

Child Abuse and Black Folks

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April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is a time to reflect on the pain and struggles children who are abused suffer on a daily basis. In fact, every few minutes a child is abused and often times by a family member. Why is this important to Black folks? It is important because according the U.S. Census Data for 2000, there are over 72,000,000 children under the age of 18 in the United States. Of these 39% are considered to be children of color. In this same year, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis System (AFCARS) reported there were 556,000 children in foster care. "Children of color accounted for 59% of these children – or twice that of the general population." Obviously, there is an overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system.

So what exactly are we doing to our children that the child welfare system considers to be so heinous that our children are removed from their home and put into foster care? Child abuse refers to the non-accidental infliction of injury or harm to a child that leads to a wide range of injuries. Abuse can be physical or sexual. Our children have sustained injuries such as bruises, bone dislocations and fractures, broken eardrums, bald patches, head injuries, internal organ injuries, burns, and injuries to the genitals. These injuries are caused by family members who are hitting, punching, slapping, burning, cutting, stabbing, sexually penetrating, etc. our children. The results can be permanent physical damage, scars, emotional distress, or disabilities such as mental retardation, epilepsy, and even death. Some, to protect their safety, are not allowed to return home and others are never adopted. Consequently, they age out of the system at 18 without family support, assistance, or guidance. What kind of adult life can we expect them to make for themselves?

What can we do? Firstly, we can stop treating our children like property that we can do with what we want. They are not property! They are human beings that deserve our nurturance and guidance into adult life. Parents should seek out information on how to successfully and lovingly parent their children. Secondly, schools, organizations and churches can invite non-profit organizations such as the SEP Healing Project into their facilities to educate children about abuse, ways to protect themselves, and the importance of telling a trusted adult about their abuse. Thirdly, when we know of a child we suspect is being abused, we should immediately phone Lucas County Children's Services. They have expert staff that can investigate concerns, provide in-home services to help families, and if necessary place the children into a safe home while the family resolves the problems that led to the abuse. When you phone, you can do so anonymously. Think beyond what you believe the family's response will be and concentrate on the children. The children are the ones who need our urgent attention.

So what does Child Abuse Prevention month mean to Black folks. It means taking time to think about and pay positive attention to our kids so we can have healthy children, healthy families, and a prospering Black community.