

ANOTHER TUESDAY NIGHT

TEACHERS' NOTES

Study guide to accompany 'Another Tuesday Night'- an educational DVD about working families sharing the load.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE DVD

The International Labour Organisation is an agency of the United Nations which focuses on the needs of working people. The ILO recognizes that paid work and family responsibilities are often difficult to balance and that conflict between the two roles affects women in particular.

In 1990 the Australian Government announced that it would ratify ILO Convention 156 and would develop a strategy to inform individuals in the community, as well as people working in governments, unions and employees, about the Convention and how they could use it to improve the situation of workers with family responsibilities.

The film *Another Tuesday Night* was commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women as part of its Working Families Project in response to ratification of ILO Convention 56.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE

This study guide contains guidelines for facilitators about the contents, procedures and discussion topics on the theme of families sharing family responsibilities.

It is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to provoke critical thought and discussion about the film and to provide some additional background material for facilitators, as well as suggestions for ways to stimulate discussion and what issues to highlight.

The questions and activities will vary according to the nature and composition of the viewing group and should be selected accordingly, rather than in chronological order. The suggested role plays will need planning prior to use on the day.

PURPOSE OF THE DVD

The DVD is to help people to think and talk about the ways families deal with conflict around the issue of home and family responsibilities.

It shows a working couple with a young child trying to balance paid work with home and childcare demands and the resulting tensions between them as they attempt this. The DVD also demonstrates the importance of negotiation between family members in order to reduce stress and achieve a more balanced share of the domestic load. It begins with a problem and concludes with possibilities for a resolution.

ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DVD

In helping viewers and groups to think more carefully about the issue of sharing and balancing family responsibilities facilitators should be aware that:

- Balancing work and family is an important issue for the workplace and the general community. Workers who are worried or stressed about their domestic or childcare arrangements are unlikely to be productive and efficient in the workplace.
- Figures show that rising numbers of women in Australia are entering, or re-entering the workforce by necessity or choice. Thus it is no longer the case that men are the principal breadwinners or that women mainly stay home. More commonly, both partners work and

so need to negotiate sharing the domestic load if women in particular are not to be overburdened or handicapped in their capacity to take advantage of employment opportunities.

- Busy working families are often so rushed and committed that it is not easy for them to sit down together and talk about sharing the household chores, or negotiating solutions to conflicts around them. All members of a family, children as well as adults, have a responsibility to share and balance the load and this means setting an agenda and discussing what's fair in relation to each individual family member.
- Reforms in the workplace concerning workers with family responsibilities need to go hand in hand with changed attitudes and practices in families in order to enhance the change of long term reforms.

TARGET GROUPS

The DVD is aimed primarily at people with work and family responsibilities who want to benefit from examining the issues more carefully.

It should also prove useful to employers, unions, health, education, welfare and community groups with an interest in, or involvement with working families.

THE DVD CONTENT

Welcome to the home of Bridget and Mark and their young daughter, Jess.

It's 6pm and the start of yet another hectic round of domestic and childcare chores as Bridget lets herself into the house with her door key. There's the shopping to unload, Jess to feed and bath, dinner to prepare and cook, as well as work from the office to complete before the next day's important audit.

A call on the answering machine from Susan, reminds Bridget that she and Mark, her husband, have promised to baby-sit Sue's kids tonight while she goes out on her first date in ages.

Then Mark arrives home with Jess, whom he has collected from the child-care centre.

The couple exchange a brief kiss and Bridget greets and kisses Jess. Mark is none too pleased by the babysitting news because he too has brought work home from the office. Shortly after, Susan and her two kids, Sally and Adam arrive as Bridget is frantically cleaning the toilet.

As the evening wears on and Bridget and Mark struggle through their various chores, tension is growing between them.

Bridget thinks to herself, 'Why can't he take more responsibility and a fairer share of the load in the house? He only does what suits him.'

Mark thinks 'Why doesn't she get off my back? I help her a lot, but she doesn't appreciate it and is always interfering.'

