



Perspective

Parenting in the Time of Black Lives Matter

by Lara Voigt, MD

When my son was born in March 2020, I thought the most dramatic stories I would be telling him about his birth would be related to the pandemic. I had been in quarantine for only a few days after my husband tested positive for COVID-19, when I went into labor, becoming one of the countless new moms to go through labor and delivery without their partner or a support person.

I thought I would be telling him how my anesthesiologist held the phone to video call my husband for the birth and how my nurse took pictures of us when he was just minutes old. I thought the main tragedy surrounding his birth would be all the families separated and lives lost during the pandemic. We were lucky that my husband never had to be admitted, and we were only separated for the first week of our son's life.

Two months later, I sat on the couch with his tiny head resting on my chest, scanning news articles, and watching as communities took to the streets to protest the murder of George Floyd. As non-white communities stood up to say "Enough," I became acutely aware of the incredible privilege my son had been born with as a white male child of two physicians, and that our stories surrounding his birth would be about far more than quarantine and PPE shortages.

Long before I planned to have children, I imagined how one day I would teach mine about race, gender, sexuality, privilege, poverty, inequality, and how to be a good human. I was worried about how society, including my children's school friends and the media, would shape their biases despite my best efforts. But what would "my best efforts" be?

Our son is not going to grow up in a world where everyone is treated as equals and respected regardless of their color, but I hope I can foster in him a respect and recognition that *a//* life as equal. I often start to think, "Well, growing up in South Africa, my experiences..." then stop myself as I realize this is me making excuses for the implicit biases I know I hold. I try to recognize and analyze these biases on a daily basis and want to teach my child to do the same.

I'm sure I am one of the many who feels useless as I sit safely at home with my newborn. I feel guilty that I am not in the streets supporting my community, nor in the hospital treating patients on the front line of the pandemic. I think nothing I would do is "enough" because I am just one person.

But we are all "just one person" and together we are a national voice. There are so many seemingly small things we can do that, in sum, make a difference. We can educate ourselves, be honest about our biases and actively work on them. We can donate our time or money to organizations, and speak up when we see racism, injustice, and inequality in action. These are actions and values I hope I can instill in my children.

When the protests first started, I cynically thought this would be another flash in the pan for racial equality, a recurring movement that gets brief national attention every few years when an atrocity gets caught on camera and we are reminded of the horrendous inequality our non-white communities experience on a daily basis. But as the protests continue and real change seems to be more than just a pipe dream, I think I may have to change the stories I tell my child about his birth. He will no longer be a #COVID baby, but also a Black Lives Matter baby, and hopefully a child and adult who recognizes the differences between us but does not treat those differences as either a negative or a positive.

Until we get to tell him these stories, I will continue to educate myself, work on my biases, stand up for those around me, find ways to support my community, and find ways to teach this small human that Black lives matter just as much as his tiny white life does.

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