

UNLESS YOU'RE  
BLEEDING OR ON FIRE,  
DON'T CALL ME!





## A TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

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“Let’s go. Are you ready? Why are we still standing here? Do you think I have all day?” my daughter nags. Burning rubber like a NASCAR contender, we zoom to the nearest department store.

At the mall, we shop for the many back-to-school needs of a nine-year-old girl: school supplies, school shirts, jazzy headbands, cool jeans and...bras. In keeping with my promise, my daughter and I search for bras. Underwire, padded, strapless, backless—the styles of bras are endless. But today, we shop to satisfy my daughter’s desire to be a mature young lady. We seek a training bra.

She enters the lingerie department in a trance. Different colors and varieties of bras hang across the junior department, like a sea of flags at the United Nations. My daughter looks around in wonder, preparing to enter preadolescence one bra at a time.

After much contemplation, we complete our selections. White and simple, these are bras a mother dreams about for her daughter. With purchases in hand, we march to the only checkout lane open and drop the items on the counter.

Dark-haired and attractive, our teenage clerk, Kyle, turns to face us. With a flash of pearly whites he asks, “Did you find everything you need?”

My daughter and I smile knowingly at each other, our purchases forming a bond between us that only a mother and daughter can experience. She is growing up.

Kyle scans our purchases and I hear only one soft beep. But, how can that be? We selected two bras. My mind wrestles with the pros and cons of the next step. Two choices exist: we slip out of the store quietly, stealing the bra that didn’t scan, or I humiliate my daughter and possibly the store clerk by pointing out his error. I decide to be honest. After all, I am a parent—a role model.

“Wait! You only rang up one bra. You missed the other one.”

By my side, my daughter melts like butter on a hot plate. Kyle attempts to pull apart the AAA training bras tangled together. I reach over to help, and the tug of war begins. As he yanks upward, I jerk to the left and right.

“Thanks a lot. This is the most humiliating day of my life,” whispers my daughter. Kyle avoids eye contact and my daughter tries to hide behind my purse. I quickly glide my Visa card across the scanner to pay. Then we charge through the automated doors and out of the store. Ashley stays close by my side, still grumbling and embarrassed.

“Mom, he was the cutest boy! And did you notice how embarrassed he was?”

Bra shopping is not for the meek. Maybe my husband was right to stay home, avoiding the whole thing. Despite the checkout debacle, my daughter lights up in anticipation of trying on each training bra. Once home,

she puts on the bras over her tank top and prances around the room, modeling her updated figure for her dad and brother. My son yells at her to quit blocking the TV, but Dad offers her the attention she craves.

*“Yes, Ashley, you look all grown up.”*

Smiling and glowing, she confidently strolls out of the room.

## CLASS CLOWN

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Parent-teacher conferences are as unsettling as being attacked on a city street by a flock of geese overdosed on Ex-Lax. You hope you don't get hit with something you weren't expecting.

When our son brought home a crumpled-up reminder note about his upcoming parent-teacher conference, my husband said to me, "Should we be concerned?"

"Nah," I said with a laugh. "We've got nothing to fear. Our little guy's fun-loving, smart, and inquisitive. He's right on track."

I was certain his bubbly kindergarten teacher would load on the compliments with a flash of her professionally whitened teeth and say, "Your son is fabulous. A model student."

This would be a piece of cake.

I prepared a list of questions for Ms. Smiley, things like, "Is our child working to the best of his ability? Is he a visual, auditory or tactile learner?"

The day of the conference we peeked at the parent-teacher appointment list taped on the classroom door and confirmed it was the correct room at the right time.

My husband and I entered the classroom with a grin and took a seat at our boy's tiny desk. The perky young teacher beamed down at us from her stool, hands folded in her lap.

Let the bragging begin.

With a serious face, she said, "I love your son's energy. He is certainly enthusiastic, but ...."

No buts. What do you mean, but?

She continued, "But yard-duty volunteers are concerned he's causing a commotion at recess. Personally, I embrace his enthusiasm."

Whew!

"What's he doing?"

