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Jackie, Mommy and Me

A parenting-class guru says she doesn't run a play group. Her kind of fun is mixed with information on child development.



Jackie Rosenberg performs a puppet show at "Babies First Class."

L.A. at Large

By MASSIE RITSCH
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Just found out you're pregnant? First, call your parents. Then call Jackie. For if you wait until your fetus develops so much as fingers, Jackie Rosenberg will have no room for you and your little one in "Babies First Class," her parenting program for first-time mothers.

"Right now, I am filling my class for February of '02," Rosenberg said recently at her Sherman Oaks studio. "And I've had two calls for March."

Among a certain well-heeled crowd, Rosenberg is a guru. Moms from Calabasas to Huntington Beach praise her with the devotion of disciples. "I'm telling you," one said, "I hear her voice in the back of my head."

Rosenberg's students gather weekly in a storefront of a Ventura Boulevard shopping center. They form a circle on the carpeted floor around her, pedaling their infants' chubby feet as they intone her mantra:

Motorboat, motorboat goes so slow.

Motorboat, motorboat goes so fast.

Motorboat, motorboat, step on the gas!

When these mommies and a few daddies motor away from Rosenberg's series of classes—after about 16 months and \$1,500—they leave their guru with offerings, elaborately themed souvenirs bejeweled with likenesses of their children. "My parents leave with a tremendous amount of confidence in their parenting and they feel good about what they're doing," said Rosenberg, 55.

For decades, "mommy and me" groups have been forming at day-care centers, nursery schools and hospitals across the country. Some focus on exposing infants to music, others have incorporated yoga. Mothers use the classes to meet each other and pick up tips on parenting.

The loyalty Rosenberg inspires among her students sets her apart, the parents say, but she is quick to insist that her background and the program she has designed over 18 years also make "Jackie's Class," as most of the parents call it, no mere "mommy and me." Rosenberg has a



Photos by BÉATRICE DE GÉA / Los Angeles Times

Seven-month-old Janna Offenberger of Brentwood entertains herself during a class in Sherman Oaks.

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