It's a recipe for conflict which finally erupts over Mark's way of washing the dishes which annoys Bridget. But this isn't the real source of the conflict between them. At the heart of it lie different perceptions about what constitutes help and responsibility.

The couple needs to resolve its conflicts and tensions around these to enable Mark and Bridget to strike a balance in the home and an agreed division of labour.

They need to talk about their differences openly.

ISSUES RAISED IN THE DVD

Facilitators need to be aware of and 'flag' key points in the film to help with the discussion about working families resolving conflicts. These include:

Help versus Responsibility

Bridget feels that Mark fails to take any real responsibility for what happens around the house.

He helps, but she always has to ask him first. She tells him, "I don't want you to help...I want you to take responsibility. You just do the things you enjoy and even then I have to just about beg you to."

Bridget's Guilt

Bridget feels sad and a little guilty that because she is so busy, she is missing out on the important moments in her daughter's life. "I didn't even talk to her tonight, and I didn't even see her tower," she tearfully complains to Mark.

However, Bridget is her own worst enemy at times. Does she need to clean the bathroom and load the washing machine on the same night that she and Mark have the extra job of babysitting and when she must balance the accounts from the office? Does she take too much responsibility on herself?

Condoning Mark's Behaviour

While Bridget is critical of what she judges to be Mark's casual approach, she seems to accept it by her reactions to what he does.

He relaxes over a drink while Bridget cleans around him. When he goes off to buy the chicken he leaves Jess on the lounge floor for Bridget to mind and he appears unaware of all but the demands of the TV when Bridget wants him to cook the vegetables for Jess.

Mark Helps in his Own Way

Mark likes to do things at his own pace and in his own way and appears less driven than Bridget. He's comfortable as a father and is happy to play with Jess and Susan's kids.

Acknowledging Bridget's Role Outside the Home

From the film, it's not clear if Mark recognizes the importance of Bridget's work, as when she tries to talk about it, he switches attention to his job. He claims that the inflexible demands of his own workplace mean he cannot possibly take Jess for the day. "It'll go down like a lead balloon," and suggests that Bridget ask her mother, implying it's her responsibility.

Mark is Capable of Taking More Responsibility

However, he does finally telephone his mother to ask if she'll take Jess, so he's capable of being more considerate and taking more responsibility, if asked.

After the row between them, when an exhausted Bridget tearfully suggests that Jess will think, "I'm this horrible witch who just shoves food in her mouth," Mark reassures and comforts her by replying, "No she won't...you're a wonderful mother," as he kisses Bridget and calms her down.

Not the Real Problem

He suggests perhaps they need a dishwasher, but Bridget gently chides him, "You know that's not the problem."

Mark's smile indicates that he knows just what Bridget means as he replies, "Yeah I know. We'll work something out—something fair."

The couple settle to sleep. At that moment Jess begins crying loudly...

Negotiation a Fair Solution

The final scene in the film is one of reconciliation between the couple and the DVD ends on a positive note. It looks as if both partners are beginning to acknowledge that they have a problem in determining what is a 'fair share' of housework and childcare responsibilities, and that they need to resolve it.

BEFORE VIEWING THE DVD

Before showing the DVD the facilitator should introduce the theme and key issues. This is best done by asking viewers or participants some general questions such as:

- a) What do you find hard about combining family and work responsibilities?
- b) How do you decide who does what jobs in your family? What do you do if things go wrong? How do you resolve problems?
- c) Is it still the case that men are the primary breadwinners and women the carers in our society? What's your view? What is your evidence?
- d) How can families solve conflicts about home and family responsibilities in your view?
- e) What role should the workplace and the community play in helping workers combine and balance work and family responsibilities?
- f) How do you get
 - a) young children
 - b) adolescentsto take a fair share of jobs in the family? What are some of the problems and possible solutions? Have you met this problem? How did you deal with this?
- g) Do families need to bring conflict into the open and share their grievances?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE DVD

After flagging the issues, facilitators will proceed to show the DVD.

When it is first screened the DVD should be shown in its entirety without pausing. This will enable the viewer to form a general impression of its content.

Time needs to be allowed for viewers to comment on their first impressions. Facilitators might simply ask, "So, what did you think of that?"

