

PARENTING DECOLONIZED PODCAST



Ep #45 - Raising Conscious Children & Combating Harmful Mental Health Norms with Olaolu Ogunyemi

Welcome to the Parenting Decolonized podcast. I'm your host, Yolanda Williams, entrepreneur, Conscious Parenting coach and single mom to one amazing toddler. I'm on a mission to help shine the light on how colonization has impacted the black family structure. If you're a parent that wants to learn how to decolonize your parenting, you're in the right place. Let's do this.

Yolanda Williams: Welcome back to the Parenting Decolonized podcast. I'm your host, Yolanda Williams, and today I have with me Olaolu Ogunyemi?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: That't. You got it.

Yolanda Williams: Yes. There is that question mark. I wanted to try and see, but it came out that way. I was out of myself. Thank you so much for joining me.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be on this show.

Yolanda Williams: Yes. Well, you know, it is a pleasure to have you on my show. And can you just let folks know who you are.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Absolutely. So, as you said, I'm Olaolu Ogunyemi. I'm a husband, a father of three, a 12-year-old girl, Briley, an eight-year-old boy, Jacob, and a three-year-old girl, going on 37 in (indiscernible) (00:01:15). Ooh, she's a mess, I will tell you what. But yeah, so I love, love what I do with my family. Just that's like the priority of my life, my wife and my children. I absolutely love them. I'm also an officer in the United States Marine Corps, currently a captain, but I'll be promoted to Major sometime in the near future. And then, moving on, I actually just started writing books over the last couple of years. So I'm a published author as well. I have three children's books, one coming very, very soon and I have some, I am actually on the – in the works right now, some great projects are in the works. So, a lot of things going on, a lot of things happening, but I'm super excited. I originally came from Ruston, Louisiana. Obviously, that name didn't come from Louisiana, my dad's from Nigeria. He came for college. I grew up and I graduated from Grambling State University, the greatest HBCU, sorry for everybody else out there, with a degree in Computer Information Systems. I worked for briefly about a couple years at Tyson Foods as a computer programmer and then moved on from there and went active duty with the Marine Corps and I've been with the Marine Corps ever since. I have sort of bounced around the United States, I've been overseas reserve, and it's just been a wonderful time since I graduated and just been on speed. I graduated almost 10 years ago and that did seem like – it

seems like I graduated just yesterday, but super excited for all the things going on in life. Yeah, I think that's about me. I grew up – 56 children so, it was a pretty large family and I think that's where I get my that environment from where, you know, I just love, love family. I love bringing together friends and loved ones, that's just all me. I love it because I grew up with it. Here, we had six of us, but we also had, you know, friends, brothers, sisters that always came over, like our house was just like, you never know who was actually the blood, because we just had so many people coming over so.

Yolanda Williams: I am thinking about that food bill over here. (Indiscernible) (00:03:08) feed all you all, multiple times a day?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly. And you know what, I just make fun of my dad, you know, he'll walk in with a receipt, you know, that's like stretched and this is weekly, right? Until I had my own receipt I had like that and oh, man, I was like, I just want to apologize for the two gallons of milk we used to drink a week, you know, for the chicken we couldn't keep stocked, you know, man, it was tough, but yeah, you're right, our food bill ooh. I couldn't even imagine. Couldn't imagine.

Yolanda Williams: How did you get into writing children's books?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: So I would like to get fully transparent, right? So I graduated college. I was 22 years old, I was married and I had a three-year-old, right, which for me that I was just clueless, I had no idea how to connect with my daughter, I was doing my best. I was trying to like do things that I thought were right, but I realized that me and other parents like me, that they haven't found that manual that tells you how to raise children, they need some kind of resource to bridge that gap because sometimes I think our children sort of do their own thing, we do our own thing and sometimes we're not – that there's no sitting down to understand each other, get to know your child. So I decided I wanted to provide a resource first for me and my family so we could sit down and have some memorable moments to share those moments. And then, I decided, you know, it'll be cool to share that with other people to sort of push it out there. And so parents can have conversations with – some of those conversations they're going to have are sort of things that I grew up or we grew up with, that were maybe taboo topics, things that we didn't want to talk about, but now we know we need to talk about it. We know our children have anxiety, we know they have depression. We know they have, you know, all kinds of issues, shoot, mine in middle school now and I didn't even go in that -

Yolanda Williams: Tough – tough (indiscernible) (00:04:53) kid.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: You know, I'm a typical dad, you know, and I just want talk to – open lines of communication, but the poor child, she comes to me and she talks about boys and I just like, I think I freeze and I'm like trying to like talk to her and -

Yolanda Williams: To show your face.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, it's tough, man, oh, my goodness! But I love that we have an open line of communication and I know that was built from those times that we sat down reading together. So really, I just wanted to make sure that I put something out there. So everybody else could

have that same kind of experience. And then the second thing is, let me say like this, representation matters, right? I believe that people need to see that, you know, if you're from Ruston, Louisiana, and you look like me, you're in the Marine Corps or whatever else you have, you can do whatever you want to do. If you want to write children's books, then write it. If you don't want to write children's books then don't write it, you know, write poems, read, write music, do whatever you want to do. So, it's just, you know, the sky is the limit, so do whatever you want to do.

And if you don't believe it, then you look at a guy like me, who again, went to Grambling State University, I don't have a degree from Stanford or Harvard although I, you know, I would like to compare Grambling to Stanford or Harvard quite often just to get under the skin, but yeah, I think it's sort of – I think it's just one thing, another thing just to make sure that we're out there and we're doing things that our children can be proud of and then they know, hey, you know, "that guy can do it, then I can do it", you know, so I think those are the biggest reasons.

Yolanda Williams: It definitely is a model for them to be like, oh, you know, like there really is, it's not that unattainable.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And there may be roadblocks and it's not anything that I can't get over. So I think that is, you know, beyond the representation of race or gender or religion, it's just that especially in a country like this, like it's still, I'm still able to make some stuff happen. I think it's powerful.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. So, when we are talking about like mental illness, I know I'm personally, I have anxiety. It's like clinical anxiety, but I know I have depression sometimes. I know, I have like people in my life – young people in my life that are struggling with anxiety. And I'm so happy that we are at a place where we're openly discussing this stuff in the black community. I think it is so important because I personally don't know a person who isn't struggling with mental illness and incapacity, especially during this pancetta that we're still dealing with. And so, we got to understand as we are struggling as adults, our children are also trying to figure out like what the hell's going on. It's a third year of this Panini, I'm going to have different words for it guys. And I'm in school, I'm out of school, we can go out, but then we can't like it's so all these question marks really do make them anxious. So how do you discuss mental illness in your family? And what advice do you have for parents who may have children struggling with mental illness?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. And that's a great question first of all. Because I think the first thing is really acknowledging that it exists, right? Acknowledging that it is a thing, because I know that some people grew up, you know, I'm not a – right, and that means I'm just one small generation away from people that were growing up and saying that, oh, yeah, we could just, you know, ignore it or we could just pray this away or you need to do this, you need to do that. Don't be weak and all these other kind of things that we may have heard that I heard growing up. So I

know that if I heard it, then that means sometimes we are turning around and telling our children the same thing. So and I think one of the worst – the big of these quotes that I heard and I still laugh at it today is like, you don't your nerve – you don't have nerves, you don't have, you know, anxiety, you don't have this. It's like -

Yolanda Williams: What do you have to be depressed about? You don't have no bills to pay. Yeah, you have no problems. It's like really?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly. And I think sometimes we take that and whether we mean to or not, we unintentionally take that same mentality and attitude and we project it onto our own children, which makes them go back into a corner and sort of hide their emotions, hide their feelings. And it's easy to do, especially when we're dealing with our own things. So I think the first step is to acknowledge that they are – that they are going through things because once we get our mindset to say, okay, this child is going through their own anxiety, no matter whether we think it's big or small, they are going through stuff.

