

Dear White Parents Of My Black Child's Friends: I Need Your Help



Maralee Bradley

SHARE THIS STORY



REBECCA TREDWAY PHOTOGRAPHY

I've been wrestling with talking to you about some things I think you need to know. I've wrestled with it because I feel my own sense of shame—shame that **I didn't know or understand these issues before they touched my family.** I've felt fear that you'll respond in subtle ways that make it clear you aren't safe for my child. I've been concerned that you won't believe me and then I'll feel more angry than if I hadn't said anything. But my son is getting older, and as he

transitions from an adorable black boy to a strong black man, I know the assumptions about him will change. And I need your help in keeping him safe.

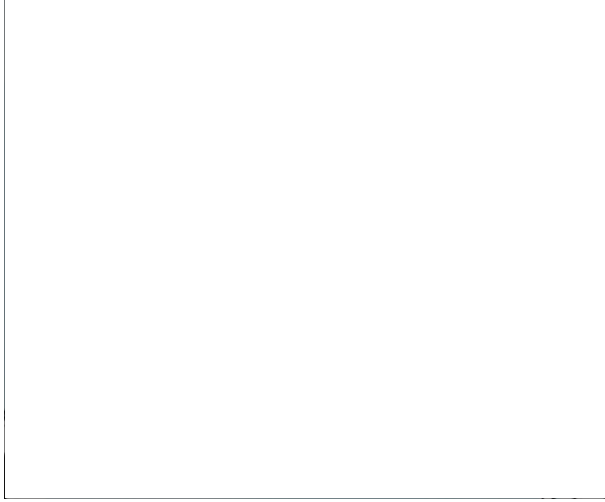
We talk to our son about safety issues. We talk to him about being respectful of police (and anyone in authority), about keeping his hands where they are visible, about not wearing his hood up over his face or sneaking through the neighbor's backyard during hide-and-seek or when taking a shortcut home from school. We are doing what we can to find this bizarre balance of helping him be proud of who he is and helping him understand that not everybody is going to see him the way we see him. Some people are going to see him as a "thug" before they ever know his name, his story, his gifts and talents.



But here's the thing: As much as we can try to protect him and teach him to protect himself, there may come a time when your child will be involved. As the parents of the white friend of my black child, I need you to be talking to your child about racism. I need you to be talking about the assumptions other people might make about my son. I need you to talk to your child about what they would do if they saw injustice happening.

I know that in a white family it is easy to use words like “colorblind” and feel like we’re enlightened and progressive. **But if you teach your kids to be colorblind**, they may not understand the uniquely dangerous situations my child can find himself in. If you tell your kids racism happened a long time ago and now it’s over and use my family as an example of how whites and blacks and browns can all get along together, you are not doing me any favors. Just because you haven’t seen obvious examples of racism in your own life doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.

It is easy to think we live in a colorblind society when you don’t know that two weeks ago I was on the phone with the principal at my son’s school to discuss the racial insults he was regularly receiving from the student sitting next to him. I was thankful for how seriously the school handled that incident, and we consider it a huge victory that my son felt safe telling his parents and teacher how he was being teased, since many kids don’t. It is easy to think we live in a post-racial society when you don’t know that a neighbor of mine called the Child Protective Services hotline to complain about my kids behaving in the exact same ways as the 10 other white neighbor children they regularly play with. Playing in the “street” (we live on a cul-de-sac), playing in our front yard without shoes, asking for snacks from the neighbor parents, these are the actual complaints that were made.



I don't want to begin to tell you the trauma it is to former foster kids when a social worker shows up at your house to interview them, and I'm afraid I haven't yet forgiven our neighbor for bringing that on our family (although it was quickly determined to be a ridiculous complaint and there was no further action taken). The thing is, I doubt that neighbor even thinks of himself as racist; however, the fact that when the white kids of the neighborhood do it, it's "kids being kids," but when the kids of color are involved, it's got to be addressed by authorities, shows the underlying bias of his assumptions. This isn't "concern"—this is harassment.

So white parents, please talk to your kids about racism. If they see my son being bullied or called racist names, they need to stand with him. They need to understand how threatening that is and not just something to be laughed off. If your child is with my child playing soccer at the park and the police drive by, tell your child to stay—just stay right there with my son. Be a witness. In that situation, be extra polite, extra respectful. Don't run and don't leave my son by himself. If you are with my son, this is not the time to try out any new risky behaviors. Whatever trouble you get into, he will likely not be judged by the same standard you are. Be understanding that he can't make the same mistakes you can.

White parents, treat my son with respect. **Don't rub his head because you want to know what his hair feels like.** Don't speak black slang to him because you think it would be funny. If you're thinking about making a joke that you feel might be slightly questionable, just don't do it. Ever. Your kids are listening and learning from you even in the jokes you tell. Be conscious of what media messages your kids are getting about race. Engage in tough conversations about what you're hearing in the news. Don't shy away from this just because you can. He can't. We can't.

Be an advocate for this beautiful soul who has eaten at your kitchen table, sit next to your son at church, been at your child's birthday party. He is not the exception to the rule. He is not protected by my white privilege for the rest of his life. He is not inherently different from any other little black boy and *all* their lives have value and worth and were created by God. I have hope that when white parents start talking about these issues with our white kids, that's when change starts.

SHARE THIS STORY





SPONSORED CONTENT

How To Spend A Perfect Day In Paradise



By The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LATEST STORIES



TRENDING

This Project Spreads Kindness One Rock At A Time – And Anyone Can Participate

Megan Zander



NEWS

Man Shares Birth Of Son, Death Of Partner In Heartbreaking Post

Jerriann Sullivan



SCARY MOMMY 2

No One Brings You A Casserole When Your Child Is An Addict

Katie Donovan

ADVERTISEMENT



PARENTING

We Need To Slow Down And Let Our Kids Smell The Roses (Literally)

Wendy Wisner



EDUCATION

The 'No Homework' Movement Needs To Catch On Everywhere

Katie Bingham-Smith

DAD PERSPECTIVE

Getting The Perfect Gift For My Wife Can Be Awkward As Hell (But Worth It)

Clint Edwards



[LOAD MORE](#)

GET UPDATES STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX.

What's your email?

[SIGN UP](#)

[FOLLOW US ON](#)

[ADVERTISE WITH US](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[USER TERMS](#)

Powered by [WORDPRESS.COM](#) VIP

