

Class: Mixing Fun and Lectures

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degree in occupational therapy, and although there are puppets and glycerin bubbles, hers is a parenting school packed with information about child development. If you're looking for a play group, please roll your stroller somewhere else.

"We make it fun," she said, "but I also have a lecture."

Rosenberg's students eat up her advice on feeding schedules, her tips on getting an infant to sleep through the night and her thoughts on the area's nursery schools. Her seminar for second-time mothers addresses how to avoid sibling rivalry.

Those who have taken Rosenberg's classes say she turns out assured parents who "go with the flow" and raise children who talk nicely and hold hands with their little sisters. Parents love her program because each class' babies are within weeks in age, and Rosenberg doesn't allow nannies to come in Mommy's place.

Her philosophy on child-rearing mixes other experts' advice with her own experience raising two children and teaching. Parents should be nurturing but firm, she believes. They should explain to their kids why things are but know when one word—"no"—is enough. "We don't need to negotiate their whole lives," she said. "We are the parents. They are the child. We are not equal."

Some mothers, who didn't want their names used, find Rosenberg's approach too rigid and question whether someone who is not a pediatrician is qualified to be so assured in her ways.

Rosenberg acknowledges she is firm on some topics but says she is flexible on others. "Even though I give them guidelines," she said, "I like for them to find how they're going to do it."

Sitting on a wooden toy box one recent morning, Rosenberg told a class, "I'd like you to read to your children no less than four times a week . . . I know one of the biggest problems is the babies eat the books." One woman scribbled notes.

"No nonfat products whatsoever for your baby," she lectured another group. "Remember," she told a third, "tickling is not pleasurable for babies."

Although Rosenberg can animate a cow puppet while mooing with a straight face, her approach is not humorless. It is her students who can be intense, mothers who approach parent-



Photos by BEATRICE de GEA / Los Angeles Times

A gaggle of babies joins a group of parents at Jackie Rosenberg's popular class at a studio in a Sherman Oaks shopping center.

ing as one part instinctual and many parts intellectual. Most can afford to leave careers in law, real estate and entertainment to raise their young Caitlyns, Maxes, Harrisons and Skylars—and pay \$25 an hour to hear Jackie.

In some cases, the women are more inclined to take advice from "Jackie" than from their own mothers. They seek her guidance on everything from noises their infants are making to baby monitors to how to read books to their children.

"Do we point and say, 'Purple shoe?'" asked one mother as Rosenberg held up a picture book she considers appropriate for a 6-month-old.

"No, that's too much," Rosenberg said. "Just say the object."

"So don't even think about the color?"

"No."

Another mom whispered to the first: "Good question."

At home, these mothers say they exasperate their husbands with, "Well, Jackie says . . ." If Jackie says a certain toy is "age-appropriate," the mothers will buy it. A book she recommends, "Your Child's Self-Esteem" by Dorothy Corkille Briggs, is ranked 24,380th in sales on Amazon.com but rockets to eighth among buyers in Sherman Oaks.

"You take from what [Rosenberg] says what you want, and you leave what you don't want. But I've got to tell you, most of it's pretty good information," said Barbara Neinstein, who went through Rosenberg's series of classes for new mothers and recently finished her 12-week

program for second-timers.

Word-of-mouth fills "Jackie's Class"—to the tune of more than \$250,000 a year. Rosenberg is developing a Web site and a book, tentatively titled "Jackie Says." A videotape is on the horizon.

For now, though, the guru is available only in person—if you can get in. In forming each 14-mommy class, Rosenberg has to turn away about 25 others, she says. Calls from transplants leaving San Francisco and New York are not uncommon. "I'm moving to L.A., Jackie," they tell her, "and I'm pregnant!"

In pricey SUVs, with their babies' car seats upholstered in leopard spots, most of Rosenberg's students come from the San Fernando Valley or the Westside. Several drive up to an hour from elsewhere. "The Industry" is well represented.

Rosenberg appreciates her students' devotion but discourages them from being too devout. "They only travel this path once with this baby—one time—and they really need to enjoy it and relax," she said.

A tradition has developed in "Jackie's Class" that mothers show their thanks when their toddlers go down her plastic slide one last time and "graduate." One past class mocked up a movie poster with photos of their children ("Little Rascals . . . directed by Jackie Rosenberg," it reads.) Others painted her a picket fence, put her face on a million-dollar bill and decorated 14 flowerpots, each sprouting the face of a cherubic alumnus.

Making a keepsake for Rosenberg "is more intimidating to us than anything else right now, trying to come up with something creative," said Maria Stamolis, whose son's graduation is approaching.

Like so many things, Rosenberg describes these mementos around her studio as "very special." Lots of things to this Valley girl of a certain age are "very special": a night when a newborn sleeps until morning, the mothers who carve out time from their jobs to attend her lectures, the bond that forms within a class. "They all get to watch their babies grow up together," Rosenberg said, "and that's very special."



Mara Lencov of Studio City happily watches daughter Landon, 10 months, crawl through cylinder at a weekly parenting session.