And the second step, I think is to take care of yourself. Now, I know that sounds a little counterintuitive. It sounds a little selfish. But what I think is that it's no way for me to pour into you if I'm completely, you know, depleted, you know, if I'm tired, if I'm emotionally drained, I just find it very hard for us to talk to our children about anything. So I think we have to find the help we need because if we're not okay, I just don't believe that our family and the people around us are going to be okay. And then beyond that, just sitting down and just asking them questions that go beyond the, you know, yes, no questions or maybe so, so when, for example, when I ask my children, you know, how's school, you know, how is school today? I love baiting them with that question because they still answer it the same way.

But they already know that I'm going to have a bunch of follow-on questions because I'm trying to get them in the habit of just like, you know, knowing they can open up to me about whatever it may be. So if you ask them, you know, how was school, you know, they may say good. Okay, cool, you know, what was your favorite part about school and, you know, how did that make you feel? You know, you are talking about the highs of that day, you know. Oh yeah, we did this, we did that and you know, okay, cool. You know, what was the worst part? What didn't you like about school today? And I think that in and of itself, it shows them that the importance of, you know, being able to have somebody to talk to, and being able to go through life with somebody. Because I don't believe that we really can go through life by ourselves. I believe that we have to have somebody to rely on and to get through this tough life with.

So I think that's how you start the conversations. I think beyond that, I think we still need to give them the habit of showing them, you know, good habits like counseling, we have to show them if we are dealing with adults around them or whether they're married or whatever it may be, I think it's important for us to sort of show them what it's like to interact with another adult, another human being in a positive way and if you do have emotions, you still can interact in a positive way by sort of, you know, going off on them yelling and all this kind of things. So I think those are some of the important things I have. So the advice I would have for parents or teachers or mentors for that matter, just keep it natural. I would say just talk to them, you know, as a person you are, unless you are a licensed counselor, I wouldn't suggest trying to do counseling things,

but I would suggest, you know, just talking through them at least starting to understand and have a moment with them, if they cry, you know, maybe you can cry with them, you know, don't be afraid, don't be too, you know, macho or masculine or whatever these things are that, you know, we sort of grew up with. It would be okay, that would be, you know, walk into, like for example, my daughter lost her basketball game yesterday and really it wasn't the fact they lost that she was upset with, although they were undefeated until yesterday. She was really more upset because she had a friend that she lost to, right. And she was a little more upset about that.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: And I think just walking into her room and sitting down and talking to her about it, okay, what, you know, what is it that's bothering you? What is it about the loss that's bothering you? Is it the loss that's bothering you? And having that conversation, just seeing like we walked through the emotions, you know, she walked through this, you know, being sad and then we came to a point to where we sort of can laugh and laugh together.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: And then we have that moment of affection. But again, that seems like a small thing in our world, but there's no way I feel like she's going to get to the point where she trusts me with bigger things later on in life, if I can't have that kind of communication now. So I think that's just -

Yolanda Williams: Interesting. Now that's – you have got a middle schooler?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right.

Yolanda Williams: So they, you know, middle school is when I know when I was 14, I started retreating into my room, I didn't want to be bothered. I wanted to listen to the radio and try to record my favorite songs from 92.3 The Beat and try not to get that DJ's voice at the very end or the beginning. I wanted to read, I didn't want to go outside. Like I really wanted to be left alone. And it was in those times it was around like 13 to like 16, and I probably needed someone to come knock on my door and just be like, how are you? You know, because I felt so lonely and that's why I was in there. I just was like, I want to be left alone, but mostly I just, I felt so lonely from school from just like being, the position of my family. And I think just checking in is so important, especially when you see that they're upset about something and not invalidating like, oh, you know what, you were undefeated until today, like, it's okay, like that's invalidating, but you were like, hey, let's talk about this, like, what's really like, what's really going on and helped her to realize that emotions are fleeting, we don't live in that space, and I think that's such an important because it is confusing around that time. Like what the hell that even our emotions and why do I keep feeling this way? And so we need to, we need to help coach them through these hard moments, I mean it's wonderful and it's setting such a foundation, not just for your relationship, but for how she is when she's an adult.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Because that's what we see walking around here, people who didn't have, when you talk about home training, they may have home training, but they had no emotional coaching at all.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right, right.

Yolanda Williams: Right?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly..

Yolanda Williams: Because you are not acting, you get out and something happens and you, and that switch flips and it's like, you have no control over your emotions. You think they control you and we're seeing it, we're seeing the effects of that in this society.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. Exactly. Yeah and I agree because and that's the thing, I think that, you know, to sit here and pretend I have everything figured out would be, I'll be lying to everybody, right, because we grew up playing basketball, right? So we were, I mean, it was four boys, right. And I told you about six siblings, we are just four boys, right. We're spaced out by like two years apart into my younger brother, I almost call him little, but he's not little, he's the biggest of us all. He's like six three, 215. So my younger brother was like four years, four and a half years younger to me. And we were ultracompetitive, like we did not like losing, we didn't like all these kind of things. And we just, when I look at it, I look at them playing basketball. It's easier for me to follow that sort of trend and be like, okay, yeah, like you just said, you are undefeated. You know what, come back next time you're going to hit them harder. You know, you'll able to beat him, you know, and it's easy to give that kind of pep talk, but to your point, like, it's, maybe that's not what they need in that moment and maybe that's what happens. We continue to like force that kind of thing down somebody else's throat. Then when they get older, they're looking for somebody to give them that pep talk and there's sometimes you just don't have that person. So you have to have that ability to have that your own emotional control. And, you know, you sort of learn from the things that you put from failures. There's been times that I've walked in on either of the children to try to like give them that pep talk and I don't have that, I don't see that light bulb go off and it's like, oh well, you know, I think I misfire.

Yolanda Williams: Maybe later.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly. Or you know, and one thing, one thing that attracted me to your show full disclosure is like, I have heard you say something that was like, it was like profound and I was like, okay, she gets it, right, you said that you did something to your daughter. You know, I think you said you yelled out or something and then you went back and apologized. And I was like, yep, she gets it, right. Because a lot of times we, as human beings think that, oh yeah, we just, you know, as adults we are like, well, you know, they'll get over, they have children, blah, blah, blah. But in reality, I believe that, you know, sometimes when we make mistakes, we slip up and when we don't go back and correct that with the child, number one, we're showing that, you know, once you get to a certain age, I guess you're infallible, you don't, you're above the law, you know, because I'm teaching them, hey, if you offend somebody, go back and try to, you know, apologize at least, you know, if they don't accept it, they don't accept it. But, you know,

once you get into a certain age, now you're above the law and you don't have to apologize. You don't have to attempt to live in harmony. You don't have to do any of that kind of stuff. So that's why I do definitely appreciate you giving that story because I was like, yeah, that's, you know, that's the kind of stuff we need to hear. Because you know, when we make mistakes, our children are learning from that mistake and they're learning from what we do after we make that mistake.

