
Handout 10: Dinnertime at Rosie's

Rosie has three children. They attend child care programs while she works part-time. Recently she started taking an adult education class that starts at 6:30 p.m. She signed up for the night class because it was closer to where she lives than the day class. Also, the children's stepfather, Michael, is home evenings so she doesn't need a babysitter.

Today she picked up her children up at 4:00 p.m., chatted briefly with the child care provider, and then rushed home. Her plan is to have dinner over by 5:30 so she can get the children ready for bed before she leaves. However, it's already 5:00 and she's just starting to prepare the meal.

Her oldest daughter, Rae, is doing homework at the table. Rosie has asked Rae several times to set the table, but Rae is absorbed in her math problems. With each new problem she calls, "I don't get it. How do you do this?" Rosie stops what she is doing the first few times to help Rae. But when the child keeps asking for help with every problem, Rosie gets frustrated. She tells Rae, "I just can't help you now. I've got to fix dinner." Rae shouts back, "You don't care about me! I hate you!"

Rosie looks at her daughter and says, "If that math is too hard for you, Michael can help you after supper, or I can help you in the morning. But set the table now, we have to eat." Rae's allowance is based on doing chores, and one of those chores is setting the table. Rosie wonders how much to nag. After all, isn't she supposed to be teaching responsibility?

Meanwhile, Don and Dante, her four- and six-year-olds, are in the other room watching TV and playing with action figures. She can't see them but it's impossible not to hear them. The older child is trying to direct the play and is telling the younger child what to say and do. The younger child is getting impatient and knocking all the action figures over. They are screaming and calling each other names. Rosie calls out for them to "hold it down!" No one has come into the kitchen crying yet but Rosie expects that to happen any minute. Finally, the screaming gets too loud for Rosie. She goes into the living room and turns off the TV. The boys want her to solve the dispute. "Mom, he wrecked the castle," says Don. "Mom, he won't let me have my guy," says Dante. Rosie puts each boy on a chair and tells them to take a five minute time-out.

Now it's 5:30. Dinner is not ready, the table is not set, and the boys are not cooperating with the time-out. Michael is not yet home, either. Rosie wonders if he forgot that she was going to class tonight. She wonders if the class is too much to add to her family's schedule. Should she drop out and try again when the children are older?