"He has single-handedly taught the whole kindergarten class how to armpit fart. No worries. I think boys should be boys," she said with a giggle.

At the doorway, a woman with a deep voice cleared her throat and said, "When you're finished here, do you mind dropping by the gymnasium?" and scooted off with a flash of spiky, black hair.

"Who's that?" I asked his teacher.

"Your son's physical education instructor, Ms. Wagner. Not sure what she wants," she said with a twist of her ponytail. "As I was saying, he's a pleasure to have in class. Mom and Dad, you're doing a good job."

You bet we are!

I winked at my husband and gripped his hand as we strutted down the hallway to the gym. Ms. Wagner straightened the exercise mats and flagged us over to her corner office.

"Thanks for coming by," she said, running a hand through her hair. "I want to start out by saying that I enjoy having your son in class but I'm concerned about

his safety and the well-being of the other kids.”

Woman, what are you talking about?

“He’s the biggest boy in class, and I’m afraid he’s going to hurt the other children.”

“What’s he doing?” I said with a frown.

“Let me give you an example. Right now the class is doing gymnastics, practicing log rolls and somersaults on the mats. Yesterday, he rolled across his mat, knocked down the other children, then rolled over their bodies and out the gymnasium door,” she said rubbing the back of her neck. “We’re just concerned about his safety.”

Oh my God! Like a human army tank!

“I don’t want to take up any more of your time,” she said, pushing back her chair and standing up. “Please try to get your kid under control.”

With a weak handshake, we left the gym, our heads held in shame. As we rushed down the hallway to get the hell out of there, a tall, bearded man with fashionable glasses blocked our way. “Glad I bumped into you,” he said, looking us up and down. “I’m Mr. Thompson, your son’s music teacher. Can you stop by for thirty seconds?”

“Uh...sure,” we said in unison.

Oh boy, our son is a musical prodigy!

Once in the music room, we plopped down on the metal risers next to the teacher.

“First, I want to tell you that your child has a very high level of energy.”

“Okay,” I said, sneaking a look at my husband.

“He’s disrupting the class,” he blurted out.

“Can you give us an example?”

“Let me show you,” he said as he hoisted himself up in true dramatic fashion. We stared, eyes wide and



mouths open, as a six-foot three-inch giant hopped around the classroom like a one-legged kangaroo and slapped his butt with wooden drumsticks.

We departed the room holding onto each other, unable to suppress the laughter any longer. I glanced over my shoulder and spied the teacher as he chuckled too and dabbed his eyes with a tissue.

Geez, our son, the five-year-old class clown. Like I said, you never know what will hit you at the parent-teacher conference.

## GOOD PETS GONE BAD

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When my kids were younger, they begged for a hamster. For Easter we surprised them with a brown, long-haired teddy bear hamster, the perfect gateway pet. We purchased all the essentials: a modular hamster habitat complete with tree house, tunnels and a wheel (\$40.89); an exercise ball (\$23.98); and chew toys (\$3.99).

Our kids (sort of) played with Chubby Cheeks for about three months and then ignored him. Then the hamster grew a tumor. Not just any tumor, but one that oozed; a pus-filled, weeping, disgustingly red tumor.

Soon the hamster was living in the laundry room. Since I washed all the clothes, it became my task to feed and care for him. But after another month “the hamster problem” needed to be addressed.

“Hey, kids, come into the living room,” I said, staring down at my hands. “The hamster needs to go to PetSmart. His tumor needs to be examined.”

“We still have a hamster?” said my son.

Whose kid is this?

The next morning, I placed Chubby Cheeks in a box and drove to the vet. After the doctor examined him, we met in the waiting room. He said, “Good news. We

can operate and remove the tumor. What would you like us to do?"

"Hmmm...how much will it cost?"

"\$300," he said, checking his watch.

"Do you mind if I ask my husband first?"

I called my hubby and explained the problem. He listened without interruption for a few minutes. After a long pause I asked, "So what should we do? Operate? They can squeeze it in today."

"How much does a new hamster cost?" he asked.

"Five dollars."

Problem solved.