Yolanda Williams: Rupturing your parents, what it's called.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly, exactly. I love it though. And I think, yeah, I can go on and on about that, but I really believe that, yeah.

Yolanda Williams: We know, we know as people from, as you know, I'm what they call an elder millennial, but we know that just think about how many times you deserved an apology and didn't receive one and how much impact that would've made on you at the moment, you know. And I just think about also that as parents, we are people first and I also want to humanize us. I want, I think we need to humanize ourselves to our children. So when I make a mistake, I don't want her to ever think, like you said that I am some infallible human being or a God, because that's how small children see us as, and I want her to know like, no mom is a human being. I'm going to mess up, when she's older, I can discuss some of my trauma, but right now I am just showing her that it's okay to mess up. But it's even better when you make a miss, you know, it's even better when you can apologize and then it's even better when you cannot continue to repeat that same mistake like -

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Otherwise, it becomes abusive and manipulative for you just to apologize. So there's so many things that we teach them just by practicing like a more conscious way of parenting.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: That they're just getting, you know, like it's just like, if you all could see my hands, just like I'm doing something like, it's what they are afraid of being hit. And I think that's what's so important. Now, I do have a question. Do you feel like your parenting style would be different if you had, do you have two girls?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: I have two girls and one boy.

Yolanda Williams: So do you think that conversation would've been different if it was him?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Ooh, that's a great question. Because the first thing, I would say is, I do have to adjust for each child whether it be the two girls or the boy. And I don't necessarily think it's, don't know if it's because he is a male, more so that he's just a different human being who reacts to different things. In the beginning, you asked me because he's eight now, you asked me probably a good six years ago, oh yeah, I was, you know, we wrestle, oh, we doing all that, I got to toughen him up and all these kinds of things, until I realize like that, that's not what's

toughening him up. He's going to – life is going to toughen him up. He is going to get tough regardless. He is going to have to take his interest in all these kind of things.

Now, I have had separate conversations with him. For example, he also lost yesterday because they are both playing in different league, and we had a different conversation. My conversation with him was more so, like hey man, you know, you're going out there and you're staring at the scoreboard, go out there and just have fun, enjoy what you're doing, you know. So his embarrassment was more like, I think for the amount that they lost by and because he was talking noise to his sister early on the day after they lost, and so my message to him was a little bit more on the side of, hey, you need to make sure that, you know, you're not staring at the scoreboard, and you're having fun.

Now, where I have to be careful is not taking that, I guess more of a sensitive approach with my daughters and then taking more of a hard approach because you know, he's a man and I think that's a great question, because I think we tend to do that naturally. And that's why I love my wife, she sort of – she'll stand in the corner, she'll sort of give me an eye because I think vice versa she will even do the same thing. And I don't know if it's just, you know, male or female, I don't really know what it is, but we'll do the same things and she'll sort of look at me and I'll immediately realize, okay, you're being a little bit more alpha type with him exactly than you are with your daughter and it's not, and it's not necessary, you know.

Yolanda Williams: It's really not, yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. And so I love that question because it does make you reflect and I hope for all the men listening to this, they have, or anybody who have sons, who are listening to this, I think, you know, really, I can't tell you anything that made me tougher. In fact, I even told, you know, Marines that, and as I trained was about 2000 recruits when they were coming to the Marine Corps, I always told my drill instructors that, hey, you're not going to be able to, you know, intimidate, you know, the fear out of somebody, you know, oh, well he's, as long as he's more scared of me, you know, then he won't be, he won't fear anything out there, that's all nonsense.

Yolanda Williams: You have to push it down somewhere.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Like it doesn't go away. It just gets pushed and smushed and placed, and then it turns into violence.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: I guess that maybe that's the point in, I don't know, on your household, you know, especially, I mean, listen you all, I have started going down, unfortunately, a TikTok rabbit hole and landed before I fixed the algorithm – landed in like alpha male land. It's horrible there. It makes me never want to date. It's horrible there. And a lot of it is around like hardness around transactional relationships, around needing to assert dominance over people, and that's pretty

much toxic masculinity. And I think, you know, there are some women who are, who will, especially some single moms who will be like, my black son has to survive, I cannot cuddle him. I can't like, you know, but it's not about cuddling, it's just about, you can still nurture, you can still have affection for, your child is going to really let you know what they resonate with and what they don't, right?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And so we have to just look at the way we're parenting and is it from a dominating, like, let me show you how to go out and dominate people because that's what you're teaching them when you're dominating them, how to have control over someone, how to have power over someone or am I showing you how to be a more collaborative person.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Somebody who wants to have a conversation with someone, doesn't want to talk over someone, ask questions or gets curious before becoming upset. Because that's one of my biggest things that I'm trying to learn how to do is get curious. You know when I find myself like what the hell is this person talking about?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And then I try to stop myself and just be like, okay, so what else could be true here, you know. Except when it comes to racism, I don't have any tolerance for that shit, but or massage noir, but -

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right.

Yolanda Williams: But you know, for the most part, I just really want – I want to teach my daughter as far as conflict resolution to become curious before reacting, you know.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. And I think, so I actually wrote a blog about this because I believe that society has created this perception of masculinity that sort of has caused us to have all kinds of suppressed mental issues, right. Because we view masculinity as this big bold thing, you know, and you know, funny thing is I actually wrote, it's called a three-day mental health guide, it's like Major Payne edition because I thought, number one, I think that movie is hilarious, just sheer nature of the movie. But there are some key points in that movie that I think we quickly gloss over so you could laugh at Major Payne, right. But like one of the key points in there is like he literally said I must be sensitive to his needs, right. And it was funny how he said it, but the thing is like, he really was saying something really profound that we may have missed, right. He's saying that the only way for him to be effective in leading and mentoring these young men was to truly understand what they need, right. He went from being hardcore, oh, you don't cry, you know, I'll do something, take your mind off that pain, all those kind of things, to really understanding that, you know, especially the young kid, I think his name was Tiger, if I'm not mistaken, it's been a while since I watched it, especially the young kid is that just needed that male positive, male role model in his life. He did need somebody to just tell him to, you know,

take your mind off the pain or all these kind of things. So I think that once we start realizing that masculinity is just another thing that's just sort of put out there that cause us to, you know, go to the left and not understand how we truly should express our emotions, once we realize that, you know, hey, I can be a man and still cry. And we show our children that it's okay, you know, that I think we're getting to a good place. And to be honest with you, one day, literally as I was writing that blog, my wife, I heard her, overheard her telling my son, you know, it's okay to cry, you know, it's okay to cry if something's going on. And I would be honest, I cringed, that was just what a year ago, maybe. I started cringing and I started thinking, I looked at myself in the mirror. I was like, what are you cringing for, you know. Why did you cringe when she said that? And I, the one, the reason I thought and straight up I thought about like growing up, like, you know, with my brothers, we sort of beat on our chest, and again, I'm fully transparent, so hopefully it helps somebody else, I remember like my brother, my little brother, younger brother, he walked up to me, I hadn't seen him in a while and he gave me a kiss on the cheek and I smacked him, pop, and you think about it, you know, I look back, I apologized later on once I realized how silly it was, but you really think about this young man was trying to show me affection.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Because I'm so masculine, I'm so, you know, macho, I can't let my little brother give me a kiss on the cheek, right. And those are the kind of things that, you know, as you get slightly older, I guess I'm a mid-grade millennial, I don't know how to describe that.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, regular millennial.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: But I guess so it's just, as I sort of look back at those days that I learned, it's like, okay, you know, we're sort, we have to learn to move beyond that. You know, that doesn't make us any less of a man. In fact, it makes us a better man when we can show affection and we can actually learn to embrace each other and say, hey man, I got you. Well, you're going through tough times. Like, you look at me, I got you, I can hold you through it. I mean my brothers, we developed that kind of relationship and I can tell we pulled each other through some tough times, you know, whether it be related to military service or whether it be related to relationships like, or jobs or whatever, it's been like, we've been able to lean on each other because we realized that all that masculine stuff that we thought – all of the things we thought was true masculinity really was not and we were really harming each other.