The DVD can then be repeated as often as is required, or sections re-shown to help viewers in the follow-on group discussion about it.

Divide large groups into smaller ones to encourage discussion. Findings can then be reported back through group leaders. The facilitator can summarise findings for the benefit of everyone.

FOLLOW-ON DISCUSSION

Through viewing the DVD and taking part in the follow-up discussion/activities, participants may show greater awareness and understanding of the following:

- the importance of families achieving a harmonious balance between work and family, to reduce conflict and stress
- the need for families to develop the skills to negotiate household and childcare tasks
- helping to lessen the heavy load that most working women carry by more active support from other family members, employers and the community
- recognising that changing family patterns in our society demand innovative and flexible workplace practices and options
- the need to look at new roles, attitudes, behaviours and values
- the benefits to families, industry and the community as a whole when employees successfully combine their work and family responsibilities
- the existence of family support services to help families in conflict.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- a) How is Bridget's entry to the family's home different from Mark's? What are they carrying? How do they appear?
- b) Why do you think Bridget starts cleaning the toilet so soon after arriving home from work?
- c) What do we learn about Susan from the film? What's her status? Where is she going? What does she believe about kids helping in the family?

- d) How does Mark play with Susan's children and Jess before bedtime? What does he mean when he warns Bridget, "Don't start! This is how we play", in relation to Jess. 'Don't start' what?
- e) Both Bridget and Mark have paid jobs. How does each partner feel about their work? Is it important to them? Is there any clue in the film as to how each feels about or regards the other's work?
- f) When Bridget wants Mark's help, how does she ask him? Give examples from the film. What can you say about the manner or way Bridget asks Mark to help her? What do you think are her expectations in the way she requests his help?
- g) Comment on the different response by each parent when Mark is telling Bridget what Jess did that day at her childcare centre. How does he sound? How does she sound?
- h) Who in the family takes the major responsibility for organising childcare? What's Mark's attitude to Bridget's request that he take their daughter to work for the day? What does this tell you about the attitudes of Mark's workplace to his family responsibilities?
- i) Bridget and Mark begin to quarrel over Mark's method of washing dishes. What sparks the quarrel and what does Mark really mean when he tells Bridget, "Would you get off my back?" What's he signalling to her?
- j) When Bridget tells Mark "I don't want you to help! I want you to take responsibility", what does she mean? What's the difference in her view between help and real responsibility?
- k) How does Mark respond to Bridget's accusations during their quarrel? What does he say to defend himself? Does he agree with Bridget's criticism of him? If not, why not? What's his defence?
- l) What is Mark implying when during their row he comments to Bridget, "I spend half my life fixing and repairing this house." What do these words tell you about the gender roles in this family.
- m) Bridget's response to Mark is "You mow the lawn once a week and bang in the odd nail... that's not half a life's work!" What do you think she means by this?
- n) What strategy does each partner use to resolve the tension between them? eg Hostility, withdrawal etc. What incident breaks the ice between them?
- o) What do you imagine is going through Bridget's mind as she sits by herself on the ground next to Jess' cot holding her hand? How much time does Bridget have to herself in the film? Does she need more or less time for herself in your view? If more, how can she arrange it?
- p) Bridget is quite upset and weeping in bed. Is this only as a result of the quarrel, in your view? What else could be on her mind?
- q) What does Bridget reply to Mark's suggestion of a dishwasher? What does she mean?
- r) Mark tells Bridget that they'll work something out. "Something that is fair." What do you think Mark means by these words?
- In your opinions what would fair mean—for Mark? For Bridget? For the family as a whole?
- s) Why is fairness a really important issue for Bridget and Mark in settling their differences about household and childcare matters? Do they have to each do exactly the same amount of work?

t) How important is lack of communication between Mark and Bridget in the problem they have? How can they each improve their communication with the other partner? What changes does each need to make in voicing their concerns?

u) How would you rate this couple's chances of resolving their conflict about family and work responsibilities?

- High?

- Quite likely?

- Low?

Give your reasons for your choice.

