



Black with Kids: The Importance of Affirmations

By Educator Barnes – January 29, 2020

Children are born into this world innocent. They love easily, and they don't have hate in their hearts. But if that child happens to be black? He or she will find out that Earth, Wind & Fire were correct when they sang, "child is born with a heart gold; way of the world makes his

heart so cold.” Black parents know they cannot shelter their children forever from the barriers and discrimination their black children might face. This is why affirmations are important for black children.

This month, a study published in the Journal of Applied Development Psychology revealed, “on average, participants reported over five experiences of racial discrimination per day...and that these quotidian experiences led to short-term increases in depressive symptoms.” Furthermore, the study highlighted other issues:

Specifically, our findings support that more serious microassaults as well as assumptions of criminality, intellectual inferiority, the universality of the Black experience, inferior status, and second-class citizenship occur on a daily basis. That these microaggressions lead to short term changes in depressive symptoms among participants...As such, the present study supports an empirical impetus for institutions such as schools to develop programs to prevent microaggressions and their negative effects.

Although this study focused on black adolescents, as a mother of two black eight-year-old twin sons, I assert black children experience these issues even as young as preschool. When my sons were in preschool, and in the same class, another parent accused one of my sons of approaching her daughter from behind and bending her over the merry-go-round.

The preschool principal called us late in the evening to pass along this report. Then asked us if our son had been exposed to any inappropriate situations or media. I had to take a deep breath and collect myself before responding. I said no and told her we were offended by this phone call and the assumption she and this parent made. Then, I retold the story from our viewpoint. I said, “Are you asking us if our son rushed the girl and tackled her just like he does his twin brother every day?” On the other end of the phone, there was immediate silence and then an explanation of how she has an obligation to investigate complaints. It did not stop there. Later in the school year, the same parent pointed out my son backstage at a play, in our presence, and said stay away from him to her daughter for everyone to hear. This is just one incident; I could recount more.

I can't control other people. I can't stop them from making assumptions about my sons. I can't stop other people from mistreating them. Instead, I can build them up and equip them with tools to stay grounded and focused as they navigate being black in America.

A couple weeks ago, my sons spent the weekend with my mother-in-law. She decided to do an affirmation board with one of my sons. On the board, they put five affirmations:

- I am smart!
- I am handsome!
- I will show others respect!
- I am well behaved!
- I can control my anger!

His affirmation poster is hanging on his wall next to his bed. She instructed him to read these affirmations every morning before he leaves to board the bus for school. It may sound silly to repeat sentences to yourself, but it can help. When black children have experiences that make them feel like they are dumb, ugly, or criminals, those experiences can be internalized and become an inner narrative. That negative narrative can cause children to believe they are not smart, or they can't control themselves.

Black parents, and even black grandparents, have to help combat the mistreatment black children could face. These affirmations encourage our black children and give them a positive narrative to cancel out how the world sees them.