Yolanda Williams: (Indiscernible) (00:26:14).

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly, exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Because nothing in and of itself is wrong with masculinity is the box.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: That people put themselves into and I told a friend of mine one time, I was like, I think what happens with men is there's this box that, you know, patriarchy and white supremacy has put men into, and so if you don't fit into this box, it's like, you got to fit

everything into this one box. And it can't, it cannot hold all the nuances and all the spectrum of who you are. Like, it doesn't make any sense. So anytime something tries to like spill out the box, you become violent because what's in that box is what's defining you. And so anyone that threatens what's in that box, anytime or anything comes out of it, it's like, no, no, no, no, no. What's in here, it's all that I am and that's all that I have and that's a sad way to be.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: So sad because we are all on this like spectrum of humanity. And as I get older, I just realized so much about myself and the things that I did to put myself in boxes, the things that the world did to put me in a box and the ways of breaking out of that ditch, and nobody got time for that.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: I am loving seeing black people just feeling free enough to be like, listen, I don't act like what we think black people are supposed to act like. I don't like all the same music. We don't like a lot of us, a lot of blurs are coming out now, like, I like a lot of comics get over it, you know, like.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: All these cos players, fairies, princess core, like cottage core, I'm like, I'm saying it, I'm just like, my heart is so full for the people, for especially gen zers, who are just like, that's going to be what they grew up with.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Your kids, it's going to be the norm for them.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And I'm so excited for them, this is stuff we have to learn, but stuff that they're just seeing are making space for that now.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Hey, first of all, I'm proud of us.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly, you're doing it.

Yolanda Williams: I'd like to thank me. No, I'm playing, but no. I really, I really am proud of us for like exactly – the people who are doing this work because it is paving the way for the younger generations to just – this is normalized, this is who they are. And I really hope that one of the things that comes out of this is platonic affection among men. Like you all can kiss each other on the cheek, hug, you know, I know that in a lot of cultures, men will walk not holding

hands, but maybe like their arm around someone's shoulder, you know, in United States, it's like, oh, that's hell of a game, it's just like, A, okay, nothing's wrong with that, but B, they can just show affection.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: There's nothing wrong with that. It's like after a boy becomes a certain age, people are just like, don't touch him ever again and humans need touch.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Always need touch. And in touching, we sexualized every single touch that now men are afraid to even like kiss each other on the cheek or -

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: You know, in any kind of don't brush up against a man accidentally, you know, it's just like all these rules and these rules are getting people killed. They're making people killers and it's so harmful, like patriarchy harms men too. And I wish more men understood that.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. And I agree. And I think it starts just like you said, as we give ourselves awards here today, I think, I think it starts with that young age. And that's why, that's why I encourage all the fathers out there, mentors, man, embrace your sons, like get reach out to them and literally give them a hug, you know, don't just slap on his butt, hey, good, you know, punch him on his shoulder.

Yolanda Williams: (Indiscernible)(00:29:50).

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly like, you know, if you want to do that, yeah, that's fine. Yeah, I still wrestle with my son, yeah, we are still boxing, and I still do it with my other children as well. But it's still like every night, every night that I'm here, unless I'm off somewhere with the military, every night that I'm here, I'm talking to them and I'm kissing them all, and I'm kissing them all on their head, telling them good night. I'll see you in the morning or I see you tomorrow. And really, I didn't think about how profound that is until you realize that, you know, some children, their parents, you know, gave them a kiss and never saw them again or they never gave them a kiss and they never even met them. So I started doing those kind of things like, okay, this is what – this becomes, like you said, it becomes the norm, right. It becomes a thing that, you know, they grew up and they're not going to know anything other than, oh yeah, I'm supposed to give my son affection, the same way that I grew up thinking like I'm supposed to toughen him up, you know? So I think that really, it starts with us.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: And the more we talk about it, the more we take action. Yeah, they may, but after some time, you know, he got to, what was it? Maybe – he's in second grade now, so maybe into kindergarten, he started getting to the place where he is like dad, uh, you know, and not my

12-year-old, she's starting to get to that place a little bit. She tries, but you know, she's still my baby girl, I don't care, she's 37. But anyway, I think they get to the place at some point where they start trying to like shy away just because they, you know, now they're in their own environment.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: But that doesn't discourage me at all. What I encourage people is to continue to be affectionate with them, continue to like have those conversations because I really believe it's going to pay off in the long run. I know that the best conversations I've had with my father who's, like my best friend now were all because, you know, when we got, as we started to get older, he realized that, you know what, no matter what he did or learned, you know, in Nigeria or what he learned and thought that he was helping us to get stronger, he learned that, you know, over time it's like, I have to show them affection, I have to give this to them. You know, I have to let them see me cry. I'll never forget the first time I actually saw him cry, like my world stopped for a second and it's like -

Yolanda Williams: It's daring.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. I was like -

Yolanda Williams: To see your parent cry. Yeah, I can remember that day too.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: It was like oh! Right and the thing is like, yeah, somebody had passed, right. And, but it still was like, oh, he's actually like, he's actually hurt, what do I, like what do we do? This is Superman that is hurt right now. But I think over time you realize, okay, my sons are getting older, I can't pull the wool over their eyes, I can't continue this whole guys. I have to show them that I'm a human being and I have to show them that affection so that way, when they get older, they can do the same for their families. And then he calls us and one thing I give him that every day, especially if he had not heard from me in a day or two, he's calling me, he's going to say, hey stranger, you know, I'm just wondering, just wondering if you forgot my number. And the reason I like that is because he's always talking to us about things that he learned and my parents did divorce, but things that he learned through that, things that he wished that he would've known and he wished he would've applied and those kind of things are the things that I've grown to appreciate because I'm learning from him, right. It's just like we said earlier, we learn from mistakes and I have learned from the things that we saw him do, which wasn't really much to be honest with you and the things that he's exposing now as he talks us through, you know, hey, here's the things that you should look out for because you're my son, I know how you reacted to X, Y, Z. I want to make sure that, hey, you know, just, here's some things you should – some pitfalls you should avoid, or maybe here's some great things that you should do that sort of set you up for success. So I do believe in really just having that affection and really just, it poured into your sons, it's pour into those young men because we need it. There's a reason that young men are still in that adoption processes. It's the reason that young African American men are still very easy to get, but we really need to reach out and start embracing these young men and just take it, man, we need it. Like we have to have more people that believe in that, and we just go out there and execute.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. As black people, there's so much from, you know, colonization enslavement that we still carry. And I think just, I love that, you know, when you say you cringed a little bit when you heard your wife say that, but then you took a personal inventory. You asked yourself like, well, why did I just do that? And I think that is where the change happens, right.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: It's not just the noticing – it is the noticing, if you are starting to notice, that's a step, I don't want to discount that, but I think the next best step is to start asking yourself questions.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: Why do I act like this? Why do I react to this type of thing in this way? Like the whys matter because then you can start to dissect and work backwards from there. And it helps you to become a better person in general. You know, that's the point of conscious parenting is that we become more conscious of ourselves and our stuff that we have either gotten through childhood or, you know, just as adults, we've gotten stuff and messages from the world. And we have to – we have to ask ourselves, does this serve the purpose of raising liberated black children.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right.

