

Talking to Your Child About the Trayvon Martin Tragedy

By Angela Rogers

Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17 year-old African American boy was shot and killed in Florida by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman in the community. There are two sides to every story, and there are two people who know what really happened that night: the victim and the gunman. We heard the gunman's story. People are angry because the gunman was acquitted in the verdict, and because the Stand Your Ground law, although legal, does not necessarily make the gunman's actions right.

While some parents may want to shield their children from the talk of Trayvon Martin, some parents want to have the conversation but feel uncertain in how to approach it.

Here is some advice that can help.

1. Find out what your child knows about the Trayvon Martin tragedy by simply asking the question. Listen to what your child is saying, or is not saying. When they talk to you about the issue, notice the emotional signs that appear. Find out how they feel about what they know. Do they express signs of anger, fear, sadness, or indifference?
2. Educate your child to be aware of other people's feelings. You've heard it repeated many times, "I am Trayvon Martin". These four words can allow your child to sympathize or empathize with how Trayvon might have felt. Also, remind your child that everyone is not George Zimmerman.
3. Assure your child that it is normal to feel emotions about the issue. If your child is African American, help to alleviate fear by letting them know that young black men don't have to feel that they are walking around with targets on their back because of the George Zimmerman verdict. Encourage them to walk in safety, not in fear or insecurity.
4. Remind them to always be aware of their surroundings. Teach them to avoid violent confrontations and to flee danger if at all possible.
5. Let them know that if they feel threatened in any way, notify a parent, an adult, or call 911. Their life is too valuable.
6. Talk to your child about racism, injustice, bullying and violence. Teach diversity and inclusion and advocate for justice. Know that violence is rarely the answer or solution to the problem. Counter seeds of violence by planting seeds of peace. Practice conflict resolution. Talk about codes of conduct.
7. Most of all, tell your kids you love them, always! And that you are there for them if they need to talk.