



Category X : Other Malicious Harassment

Incident 1: You Can't Play

She was in first grade in a private school. She was one of the few African-American children in this mostly white, suburban, religious school. It was a financial hardship for her family to pay the tuition, but they figured she'd get a better academic foundation with the small classes and the school's focus on "the basics." And they liked the idea that values would be a strong part of her education.

They were shocked to discover WHICH values, when she came home from school looking sad one day. They gently probed what the problem was. It turned out that at recess that day, a little boy had told her she couldn't play with the other kids, because, he said, "you're Black." This wasn't the 1950's in the South. This was 1997, in Washington State!

Mom met with the teacher the very next morning. The teacher was shocked. She agreed to talk with the little boy. The mom was concerned that that wasn't enough of a response. So she gathered up lesson plan ideas on the subject of race and prejudice and she met with the teacher again. The mom and the teacher made plans together for the class to address the issue as part of the curriculum.

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Incident 2: Laundry Conversation

One day, the mother of this African-American high school junior finds a stain on his shirt that she can't get out. "Oh well," she thinks, "He's an active kid." Next week it's three shirts with the same stubborn stain. Next week, three more. She finally asks him what the stains are from, hoping she can clean them better if she knows what they are.

He frowns. "I don't want to tell you." When she persists, he admits that they are tobacco stains. It seems a bunch of students he describes as skinheads have been spitting at him and his two friends, who are Jewish and Latino.

The mother and son talk. But they don't come up with any solutions that either of them is very happy with. He doesn't want her to get involved. And he doesn't feel he can go to the school authorities without the whole thing growing into worse violence. Finally, they decide together that he will just change schools. Of course, that doesn't solve the problem for his two friends who are still stuck in this small school district which just doesn't feel very safe for kids who are different.

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Incident 3: So They Dropped Out

A teacher reports the story that was told to him by a Somali Muslim student last year. The student said that his sister and her friends were often harassed verbally, teased, pushed and had their hijabs (their veils) torn off by students at their suburban school district. He was upset, he said, because they were black students (like him) who were doing the harassment. The family, recent immigrants with limited English according to the student, didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to get help from school officials. Was it religious bigotry or was it bias against them as immigrants from another country? In the end it didn't matter ... according to the youth, his sister dropped out of school and he transferred into a more urban school district.

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Incident 4: Playing on the Bars

She's now in fifth grade, but she remembers what happened last year as if it was yesterday. She was playing on the bars at recess with some other kids. She describes one of the third graders as an Asian-American little girl with White adoptive parents. Anyway, the kids were just all playing together when a fourth grade boy walked up and declared loudly so that everyone could hear, "There should be less Asians around here."

The girl who saw this happen says that she told a playground assistant but she doesn't know if the grown-up did anything. She sounds sad in the retelling.

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Incident 5: "I Didn't Realize What I Was Saying ..."

The Seattle Times quotes a middle school boy this way, "A couple of weeks ago, a kid was making fun of me, teasing me about the clothes I'm wearing and the style of music I listen to and stuff like that. And I think I just said, and it really doesn't sound like me, I said: 'You shut up, you stupid,' or something like that. But I said something more. I can't remember what I said, but I did say something that was kind of racially motivated, something like, 'Shut up, you Asian freak,' or something like that.

"Later I thought: You know, that's not right, and I felt real bad. I said it because it was the first thing that popped into my head. I didn't realize what I was saying until after I said it, and it was too late. I said things before thinking."

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Incident 6: The "N" Word

This incident happened on an elementary school playground in 1998. The school is very diverse and the children on the playground represent many different ethnicities and languages. A first grade boy (who was white) got angry at another boy (who was also white). He said, "You better leave me alone you stupid nigger or I'll kick your butt." Then the boys fought.

The playground assistant sent the boys to the principal for fighting and said, "That kind of language is not allowed." The principal took away the boys' recess for 2 days for fighting, and told the first boy he needed to talk to Mr. X because of the words he used.

Mr. X, the school social worker, and the student discussed what the word "nigger" means. The boy said he used it because he was mad and he knew it was a bad word, but he didn't know what it meant. They talked about where the word came from and why it hurts people. Then they talked about how it feels to have some make fun of you or say mean things about you because of one of your characteristics (tall, short, white, black, etc.)

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