Yolanda Williams: Free children. Does this thought process serve the purpose of being a more conscious person? And when you start to ask those questions of yourself, like you may need to take a look at the mirror and be like, it does not.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: So I need to pivot, you know, and speaking of those pivots, what kind of like pivots do you suggest, like if someone notices something about themselves, like you notice that, what do you think a parent should do or what did you do when you noticed that that was something you wanted to change?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. So the first thing I did was I had to accept it and the second thing I think was I started actually asking like, why? So I have noticed it and you're right, I think that's a great first step to acknowledge that, hey, this is there, but then the more important thing is start digging through why? Because if I just acknowledge it and try to change just the action, I feel like it's just not going to work.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: So when I started digging, it's like, okay, why do you feel that way? Why did you cringe when that happened? And I went straight to what I enjoy doing and if people don't like writing then, you know, it's whatever you want to do. But I went straight to writing. I started

writing out the reasons that I believe that I cringed in that moment and it started with the basics. My wife said, you know, "he can cry whenever". And then I thought it – started thinking through it, okay, I've cringed because I really believe that she didn't narrow it down or she wasn't doing this, she wasn't doing that, you know, and then I realized, wait, really what's happening is you're letting your ego get in the way. So that's really the root cause for me was my ego. My pride was getting out there, like, well, you know, this isn't, you know, she isn't doing the thing that I believe that she should, she didn't say it the way that I believe she should say it and then the first thing is, like, okay, slow down, then, one, you're not the perfect parent, and then number two, you know, just check your ego at the door, because you're never going to have all the answers. So I think that was really the biggest thing, like, A, I have this big ego that's sort of piling up and all these kind of things.

And then secondly, so we can start getting towards like, how did I start making that shift is I started educating myself. So now I understand, you know, hey, you know, this is important. I know why it's important. Obviously, I'd already been reading about it a little bit, but once I really realized that it could be a problem. And if I'm cringing now, that means that I'm probably showing him some things that I'm not unintentionally based upon my own unconscious bias or maybe even conscious bias. So I started educating myself and starting reading, okay, what are those things like, why am I, why am I reacting to that in the way I am, you know. I started listening to podcasts. I like this one, that's giving information on how to decolonize your mind when it comes to parenting. Started thinking about like, you talk about conscious parenting because it's that, you know, those unconscious biases are going to exist, but you have to really be cautious of what you're pouring into your children.

So I think that's really what it is, you know, identifying it, understanding the root cause and then starting to educate yourself to figure out, okay, why am I doing this and how do I better myself. And then go start making the next, the subsequent steps to improve it. You know, every step is a step in the right direction. So if you feel like you're not in a place to where you can genuinely give that, have that kind of conversation with your child. I say next time my wife is having that conversation, just stand there in a room, don't make a bunch of faces, don't stand there and disagree or to like throw your two cents in, and maybe you just need to stand there. So that way, just your simple presence shows that, hey, I'm in agreement with your mom, right? I'm shaking my head, yes or the teacher or whoever it may be, I'm shaking my head, yes. I'm in complete agreement with it. Until you get to the point to where you actually can have those genuine conversations to say, okay, this is something I truly believe now that I didn't believe in the past. So it is hard to change habits that you've sort of had for many years. So know that it's not going to happen overnight, but it does. You're going to have to practice it. You just go in and continuously practice those things, make sure you hear those continued, like rehearse those things, rehearse those moments in your mind. And then when you go out, just continue to practice. And I think that's how you build the habits and eventually you make that shift and change in the kind of person that you are, or kind of leader that you are for your children.

Yolanda Williams: Such important aspects to – because it is, it becomes a habit. You know, especially if you're a parent living sort of in survival mode, and I posted about this recently, a lot of people did not like it. I said that gentle parenting is privileged parenting. And I, you know, went ahead and explained, like I'm not talking about just money or race. I'm talking about the

privilege of, well, that's part of it, money and race, but also having the capacity to pause in the moment and override your brain's survival mode. You know, if you're having problems with paying rent, homelessness, you've just come home from working, dealing with racist people all day, like all these things impact our ability to gentle our consciousness in the moment and the more, the sort of, when we are talking about spectrum from like difficult to easy, "the easier your life is" when it comes to like class and race and all that stuff, the more capacity you may have to be able to override your brain's survival mode, fight or flight or fine techniques. But as I know, I always talk about myself because I have a lot of trauma and so I find myself sometimes like having a difficult time, being able to override that, like when I had COVID and Gia had COVID, but she was asymptomatic. So my sick self is I feel terrible and she's 4. So she's like you sick, I'm not, I'm still about to party, you know.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And so that was very difficult for me, you know. Like, how do you remain conscious like what can you do in those moments because it's possible, but it's hard. And that's all. So I just want to encourage anyone, like, as you grow as a person to have grace for your humanness, you're going to recognize things that you don't like about yourself, that you want to change, but have grace for that and congratulate yourself for even being like, I got stuff I want to change. But as you start to like incorporate these changes into your life, it's not going to happen overnight. Like you said, you're going to find times where you're just like, your brain is just like, this is too hard, I'm too stressed out, I'm in survival mode. And it is those moments that I always tell parents, the best that you can do is just pause. You are not going to do nothing else. Save it for tomorrow if you need to, like you are not going to do anything else, just stop.

And so that's what I do because when I am noticing I am too – my brain is just in survival mode, I'm too triggered, there's no consciousness in that moment. All I can do is stop. And just with those pauses, you're allowing your brain to catch up to what you want to do and creating space to make better decisions versus just reacting to that first thought. And you know, a lot of black parents, people were just like, oh, you're giving people excuses to be, you know bad parents. And you know, you shouldn't need to work on being gentle with your kids, that's a lie. Like if you have trauma, it may – it's not impossible, but it's harder. And I think for us to, and that's where the privilege is coming, you said that from a privileged perspective.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah.

Yolanda Williams: You know, like it's not, it's not hard for you because of your life and who you are and maybe you didn't have all that trauma. Maybe you have more help, but for someone who's really, really struggling in adulthood, just as a person with who may have mental illness, who may, you know, just be on the brink of houselessness is so much harder, not impossible but harder. And it means that they have to work extra hard to be intentional and override the brain's wanting to just lash out.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right.

Yolanda Williams: So all that to say, the more we practice this, no, it's never going to be easy you all, especially, if you don't have help.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right, right.

Yolanda Williams: But the more we practice it, the more habits we can form around it and it becomes more, it does become easier. So now it's not a fight for me to pause. I can just pause and just walk away.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Whereas before I was like, I had to like, I gave myself a mantra and that mantra for me is when she was much younger and I was so tired and sleepy, I was literally getting like un-consecutive hours of sleep at night, it was horrible. And so I was so exhausted that her cry would just trigger me, you know. And so in those moments, I would have to have a mantra and I would say, she's only a baby, she's crying because she needs you. And I would have to say that until I calmed down.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And that helped me because pausing in the moment wasn't working. So I had to do something else in order for me to override my brain's wanting to just run out the door and never come back because I was so tired. And so like just being a single mom and with a child who cried a lot, I was just like, and who didn't sleep at night.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: I was just like at my wits end, I didn't know what else to do. So I would just say that over and over until my brain connected with those words and then I was able to help her.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: So just, you know, what I'm trying to tell, hope I'm making sense here.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: No, you are right on.

