



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 26, 2019

Family Contends Autistic Boy, 5, Accused of Sexual Harassment for Hugging, Kissing Peers

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According to an angry family in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a five-year-old autistic child was dubbed a “sexual predator” and accused of “sexual harassment” for hugging a classmate and kissing another student on the cheek at East Ridge Elementary School. And while the boy’s guardians contend the school officials are out of their element when it comes to autism, critics wonder whether this is an example of #MeToo paranoia run amok.

Summery Putnam, guardian of the autistic child, Nathan, told WTVC she was contacted by Nathan’s school earlier this month and informed the school had filed a report with the state after Nathan hugged and kissed two of his classmates. “I was sick to my stomach,” Putnam said. “The teacher called me and she said, ‘You need to have a talk with Nathan about boundaries.’”

Putnam contends the school is out of touch and does not seem to comprehend that students with autism have difficulty understanding social cues. “If you don’t understand how autism works, you’ll think he’s acting out or being difficult,” Putnam said. “But, that’s not the situation.”

According to Nathan’s grandmother, Debi Amick, the school has informed her that Nathan’s school record will permanently list him as a sex offender, though the school denies labeling the child a “predator.”

“This child is autistic, he comprehends and functions very different than your typical 5-year-old,” Amick opined in a Facebook post. “Who do you turn to for help when the school will not even listen to the child’s doctor when he explains the child’s difficulties in his comprehension of simple things such as boundaries.”

Tim Hensley, spokesman for the Hamilton County Department of Education, has defended the school’s decision to involve the Department of Children Services in a statement to WTVC: “School personnel are required to [sic] concerns regarding children to the Department of Child Services (DCS),” he said, adding it’s at the discretion of DCS “to determine if those reports are acted on by DCS and what form those actions may take.”

The statement also claims that Nathan’s family has mischaracterized the incident. “This family’s characterization of the incident with their child at East Ridge Elementary does not capture the full



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context of the concerns expressed to them by the school,” the statement continues.

According to the Daily Wire, Nathan is not the first autistic child to be punished by school personnel for behavior that can be attributed to his condition, though he is the youngest. In 2015, for example, 20-year-old Brian Ferguson, an autistic student at Navarro College in Texas, was expelled after he accidentally hugged and kissed a woman he mistook for one of his friends. The woman did not report him and did not wish to see him punished, but because school administrators witnessed the interaction, they took it upon themselves to act.

In 2018, another student, Marcus Knight, who has both autism and cerebral palsy, was suspended for reportedly taking a selfie with a woman, wherein he accidentally hit the “burst” feature and took between 200 and 300 photos, and fist-bumped another woman. The woman with whom he fist-bumped reported Knight for the fist-bump, and later changed her story to say he had also “hugged her, sat very close to her, grabbed her with one hand, and with the other tried to get her hands onto his upper thighs.” Knight was denied the ability to participate in his own defense during the school’s investigation. And while Knight’s suspension was ultimately lifted, the school refuses to remove the incident from his record.

Perhaps the schools’ overreactions to these incidents can be attributed to a limited understanding of autism, but that seems hard to believe given the [increase](#) in autism rates amongst children over the last few decades, which seems to coincide with increased vaccination rates. It is not presumptuous to assume that more and more teachers are encountering autistic students on an increased basis as a result.

Instead, it’s more likely the overzealous nature of the #MeToo movement has prompted these overreactions. Americans have already seen #MeToo morph into a witch hunt against innocent men. In some cases, men engaged in consensual relationships with women who later came to regret their encounters are unfairly accused of sexual assault. In other cases, the allegations of sexual misconduct have proven to be outright false, but not before the reputation of the accused is utterly destroyed. And still, the SJW rallying cry remains #BelieveWomen, even if it means leaving a few male victims in the wake.

But now it seems that even children may not be safe from #MeToo, especially when there is a simultaneous drive to [portray](#) children as sexual beings. What was once deemed harmless affection may now be treated as “unwanted touching.” But even if that can be justified, is it fair to hold autistic students to the same standard?

It remains to be seen, as the school cannot provide further details at this time.

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