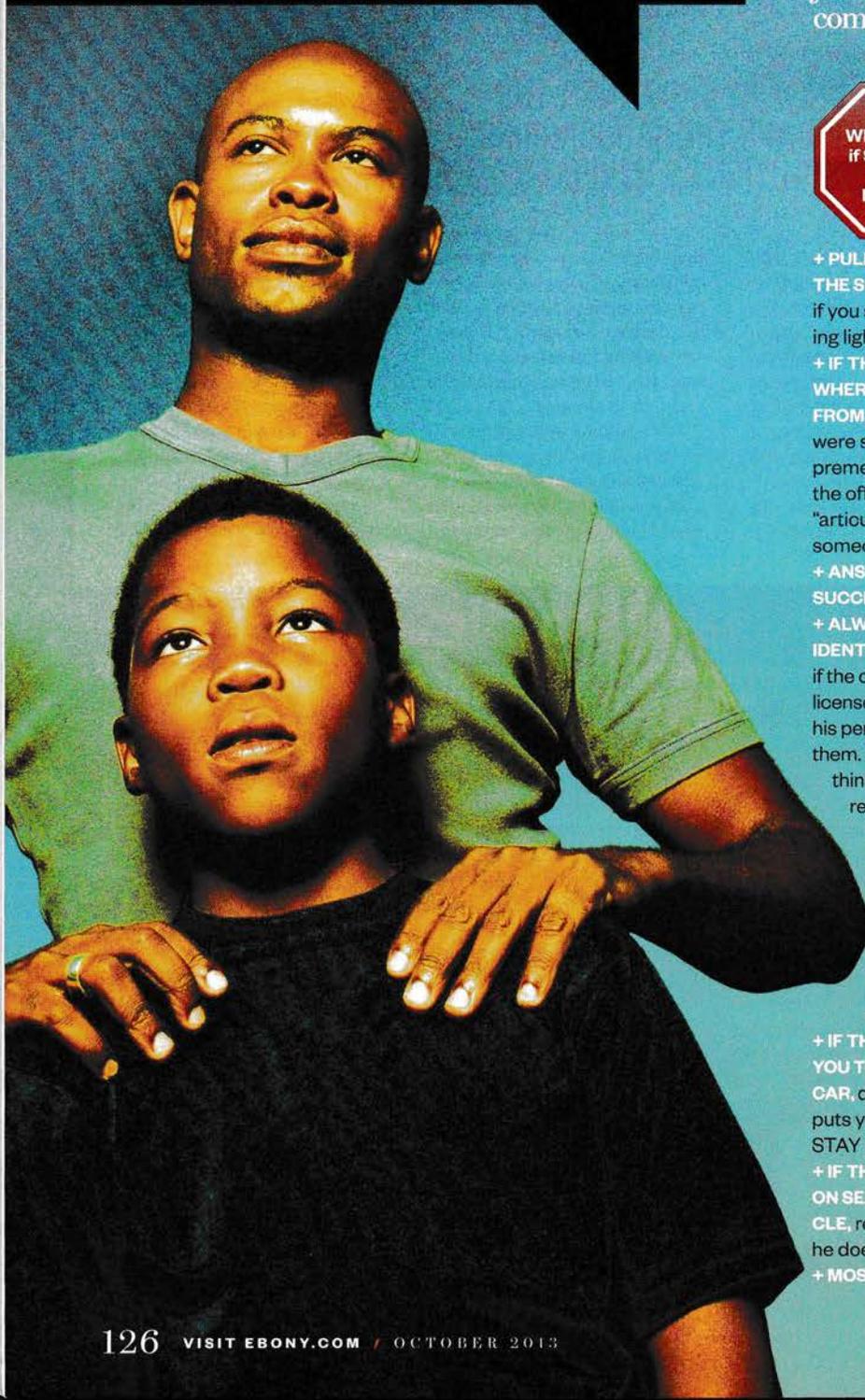


Talking to My Son About the Police

A father shares a script for an important conversation

by NICK CHILES



THIS IS NOT A PLEASANT CONVERSATION TO HAVE with you because, in a sense, it is an acknowledgement that we have not created a world for you where this talk isn't necessary.

The police officer has always been hostile to the Black male in America, and some policemen feel as if their main job is to find a reason to send you to jail. So if you have an encounter with an officer, your primary job becomes not giving him a reason and coming home safely to your family.

What to Do if Stopped While Driving

+ PULL OVER SAFELY TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD if you see a policeman flashing lights behind you.

+ IF THE OFFICER ASKS WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM, politely ask why you were stopped—the Supreme Court has ruled that the officer must have an "articulable" reason to stop someone.

+ ANSWER QUESTIONS AS SUCCINCTLY AS POSSIBLE.

+ ALWAYS HAVE YOUR IDENTIFICATION HANDY; if the officer asks for your license and registration, get his permission to reach for them. You don't want him thinking that you may be reaching for a weapon.

+ ALWAYS KEEP YOUR HANDS AT 10 AND 2 O'CLOCK on the steering wheel.

+ IF THE OFFICER ASKS FOR PERMISSION to search your car, politely refuse.

+ IF THE OFFICER TELLS YOU TO GET OUT OF THE CAR, do as he says, and if he puts you up against the car, **STAY THERE.**

+ IF THE OFFICER INSISTS ON SEARCHING THE VEHICLE, remain silent while he does so.

+ MOST IMPORTANT,

THOUGH YOU WILL CERTAINLY BE OUTRAGED, don't give the cop any attitude or reason to claim you were hostile or belligerent; that's the quickest way to escalate the encounter.