Yolanda Williams: What I'm trying say is just the habits you all, like the more that we examine and the more that we stop and pause, the more that we're able to form habits that we never had before that no one taught us, a lot of us don't have models for conscious parenting. No one has done it before us. We are the first people in our family to do this and we are modeling for our parents sometimes, how do we do this.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah, yeah.

Yolanda Williams: And so it is harder when you don't have a model or when you weren't raised this way, but it's not impossible. You can definitely do it. And I just want you to have grace for your humanness and grace for the fact that you will mess up.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: It's just a matter of when you do, your willingness to repair that rupture in the moment.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly. I love that too. As you were talking, I just want to double down that encouragement because it is easy to talk from a place of privilege. I'll give you an example, right. Because right now my children are super quiet, right, which is a privilege in and of itself, right, because my wife is taking them and kept them quiet, I have never heard my daughter, but my wife has taken them, kept them quiet, which is a privilege, right. And I know people who hate and I've had this same debate and all these kind of things with people about, oh, what's privilege was that. But really it is a privilege to have the ability to have somebody who just helps, right. I don't have to stress out about X, Y, and Z. On the other hand, I had my sister, one of my sisters had to, you know, she was a single mother for her children's whole life, right. She has five and for four of them, she was a single mother, you know. And I saw the struggle that she had with those boys and her daughter. I saw the struggle that she had and it's like, man, there's no relief. You know, there's, it's like constant, like constantly coming at you, you got to work, you got to get them to school and oh yeah, now they have extracurricular, you know, you have all these stressors in life, you have your own stressors and then you pile on top of like children's stressors that you have, and it is just, it can be overwhelming. And that's why I started off with like, you have to take care of yourself first.

Yolanda Williams: Self-aware.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah. Self-aware. That's even better. That's better, but just take care of yourself. So that way you can pour into someone else and pour into that child. And you're right, you definitely grace because, you know, when you mess up probably daily, you're going to want to go back and be able to like just say, you know what? I did mess that up and I'm going to do it back and fix it, no problem, it's not the end of the world. It's not something I do consistently. You know, these are just mistakes that as a human being, I'm going to make. Because again, when you're dealing with so many things, when I had to commute, this problem, when I was able to do it best, it's like literally like an hour and a half commute, I was able to do it best, right. So when I was dealing with all the stressors at work, driving an hour and a half was my decompression time. And that was a luxury, even in and of itself, that was a privilege because it was a luxury deal.

Yolanda Williams: You had time.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. I had time to just like decompress my mind. So by the time I walked in the house, my children are getting the best of me, right?

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: And sometimes you just, you just don't have that.

Yolanda Williams: You don't have it.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. Even when you – like you said that not getting sleep, I mean there's – how do you give that, how do you give to a child that's crying, you know, when you are not getting sleep? And that's a thing, so I definitely want to double down on that encouragement to say, you're not crazy, you're not wrong and you're definitely not giving excuses for parents to be. The only people that think that are people who just don't understand it. And maybe they're perfect, and I haven't met them yet, right?

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. I think it's trauma because it's like, there's no excuses. And it's also the binary thinking either or. The either/or thinking does not ever leave room for people's humanness. Either you are a good parent or you're not, and that's just not how people are. And I really believe in those moments, like people forget, we're not just talking about money or race, talking about ableism. Are you an able bodied person, that's a privilege, are you able to have a family member's help, my daughter is with my sister right now, so that's a privilege. Some people never get a break.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah.

Yolanda Williams: Single parenting versus, you know, partnered parenting or having a village around you. There's so many ways we can be privileged that because we are privileged in them, do not see them exactly as a privilege. That's the point is that you don't really have to deal with it because you are privileged because you're living in it. So I just, you know, taking stock of the ways that I am privileged, being able to work from home and being, you know, like all these different things and the ways that I'm not really helps keep me balanced. And it helps me see the humanity in other people.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And I can't, you know, like, if people want to argue about this, they can argue with their mamas, I'm not going to, right, at one place, I do not go is back and forth with folks. You are entitled to your opinion. I am going to continue to say what I need to say to help reach parents because what we don't want is for people to feel this is unattainable.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: So you have got to be – all the time, you have got to be perfect at this. That's why folks are just like, this is some white people shit. Because they are like, with all that life has thrown at us, like you expect me to always be on and perfect and it's -

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Dealing with racism and sexism and police brutality, trying to figure out how to save my kids from all of it, like it's impossible. But when we hold space for parents to say, listen, you are going to mess up, so when you do recognize what you did, go and have discussion, go ahead and apologize, and explain to your child that it's not about them.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Because I think that's the biggest, I grew up thinking everything was about me. That every time my mother cried, it was about that she didn't want us, you know.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah.

Yolanda Williams: And I think just letting your kids know, it's nothing to do with you. This is all about me not having the control I should have had in the moment and having like that honesty, it's so helpful because then they understand like, hey, that's how a human is like, you are a person before you are a parent, because I didn't recognize that until I was 25. Okay.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: All that to say too, you have a book and it's about it, it's a shadow..?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. "Crow from the Shadow".

Yolanda Williams: Okay. So what is this book about?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: So Crow from the Shadow is my first book that I wrote and I'm very excited, I'm very blessed to have, it's done well on Amazon. It gathered over a hundred five-star reviews. And I'm just, I'm excited about that. Because I didn't know how far this book will go, but simply put the Crow, and I'll talk about why I picked Crow because I think it is very relevant to this conversation. Crow is just a normal person like me and you who wants to be, he wants to be a military leader, he wants to get his degree, he wants to play basketball, all these kind of things he wants to do. But every time he says that he wants to do something, this figure comes in a picture called the Shadow that tells him that, hey, you cannot do this, right, or you cannot be this. And I left the Shadow vaguely defined in the story because I wanted the child, when the adult sits down with the child and they have that communication, I wanted them to be able to identify what that shadow is to them, right. So I left it completely vague. Then in the end, the Crow does come and say, you know what? I realize that I do have, he starts taking inventory of all the skills that he does have. Then he says, you know what? I don't even know why I listen to the shadow because he's not telling the truth. Only one can deter my future, that one is me. That's what, that's in the end of the story, that's what the Crow came to the conclusion of.

