



How to Find and Train the Right Baby Sitter

It's important to take time to find an experienced and competent baby sitter.

Where to Look

- ✓ Get recommendations from friends, neighbors, relatives and coworkers.
- ✓ Ask other parents and the staff at your children's day care center.
- ✓ Check with community centers, church groups or agencies that specialize in child care.
- ✓ Try bulletin boards and local newspapers.

Interview

When you have a list of potential sitters, interview them to determine their experience, skills, attitudes and availability and to let them meet your children. Ask for references. Listen to your children. If they don't want to stay with a particular sitter, find out why.

Get Acquainted

Acquaint your sitter with your children and your home. It's important to give clear directions regarding your children's routine, safety precautions and your own expectations while you're away. Checklists are a handy way to organize your thoughts and instructions.

About Your Children

- Explain any behavioral problems your children may have, such as fear of the dark.
- Tell the sitter how to comfort your children when they're scared.
- Explain what your children will eat while you're gone and give menu instructions.
- Inform the sitter about your children's favorite rituals, such as bedtime stories and favorite stuffed animals.

Health and Safety

- Clearly write your name, address and an emergency phone number on a piece of paper and leave it by the phone. In an emergency, the sitter may forget your last name or address.
- Include basic directions on how to reach your home from major intersections.
- Leave a list of phone numbers for police, poison control, neighbors and your children's doctor.
- Tell your sitter where you'll be and if you'll be reachable.
- Give your sitter the name of a relative to call in case you can't be reached. This person should have a signed medical consent form in case of emergency.
- Explain your children's allergies and any medications they take. Include instructions on how to give medications.
- Point out hazardous areas in your home, such as stairs if the baby is learning to crawl.
- Show the sitter where poisons are stored.
- Indicate emergency exit routes.

About Your Household

- Discuss or write a list of house rules.
- List appropriate play activities during your absence. For example, tell the sitter if you don't want your children to play with messy art supplies while you're gone.
- Give guidelines about watching TV.
- Tell the sitter who comes over to play or where your children may go with friends.
- Tell the sitter your children should never be left unattended.
- Note the location of burglar alarms, thermostats, flashlights, candles, extra keys and bottled water.
- Show your sitter how to answer the phone and take messages. Make sure there's plenty of paper and a pen near the phone.
- Discuss when it's OK to answer your door and how you feel about the sitter inviting friends over.
- Note which areas are off-limits to children and/or the sitter.
- Explain how to operate appliances.
- Provide instructions for any chores you expect the sitter to handle, such as cleaning the dinner table and putting dishes in the dishwasher.
- Quiz the sitter on your instructions for clarity and understanding.