

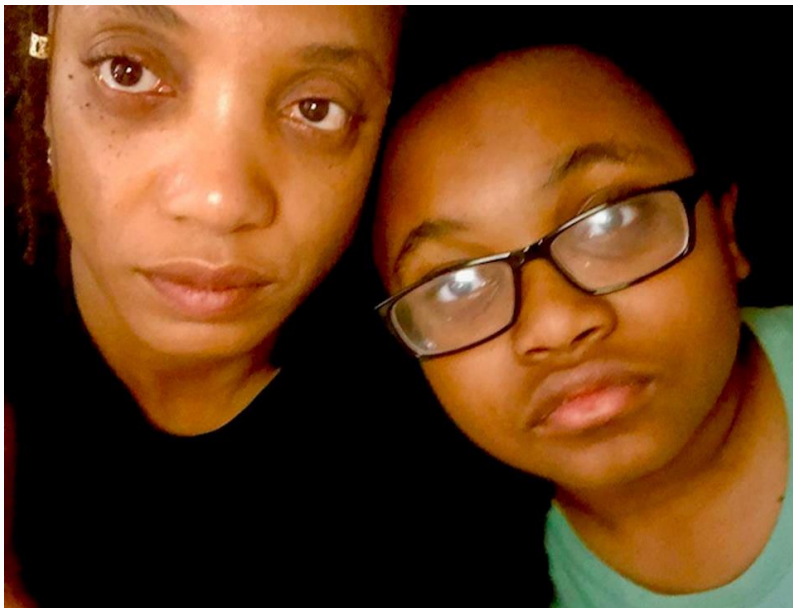
For Mothers Of Black Children With Disabilities, Living With Twice The Fear

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I write about women impacting disability and vulnerable communities.

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Kim Kaiser and her son who has autism.

Kim Kaiser's son was 10 years old when she first spoke with him about the challenges he'd face as a black man with disabilities.

It's a conversation they've continued every day since, and it covers a little bit of everything. How should he act in public? Where should he put his hands? How should he respond if police stop him? What type of people should he avoid?

In the days following George Floyd's death, Kaiser was careful to speak with her son about that, too. Her son, now 14, had questions of his own.

"He said to me, 'Mommy, are you going to be here to save me when the police put a knee on my neck? Because George Floyd called for his mommy. What would happen if I called for my mommy?'" Kaiser said.

For many mothers of black children across the country, it's an all-too-familiar refrain: raising black kids means raising them in the specter of fear.

"Now add in a disability," said Kaiser, who's been an advocate for people with disabilities and disenfranchised communities for nearly four decades.

"We are twice as fearful raising our children in this country."

It's a fear Maria Davis-Pierre knows well. Following her 8-year-old daughter's autism diagnosis, she created [Autism in Black](#), a company that supports black parents through education and advocacy services while bringing awareness to autism spectrum disorder.



Maria and her daughter who has autism.

"Our children having interactions with the police is a constant worry for us," said Davis-Pierre, who lives in West Palm Beach, Florida.

"Because they are black and autistic, they automatically have certain characteristics that could look suspicious to first responders."

Detroit resident Camille Proctor, a mother of a 14-year-old son with autism and founder of [The Color of Autism Foundation](#), agrees.

"When an African American person is disabled and can't process a police command - with any luck - he'll end up in handcuffs, but most of the time, it's fatal," Proctor said.

"Police need training. But they need to stop killing black people before the training about people with disabilities will be effective."

According to [Mapping Police Violence](#), a research collaborative collecting comprehensive data on police killings nationwide, black Americans are killed at disproportionate rates by police than their white counterparts. Black Americans are more likely to be subjected to force by police, and according to 2019 data in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), black men are nearly three times more likely than white men to be killed during a police intervention.

Since George Floyd's death, there have been calls around the country to reform or dismantle police departments, and move the money to support and serve communities through other means.

Already changes are being made.

The Minneapolis City Council pledged on Sunday to [dismantle their city's police department](#), promising to create a new public safety system in the city. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said [NYPD would face budget cuts](#) with the intention of funneling the money to youth and social services. In the wake of protesting, Richmond, Virginia, Mayor Levar Stoney said the city is committing to a citizen review board, and something called [the Marcus Alert](#).

A group called the Richmond Transparency, and Accountability Project has been advocating for the citizen review board and the Marcus Alert since the 2018 death of a science teacher named Marcus David-Peters, who was killed after lunging, unarmed, at a police officer while experiencing a mental health crisis.

Chelsea Higgs Wise, an organizer for RTAP, said the Marcus Alert would provide those suffering a mental health crisis with wellness checks, rather than enforcement.

"If someone is having a mental health crisis, crisis stabilization would be called, and they would have authority over the scene instead of police - as long as there is no lethal safety issue," Higgs Wise said.

Proctor, Davis-Pierre, and Kaiser all think something like a Marcus Alert should be implemented across the country, not only for people with mental illness but also for people with disabilities.

"I've been doing this for 30 plus years, and I can't count the number of times I've been lunged at by a person with disabilities," Kaiser said.

"You go through a lot of emotions in your head, but if you're receiving ongoing training, you should know how to restrain someone without force."

Kaiser, Davis-Pierre, and Proctor all believe there needs to be a variety of changes made at both state and federal levels, specifically when it comes to policing. They advocate for civilian review boards made up of people that diversely represent the community who can hold officers accountable, including people from the disability community. They believe police should partner and work consistently with mental health professionals and disability experts and advocates to learn best practices and experience more in-depth training more frequently. They advocate for bias training too.



Camille Proctor and her son who has autism.

"Police need to understand if someone says something you don't like, that doesn't mean you put a knee on their neck and kill them," Kaiser said.

"Police must be trained on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of disability and mental illness."

Davis-Pierre said police must receive culturally responsive training or consistent, in-depth training that teaches officers how to interact with the black and disabled communities. She also encourages officers to hold their colleagues responsible for racist and prejudiced behavior and believes police need anti-racist training.

"Until then, we will be preparing our children as much as we can," Davis-Pierre said.

Pierre-Davis gives her daughter a card/bracelet explaining she has autism in hopes that if police ever stop her, it'll help the situation.

"But my concern as a black parent is that it won't even get to that point because of her skin," she said.

Proctor insists her son stay close to her when they're in public. Kaiser advises her son to keep his hands outside of his pockets. She also tells him not to carry anything that could be perceived as a weapon, and if approached by police to put his hands up. She tells her son to immediately inform a police officer who is questioning him that he's on the autism spectrum.

"My son doesn't know how to make consistent eye contact, but I tell him to the extent that he can, he needs to try," Kaiser said.

These moms say they will never be entirely comfortable until racism is abolished, laws are changed, and systemic and cultural improvements are made. Still, they will continue doing the tireless work to improve their children's lives and for black Americans with or without disabilities that come after them.

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