But the reason that, again, I left the Shadow vague is because it could be any force that exists to tell us that, hey, you cannot achieve success. And once I started getting feedback from the book, like I was blown away by some of the feedback I was getting from that, that target age range, which is about six to nine years old. But some of the answers they were given, I mean the Shadow being, you know, it's from my hometown, you know, if I'm from X place, you know, if

I'm from Ruston, I'm from Ruston, Louisiana, then I can't go travel the world. We don't do that, you know, or like when I was in New Orleans doing a recruiting event with the Marine Corps, and a dude – literally, I was in the middle of a parade for Bayou Classic and a dude walked up, he dapped me up, I was like, what's up bro, how you doing? He was like, hey man, that ain't for black people and I started laughing because it's like, you know what, it is what it is man. I was like, I appreciate you man, but it's that kind of stuff that, you know, maybe he doesn't see it for black people. I don't know what his thought pattern was or his thought process was, but maybe he doesn't see it as something that's attainable, right. Or maybe he has other reasons I don't really know. But it is those kind of things that once you realize that, you know, no matter whether Shadow is where you're from or whether it's your last name or your first name or like one parent told me she was the Shadow for her child, which again, that was beautiful because I was like, thank you for admitting that first of all.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: And recognizing that so we can move on. But she said that she was the Shadow for her child. She was not allowing her child to do these things and to become, she was really, really blocking her, blocking her child from becoming great because she had her own issues that she's dealing with internally. And that's the trauma that you're talking about. Some children identify the Shadow as depression which again, for parents who are sitting down with their child for the first time reading a rhyming story and they hear the child say something about depression or sadness or voices in their heads, it can be like, you know, it was like a shock, but it was like, that's, that's a good shock, right, because number one, that means that you're actually talking to them, you're not wishing it away. And number two, now we can get them to help and guide them and mentor them the way we should. So yeah, that's "Crow from the Shadow". It was again, I was blessed to see the book literally go all over the world. The feedback that I've been receiving from families all over the world, it's just been phenomenal. I am very excited about it. Because again, every time somebody comes back with a new Shadow, if you will, I just get more and more encouraged that, you know what, we really did it, like we really got a book out there that helps people to understand that, you know, there are things that exist to take us like there's systemic issues, there's all kinds of things that exist to stop us from being who we were put on this earth to be and achieving whatever purpose we believe that we were put on this earth to achieve. So that's "Crow from the Shadow."

Yolanda Williams: I love it. And especially I am so proud of that parent because so many of us are our children's Shadow, because we have fears and traumas. And the majority of us, a lot of our behavior is because of our fears. And we want so badly just to protect them from the pain and the stuff that we've experienced and sometimes that means that we are like squashing their spirit and we don't even realize it until a child lets you know, like I'm feeling really sad, you know. And so that's a really wonderful revelation, you know, I just feel like these are such important conversations and I love that you figured out how to do that for children in book form. I love that again you're normalizing like taking care of yourself and realizing like I have this external thing that's trying to become internal and I have the power to not listen to it, like that's such a beautiful thing.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. You don't give us a book in here, Gia.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Oh yeah. I got, I got to get you. I'm definitely going to get you one. So we'll talk about it. We'll definitely talk about getting you one. And I really think I love it because, and this has just encouraged parents too, it's like, it's not all bad. Like that mom, that admitted, not in any way, do I condemn her because I really, I celebrate her because sometimes we do things and you know, maybe it is from trauma. It could be from simply trying to protect our children from, you know, there's certain elements of the world that we want to protect our children from. And in all transparency, I would like to protect my children from racism. Now how in the world did I feel I could do that, you know. Just as said, as sure as I said that last year, my oldest daughter was outside just on the playground and, you know, she's 11 at the time and this girl I think was 8 maybe, maybe 9, tells her you can't come down this slide. And my daughter's looking, sort of looking around like, okay, it's sort of weird. And she's like, and she doubles down. She says, you can't come down this slide because you're black. And the lady, the parent that was there, she hears it and she is floored. She goes completely off. What was crazy about it though, and I still haven't heard from that parent, but what's crazy about it is the dad was like, you know, until the lady went, you know, sort of went berserk, the dad was just sort of going to shrug it off, "ah! kids will be kids". But my issue was, okay you know, this 8 or 9-year-old isn't just saying this from a place of like cluelessness, right. This to me is a learned behavior, right.

Yolanda Williams: It's a dinner table conversation.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly, exactly. And which is why he was, you know, maybe he is so embarrassed that -

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, he didn't care, like yeah, you shouldn't go down the slide.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Exactly. And that was the thing. So it was like, it was like in that moment, as much as I think I could protect them, I can protect them.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: She's at the playground, like in the neighborhood and this is happening. I'll give you a head, we live in a military community. So it was just crazy that that happened. And I was like, sort of blown away, like, man!

Yolanda Williams: We're never prepared for that moment. We are never prepared for explaining to our children. You know, I try to tell parent, people ask me all the time, like how do we even start? And I'm like, I don't know, because like how, how do we start? That's one thing that we definitely don't want to have a conversation about because we know a little piece of their childhood gets taken from them.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah, exactly.

Yolanda Williams: And we have to have that conversation and we don't want that for them. However, we know we need to have the conversation.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah. Yeah. And the thing is like, it is weird because I find myself having it and to be completely honest with you there's times when I sort of beat around the bush simple things like hair, right. Because I mean, I have Nigerian genes, right and I know there's some women out there with beautiful Nigerian hair, but unfortunately the one, the kind I got was that coarse kind and my poor daughters have that too, right. So when their hair gets wet, it doesn't like come out nice and curly and pretty, it just, it sort of starts matted up and getting matted up. So it's simple conversations like that to where she's like, well, how come I can't wear my hair down or straighten like them, or I can't braid my hair. And that goes back to why, you know, sitting down and reading these stories with them at an early age and exposing to them like, hey, you are beautiful, who you are like the way you are, the way you wear your hair, the way your clothes are, your skin, all this stuff is beautiful, right. I'm not teaching to be superior to someone else, but I'm teaching to embrace who you are, right. Yeah, you are beautiful the way you are and you don't have to worry about how your hair falls or all these kind of things.

Yolanda Williams: Then you may even want to stop saying unfortunately.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Oh-oh, did I say unfortunately, oh, well let me, hey, hold on, let me scratch that. I dunno what I was saying.

Yolanda Williams: I can take it out if you will.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Oh, that is not, it is definitely not unfortunately. Fortunately, fortunately, fortunately, I'm glad you called me out there because let me be, I call people out on stuff like that all the time. I think, I believe, maybe and words like unfortunate, you're right, I phew!

Yolanda Williams: I appreciate you being honest.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Yeah that. But yeah, I do believe that those kind of things are important and those conversations like once they happen, like it does take the child in a way of, at least that's what it feels like. But they grow as human beings and they start to understand the world around them a little better, so. Yeah, it's -

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, well. You know, what I'm starting with is just my household being super black and just centering blackness and centering dark skinned women in my household, especially because I'm lighter skinned and she is lighter skin and we do have curly hair, so I have pictures of them with Afros and real, like they have a picture over there, this woman's beautiful dark skin is so dark you can barely see her outside of like the side of the photo. I love that photo. I love looking at it. So I make sure my home just is a reflection of all things black. I got hella African stuff around here. Hopefully, I get to go one day, but that's where I'm starting because I'm just like in this place, in this home, we center blackness and black is beautiful and that, so she just is normalized. Again, it's just like something she just is used to. So when she goes out into the world, she already has this armor and hopefully that will help protect her against some of

the words that she will eventually, hopefully never hear. But I can't protect her against not hearing them. I was called a Nigro when I was 11.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right.