+ IF, IN THE END, THE OFFICER DOESN'T GIVE YOU A TICKET, try to remember the badge number so we, your parents, can follow up.

What to Do if Stopped While Walking

+ BY ALL MEANS, never run from the police.

+ THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHT TO STOP YOU AND ASK YOUR NAME, so if this happens, politely tell the officer(s) your name.

+ BEYOND THAT INITIAL QUESTION, the U.S. Constitution guarantees each of us the right to remain silent, so don't volunteer any additional information.

+ BECAUSE THE STOP IS USUALLY A PRETEXT for the officer to see if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, be courteous.

+ DON'T CURSE OR ANTAGONIZE THE OFFICER.

+ THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THE OFFICER IS STOPPING YOU because he believes you match the description of a suspect—such as, a young Black male with short hair—who did something nearby. If

that's the case, you won't be able to talk your way out of it—so don't say anything.

What to Do if Arrested

- + **BE POLITE, STAY CALM** and don't contradict the officer's reason for arresting you.
- + **RESIST THE URGE TO BELIEVE YOU CAN SAY SOMETHING** to get the police to release you; it's not going to happen and will likely just make things worse.
- + **YOUR PRIMARY GOAL IS TO GIVE THE POLICE AS LITTLE INFORMATION** as possible and to call us as soon as you can.
- + **WE WILL GET YOU AN ATTORNEY** who can better handle the situation.
- + **WHEN WE ARRIVE, RESIST THE URGE TO EXPLAIN** to us everything that happened—the police are likely recording every word you say to us.

What to Do if You See Police Harassing a Friend

- + **DON'T CONFRONT THE POLICE.**
- + **YOUR PRIMARY JOB IS TO GET YOUR FRIEND TO REMAIN AS CALM** and nonthreatening as possible. Keep telling him, "Calm down, and be quiet."
- + **CREATE SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND THE OFFICER** so that he doesn't perceive himself to be in danger.
- + **AS SURREPTITIOUSLY AS POSSIBLE, TURN ON THE RECORDING DEVICE ON YOUR CELLPHONE.** Having a video or audio recording of the encounter may become extremely important.
- + **DO NOT INTERVENE BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO** except escalate the encounter and make it worse.
- + **MAKE SURE YOU GET THE BADGE** number of the officer involved.

Note: This script was created with the assistance of Atlanta-based attorney Robbin Shipp, a veteran criminal defense lawyer and former Georgia state representative.



Talking About Trayvon

AFTER GEORGE ZIMMERMAN'S NOT-GUILTY VERDICT, FATHER AND SCHOOL PRINCIPAL DR. STEVE PERRY KNOWS THAT IT'S TIME TO HAVE THE TALK

Are you serious? Not guilty? Of anything?" I inadvertently blurted as my iPhone buzzed its way into bedtime prayers. "What wrong, Dad?" my 10-year-old asked. What do I say? He was so proud that he'd finally gotten to go to the corner store by himself earlier.

My two sons have the coolest lives. I call them the "Party Boys." It feels as if their weekdays bounce from Froyo to Cold Stone. Weekends overflow with birthday celebrations. They enjoy spring break at Disney and summers at the beach. Each boy has his own room and a small bank account. They've got two parents and dotting grandparents. They take drum, ski and piano lessons. My kids lead an amazing and sheltered existence.

"Are you OK, Dad?"

Mason, 10, and Walker, 8, haven't fought anyone other than each other. We don't let them watch PG-13 movies and both the Tooth Fairy and Santa still leave them presents. How in the hell am I going to have "THE talk" with them?

George Zimmerman is not guilty of anything? My sons know that Zimmerman killed Trayvon in cold blood. They're up on the news. My plan was to use Zimmerman's long sentence as a teachable moment. They have White friends. They know Black surgeons, professors and attorneys. They read books written by brothers. Racism is something they learn about for Dr. King's birthday in the same way they learn about the dreidel to respect Hanukkah.

They didn't grow up like I did. I had THE talk so often, I don't remember who started the convo. I carried a box cutter everywhere. I slept with an aluminum bat beside my bed, and everybody I knew knew somebody who could make a gun

appear. I grew up in a small housing project in the '70s and '80s. By the time I was in preschool, I'd had enough fights to be kicked out. By the time I graduated from high school, my father was an inmate. The most dangerous part of my sons' lives is riding their bikes without elbow pads.

Nothing?

When I told Mason earlier that day that I needed him to run to the store for me, his pumpkin head cut the biggest grin. My wife was at the Delta Sigma Theta centennial, so there was no one to veto his half-block walk to the corner to buy himself Mentos and Reese's for his little brother.

"Dad, why are you so upset?"

Zimmerman killed a beautiful little boy whose dad had taught him to do what I planned to teach my sons: If somebody approaches you in a threatening way, protect yourself and ask questions later. Get home, son. Get home.

THE talk is supposed to keep our sons safe, but Black boys are in the crosshairs, even when they're walking home in their own neighborhoods.

I'm not ready to have THE talk with my sons yet. That would be like telling them there's no Santa. But with the Zimmerman verdict, my sons have to accept that on the streets of even the safest neighborhoods, they are targets. They also need to assume that they are outgunned. The only way they're going to stand a chance is to avoid confrontation for as long as they can.

"I'm fine son, say your prayers."

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to ... Dad, can I go to the store tomorrow?"

"We'll see, son."

—Dr. Steve Perry is the founder and principal of Capital Preparatory Magnet School in Hartford, Conn. **E**