Marlee and Carmen get together after work for coffee. Today they begin talking about how they deal with rules for their children.

Do your kids sometimes act as if they never heard you?

Yes, sometimes they don't seem to understand.
Talking seems so easy, you and I sure spend a lot of time talking. Yet sometimes as parents we don't say clearly what we are thinking.

That's true. Sometimes I cause the confusion. I tell them, "Don't eat in the living room" and then later I have them eat in there with me. It's bound to be confusing!

First, I'm going to decide what I expect of them—like cleaning their room, helping with the dishes...

And then what?

Then I want to explain it to the children.

That sounds helpful.

I just need to think of some clear rules and stick to them.

That sounds good but how are you going to get the kids involved.
Here's where I have problems. I say no you can't do this and they get angry.

I'm going to try to be positive. Instead of saying "no yelling" I will ask them to talk quietly when they are inside.

Maybe you could even show them what you mean.

Yes, and we could practice.

At times, I don't think my kids understand what I'm saying unless I show them. And I may have to show them more than once, but that's okay.

But what can I do if they still don't do what I say?

It seems to me you want to let them know what happens when they follow the rules and when they don't.

Okay, I'll try that.
Yes, and when?

By Friday night.

And what happens if you don’t?

We wear dirty clothes.

Next day Carmen and Mar Lee talk at work.

Well, I started trying to set up some positive rules with my kids.

How did it go?

Okay, I think they understand. But I’m worried what happens if they don’t follow the rules.

Did you tell them what will happen?

Yes, but I want to be fair.
First of all, they need to know you will do as you say.

Yes, I know that.

So do what you said.

If the kids pick up their clothes and put them in the basket, I wash them.

Okay, and if they don’t?

Then they don’t get washed.

Okay, if the clothes don’t get washed, remind them. Then let them know that next week they will have another chance.

I know that by setting rules and explaining them, my kids and I will both be happier.