

Ethical Parenting



By Alex Kipp

You know, I am not just the very powerful Director of Ethics Education and Outreach of an agency of 21 people; I'm also a family man. That's right, I have two adorable young children, Boy1 and Boy2 (not their real names). Boy1 is 3 going on 30, as we like to joke around the apartment that used to feel quite spacious, and Boy2 is, somewhat more prosaically, 13 months going on 14 months. Let me tell you, parenting is hard work! But I have found a number of ways that working with the City's ethics law, Chapter 68 of the City Charter, has helped me be a better parent and raise my children to have the highest standards of integrity.

For instance, in the City we say City resources are for City purposes. At dinner, we say that our edible food (most of the food I make is edible) is for eating purposes. And, like in the City, we have an Acceptable Use Policy at home. For City workers, this means that answering one personal phone call on a City phone, or making one photocopy of something personal (not for a business or a political campaign) is fine, but making a thousand copies or spending your whole day placing personal calls is not. With my younger son, Boy2, a certain amount of butter-nut squash not going into his mouth and instead going onto his tray to make yet another squash sculpture is OK, but there

is a limit beyond which it is not acceptable.

My older son, Boy1, is learning other lessons about the proper use of house resources. For example, he is already 3, which means he should start learning to read now if he ever wants to make it into the right kindergarten. To that end, I thought it would be fun to read him my illustrated copy of Dante's *Inferno*. But the book has not been to his liking. He can't even stand to be in same room with it. The other day he told me he was going to sell it to another boy and use the money to buy ice cream. And while I appreciate his budding entrepreneurial nature, I told him no, that was not his book to sell. Just like I, as a City employee, can't sell a 20-year-old City laptop sitting around the office collecting dust. I may not want it or need it, but it's not mine to sell. The City will determine the proper way to dispose of it.

Speaking of ice cream, Boy1 has a bit of a sweet tooth. If he had his druthers, every meal would consist exclusively of ice cream! It's been a hard lesson for him to learn that ice cream comes after the meal, not before it or instead of it. Last week, my spouse, Spouse1 - not to suggest I have more than one - made a well-intentioned but misguided offer to Boy1: if he ate all of his dinner AND took his plate to the sink, he could have ice cream for dessert.

This might be fine for some parents who are not concerned with instilling the highest standards of public service in their children, but it's not fine for me. Public

servants do not take tips for doing their City jobs, and no child of mine is going to going to accept tips for cleaning up his dishes. Instead, I offered to write a nice commendation for the personnel file I gave him for his second birthday. Spouse1 did point out that the ice cream in this instant case was already out of the carton and would go to waste if it wasn't eaten. I pointed out to her that perishables that are offered as gifts and that cannot be returned might, after a determination by an Inspector General, be kept and shared in the office, but in this case my mother-in-law (our Inspector General) was unavailable for counsel. This ice cream was clearly offered as a gratuity, not a gift, and therefore it would be better to let it melt before our eyes than meander down a rocky road of impropriety. We finally came to a solution by giving the half-melted ice cream to Boy2, who had done nothing to deserve it, and who promptly mixed most of it with his leftover squash to form an even more impressive food sculpture. This seemed to satisfy everyone, except Boy1, who ripped up his commendation in protest. That will also go in his file. Rules are rules.

It's hard to set boundaries with your kids. It makes you feel exhausted by the end of the day. But it's the good kind of exhausted. The kind of exhausted where you sit on the couch after putting the kids to bed and cleaning up all their toys and cleaning up the kitchen and the bathroom and sweeping the floors and unpacking the food from the delivery box, and making a trip to the store for

things you couldn't get delivered, and wiping up all the food on the floor below the dining room table, and you turn on your favorite TV show and cue it up to the spot in the episode where you fell asleep last night trying to watch it and make it about 30 more seconds before you're out for a few peaceful hours. Sometimes in those moments of repose a question occurs to me about the standards set forth in Chapter 68 of the City Charter. Sometimes I don't know the answer to that question. Do I let that rouse me in a fit of worry? No. Because I know that 9-5, Monday-Friday, I can call the Board at 212-442-1400 and get my question answered by one of the helpful attorneys in the Advice unit. I can even use COIB's website, once I figure out what Boy1 has done with my laptop's power cable. Ah, I see now, he's using it to play Indiana Jones with the ceiling fan. Looks like it's

time to see if Chapter 68 can offer any wisdom on the disciplinary side of parenting.



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Recent Enforcement Cases

Misuse of City Resources. A teacher for the New York City Department of Education ("DOE") stored 3,061 documents on his DOE computer related to his outside businesses (mostly restaurants) and jobs (as an independent contractor for two real estate firms). The teacher paid a \$7,000 fine to the Board.

Misuse of City Position. A DOE Principal accepted \$200 in gifts—a pair of Nike sneakers valued at \$125, a \$50 Sephora gift card, and a \$25 Starbucks gift card—from 20 of her subordinates for "National Principals' Day." In a joint settlement with the Board and DOE, the Principal paid a \$500 fine to the Board.

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