Yolanda Williams: You know, at school, you know, so it's like, and I didn't even tell my mom. So it was just like, you can't, you don't even know sometimes what they're going through. All we can do is help them to know I am in a safe space. If something happens to you, you can come to me, we can talk about it. And I will help you through this moment and advocate for you as much as possible.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Right. I know what you're doing is extremely important, because you're really teaching them. And this goes into the latter book that I wrote you, you're building that self-esteem and building, and I'm going to understand how important she is and how important her shine is to the rest of the world. That's Billy Dipper's Time to Shine is about, the newest book that I'm about to release. And in that book, I received some critics, right, because they really assessed it to be an anti-bullying book, which it's not, right, I'm not going to walk through the steps of how to face a bully and all those kinds of things. But what I do say is that, you know, you have to understand, you have to know your self-worth and the value that you bring to the world. And no matter who says what, no matter whether a bully plays a trick or no matter whether the Shadow comes out of nowhere, like your self-worth is not wrapped up in what they say or what they do, and like you bring that to the table, right.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Your purpose in life is what validates your efforts and what validates you, not necessarily the people on earth who sort of go through and always have something to say. And it's just like, like I said, for those critics, which is funny because I was talking to my brother about this, he is like, man, we already have critics this early, this is insane. We started growing critics this early. We're just writing children's books. So I guess that means we're heading in the right direction.

Yolanda Williams: Yes, it is.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: We're rocking a boat that makes them a little uncomfortable, because we're putting things out there and say that, hey, you already have something inside of you that you can shine and you can make, and like, you can grow, like you can make this thing, like you can do all these great things, like you could be successful, like you could show people the way that they can live and it doesn't matter what everybody else says about you, right. And if you, again, in this book, there is a bully and as parents, I think we all – you always want to identify as or at least have our children identify us as the victim, but in reality, some of those children out there are going to be the bullies, right.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Olaolu Ogunyemi: Whether it be in the way that they talk about somebody in one circumstance, or whether it just be how they act, you know, I'll give an example. My child, one time, she was hanging out with a group of young ladies and they were making fun, I don't think she was doing it herself, but either way, that group of young ladies were making fun of this young male and when it came back to me, I was like, why? You know, that's the question I had, why did you – let's talk through why were you doing that? And then we started narrowing it down, we realized that no matter what position, whether you're the victim or you're the bully, again, we don't like to talk about, there's usually some things that are going on internally that the bully is dealing with. So this thing is all about self-worth, and it's saying no matter who you identify with, whether you identify with the character, the main character, or you identify with the bully, you need to understand the value that you bring to other people, and you need to understand how your actions impact those around you. So, yeah, that's really the message. And I think that goes in well what you're talking about in that, you know, we just have to know that all those things, as we are teaching our children, our daughters to embrace who they are and love being a black, love being like, I love it, I tell you, I see people walking around, I don't care where you are, who you are, military or not, I don't care what your rank is, yeah, I'm an officer in the Marine Corps, but I don't care what your rank is and what you do. And when I see you, I'm like, "what's up man? How are you doing?" Like, I'm proud to see you, man. Because I want you to know that there's somebody out there that knows, that potentially knows some of the things that you have to face, right. Or you may have faced even today and you have somebody who's advocating on your behalf in a room where you may not have, you may not be in that room at that table, but I'm working hard to get to that table and get to that room as I continue to go up in the rank. So that way, I can advocate on behalf of, you know, simple things like, you know, young, I was talking to one young lady, she was like, hey, we have to change, you know, and be ready in 15 minutes. And I was like, okay, what's wrong with that? She said, you know, she just pointed at her hair and she's like, you think I can fix this in 15 minutes, and that stuff I can take back and advocate on your behalf and say, okay, you know what, there's no way that you can expect, you know, all your Marines to finish getting dressed and finished being ready in 15 minutes or less, because it takes more than 15 minutes just for this Marine to fix her hair, right? Let alone have a shower and do all these other things that you want her, you expect her to do and then be at work on time. So those are the kind of things that I believe are important as we continue to grow up and see those and say, okay, like we are powerful together, we grow together. I know there's times that we – I believe some of the systemic things that we sort of had as we grew up or whether it be over generations trying to survive, I think we sort of started competing with each other for some reason, but once we come together and start knowing that we're better together, I think we grow and we sort of can achieve anything. So anyway.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, well, you know, I love, I love what you're doing and, you know, super, just proud of you for like the way you're raising your children and the books. It's just, it's so awesome to see so many, you know, of us just making these wonderful changes for the future generations. So with that said, where can people find you?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: So I think the best way to find me, not I think, I know the best way to find me is on my website parent-child-connect.com. And there you'll be able to find all the links to my social media and be able to find my blog that I write for parents, teachers, and mentors. You'll be able to find any of my books that are going to be listed on my website. I think that's the best way

to find me. You'll be able to just go to About Me, Contact Me anything, just reach out, let's connect. I'm excited to connect with you. I'm excited to have conversations. I'm excited to get you resources, also have a free resource out there, it's called the #defeattheshadow journal. And what that is it's just a resource for us to sit down and I use it personally, but also for us to sit down with our children and talk through some of the ways that we can defeat the Shadow, whether no matter what that is or who that is and achieve success. So it's a supplement to my book, but it's a free resource nonetheless. You just go on the website again, parent-child-connect.com. There's a box that'll pop up, you enter your information and you get that free resource downloaded straight to you.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. I'll make sure to link all of your stuff into, you know, the show notes. So folks can get that free resource and connect with you, hopefully via social media in your blog. And with that said, what does Decolonizing Parenting mean for you?

Olaolu Ogunyemi: So Decolonizing Parenting, I'm going to shorten it so that way we won't be here on all day. So it is actually funny. I'm glad you asked the question, because when I first heard about your podcast, I said, okay, I need to educate myself. So the first thing I did was I started thinking about, okay, what is colonization, right, and I break this down in my own way. And colonization simply put is, you know, one country sending over settlers to another country to control a certain area. And then as a military man, I thought, okay, that the word control stuck out to me, because I believe control to be going in and taking over a geographical area and property for use by your country and its allies. The key thing there is property. I use that word intentionally. So as we started looking at, okay, what happens to the opposition? So the opposition that's in that land that you're going to control either they get killed or they detain. Now we call it prisoners of war, but in the past, they were called slaves of property. Hopefully, you got to stand with me, I promise I'm making a point. So as slaves, I believe that we got into a position to where we just got into that survival mode, and we developed this mentality and different things like, hey, you can't show weakness because if you show weakness, then of course the slave owner is going to assume that you're not as strong as the other slave, you're a non-producing asset, which means that the slave owner's going to divest of you, divest of that property that's not producing. And I think from there, we sort of developed that survivalist mentality and over time, that's just transcended generation after generation and we've just maintained that kind of mentality. So I think full circle, decolonizing parenting is first recognizing all those mentalities that were developed back when we were slaves or back when we were property. First of all, understanding how those impact us and how they inform our parenting. And then most importantly, taking steps to stop allowing those things to inform our parenting because again, we're no longer anybody's property. We should not be still using some of those same mentalities that our people were using just to survive for day to day. They had to 100%, I don't fault them for it because again, using that example, if they were weak or if they appeared to be weak, they were going to be divested of, they were going to be killed. And so now we're in a place to where we don't necessarily have to, some of those things we can sort of adjust our mentality and understand that if those things were still informing our parenting, we may need to go back and readjust and see how we can better lead our children.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. That's exactly what I feel it is as well. Just investigating on one's self, one's mindset, one's trauma and how it is impacting our parenting and looking into these systems

of oppression and how they impact our parenting. So yeah, so all of that. Thank you so much for coming onto the podcast, I really enjoyed speaking to you. And again, we'll make sure to put all, you know, your information in show notes, please go and, you know, purchase a book or two and you know, support this small black owned business. Super important to circulate that dollar and make sure you all leave a rating and review. Let me know what you think about this conversation on social media and until then keep it conscious. Bye-bye yall.