ACTIVITIES

a) Role Play – Bridget and Mark are in conflict again about responsibilities in their family. They seek professional counselling support. Mark explains his side of the conflict. Bridget explains hers. You are the counsellor.

What do you suggest?

b) List support services and agencies in the community where couples in conflict about family and work matters can seek help.

c) In your view which situations are most likely to be the source of conflict among family members when negotiating responsibility in relation to household and childcare chores? Why? List examples eg Washing dishes, monitoring homework.

d) Talk about the ways the roles of women and men in our society are changing and broadening. Can you list any examples from your own experience?

How does this benefit

- men? eg Can play a more active parent role

- women? eg Have a wider variety of career choices

- children? eg Boys can be more gentle, girls can be more assertive

- society as a whole? eg Has a wider pool of talent, creativity

e) Tell the group what you would say to a seven year old boy to explain why he should take his fair share of home duties. You need not be related.

f) Write a letter of reply to your friend. She has written to complain to you about her new husband. They both have paid employment, but when he comes home he leaves domestic matters to her. What can she do? Be positive and constructive in your reply. Compare replies in the group.

g) You are a 42 year old single parent about to re-enter full-time work after many years' absence. You have a son aged 18 and two daughters 16 and 14.

Your son is supportive and takes more than his fair share of household responsibilities, but it's always been a battle to enlist the support of his sisters.

It is crucial now that they change their behaviours. How will you approach the issue? What will you say?

h) Employers are gradually recognising the need to help workers balance family and work responsibilities. Why is it beneficial for industry to do this? How can it help? Consider childcare arrangements, work schedules, paid maternity leave, etc.

Tell about any examples in the workplace with which you are familiar where employers make it easier to balance work and family.

i) The DVD stops at the point where Mark and Bridget agree that they need to work out something that is fair to both of them in sharing home and family responsibilities.

- Take it further:

The next evening they arrange for Susan to baby-sit Jess overnight at her house so they can sit down and try to resolve their conflict about their domestic and childcare arrangements without interruption. They eat dinner, make coffee and then begin to talk. What do they say? Role-play their discussion. It should be positive and non-blaming, in which each partner resolves to make affirmative changes in attitudes and actions.

- When the role play is over talk about the strategies used to negotiate a more balanced load between Bridget and Mark. What did you learn from the role play in relation to resolving conflicts about family matters?

EVALUATION

After viewing the DVD, discussing the issues it raises and attempting some, or all of the activities, participants are asked to describe if and how their understanding of the issues around balancing family and working life has changed.

They can also be asked to what extent they consider the situations depicted in the film as typical and valid in illustrating the problems faced by working families in our society. Caution should be exercised by facilitators in wrapping up the discussion and activities associated with the film, because its themes may provoke strong feelings or reactions. This need not prove detrimental to a critical, in depth concern about and reflection upon the issues, provided facilitators can diffuse emotion and return participants to an even frame of mind at the conclusion of the activities.

Matters should be brought to a close in a positive and hopeful way.

RESOURCES

[Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work](#), Report VI, International Labour Conference, 98th Session, 2009. www.ilo.org

[Combining Your Work and Family Responsibilities](#), International Labour Organisation. www.ilo.org

[Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981](#) International Labour Convention 156.

[Paid Work and Family Responsibilities Submission](#), Dr Leonie Bloomfield, Office For Women Time Use Research Fellow, Sub34, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005, Human Rights Commission. www.humanrights.gov.au

[Who's really time poor?](#) Robert E. Goodin, Family Matters No. 87, 2011, AIFS Journal, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

[Sharing the Pleasures and Pains of Family Life](#), Graeme Russell, FAMILY MATTERS no.37 April 1994, pp.13-19, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Juggling Time – How Australian Families use Time, Office of the Status of Women, Dept. Prime Minister and Cabinet, Pub. Commonwealth of Australia, 1991 [see also *Juggling Time: How Australian Families Use Time: a Report on the Secondary Analysis of the 1987 Pilot Survey of Time Use*, Michael Bittman].

Sharing the Load, Papers from the 1990 National Women's Consultative Council.



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