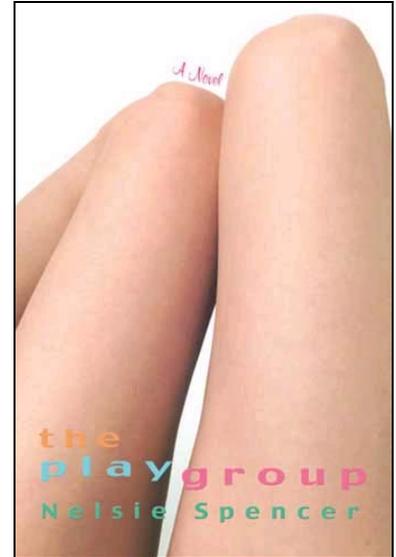


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Playgroup by Nelsie Spencer



St. Martin's Press

ISBN: 0-312-31173-7 (paperback)

0-312-31172-9 (hardcover)

Introduction to *The Playgroup*

I Don't Know How She Does It meets *Unfaithful* as a west side Manhattan mother joins an east side playgroup and the playing turns into high voltage sex and other dangerous games.

Before she signed up for the mommy role, Ellie Fuller was a stand-up comic, a good best friend, and a secret bulimic. As part of her recovery she adopts a whole new lifestyle, but when she takes a knowing step into unknown territory, that recovery and everything else is suddenly in jeopardy. At the Park Avenue playgroup where Ellie takes her daughter, Ellie meets Missy Hanover, an elegant ice princess who tempts her with what Ellie believes she might be missing. Ellie is soon in the midst of a secret affair and darker romantic entanglements, but the cracks begin to show. A skillful, addictive first novel that feeds right into the frenzy for "mommy" fiction.

Praise for *The Playgroup*

"Riveting from start to finish. Nelsie Spencer takes you inside Ellie—a place by turns bright, funny and sharp, then dark, sharp and cutting—but always surprising, always exciting. You'll love Ellie. You'll laugh with her, worry for her, be infuriated by her, challenged by her, and time and time again be lifted by her great spirit. Reading this book is like having an entire relationship—and it's far less expensive."

- Dennis Drake, Screenwriter, *Down With Love*

"Nelsie Spencer has achieved something very difficult. She has written a commercial book and a smart book. Ellie is so fresh...both brazen and vulnerable and perfectly of her moment. She reminds me of Isadora Wing in *Fear of Flying*."

- Ellen Pall, author of *Corpse de Ballet*

"*The Playgroup* is *Bridget Jones's Diary* meets *The Nanny Diaries* for the Upper West Side mom."
- Ally Sheedy, Actor, *High Art*

"What a book! Once I picked up *The Playgroup* I didn't talk to my husband or play with my children or do any of the other dozens of things that I should've been doing until I read the very last word."
- Pamela Hogan, Documentary Filmmaker

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. In *The Playgroup*, Ellie's loss of her best friend Robbie is an important issue. How and why does this affect Ellie in the book? Have you ever severed a relationship with a friend? How did you deal with it?
2. Ellie's betrayal of Peter by having an affair with Missy is a pivotal event in the book. Is this betrayal worse, not as bad or equivalent to her having an affair with a man? Why?
3. If you were Peter, would you take Ellie back?
4. The role of motherhood is of paramount importance to Ellie. Do you feel she puts that role in jeopardy when she begins the affair with Missy? If so, how?
5. Ellie is often judgmental of those who don't share her mothering philosophy. Which of her values do you share? Which do you not share?
6. Ellie feels like a fish-out-of-water among the East Side moms. Can you relate to her feelings? If so, how and when are these feelings sparked in you?
7. Ellie's relationship with food is a central issue in the book. Why does she relapse into bulimia? How does her relapse affect those around her?
8. Ellie struggles to forgive her mother in the book. How do the struggles we have with our mothers (and fathers) influence who we are? Is the forgiveness of our parents for their mistakes important—even necessary—in order to lead a happy, fulfilled adult life?
9. Do you feel Ellie's affair with Missy was essential for her growth as a person?

About the Author

Nelsie Spencer moved to New York from Southern California in 1979 to study acting at The Neighborhood Playhouse. Her play, *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*, in which she co-starred and co-wrote with Laury Marker-Sacks, was lauded by critics throughout the country. In 1998 Nelsie started getting up before dawn (while her children slept) to work on an idea she had for a book. *The Playgroup* is her first novel. She lives in New York City with her husband and two children.