

Getting The Right Sitter

Ann needed a baby-sitter for her two young children. Marisa and Kendall needed money for their summer vacation, and babysitting provided a viable income for the perky fifteen-year-old cousins. It looked like a good match for everyone involved. The girls seemed responsible, and the two young children were easy to handle. So easy, in fact, that when the girls' boyfriends stopped by one afternoon, it was easy to be distracted from their job. When a vigilant neighbor came to the door toting little Eric, who had wandered from the house instead of taking his nap, the girls were terribly embarrassed and quickly unemployed. And Ann resolved to be more careful in her next choice of a sitter.

Trusting your children with others is a serious step. The following tips can help assure you're entrusting the right people to watch after your most precious possessions.

Finding A Suitable Sitter

- Is the sitter at least 13 years of age and responsible enough to care for your child?
- Look for a sitter who has received training from local agencies such as the "Y" or a hospital. Ideally, find a sitter who is certified in infant and child CPR.
- Meet the sitter ahead of time for a personal interview. Introduce them to your kids to see how they interact.
- Ask the sitter for references, and call them to check on qualifications and competency.
- Pose "What if ..." questions that will show you his or her degree of preparedness for the job. Admitting they don't know an answer is seen as a more positive response than bluffing a wrong answer.

Before You Leave Home

- Have the sitter arrive early so you can show her around your house. Be sure to point out: the location of telephones, hard-to-find light switches, the first aid kit or medicine



chest, extra keys, flashlights, and blankets. Practice using the door locks and the burglar alarm system.

- Also, instruct the sitter on the safety precautions you have taken: point out the baby gates, child resistant locks, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, electrical outlet covers, toilet locks, etc.
- Show them all the entrances to your home.
- If preparing a meal is part of the job, train the sitter in how to use the stove or microwave.
- If your child is allowed to ride a bike or scooter, skateboard or inline skate while you are away, tell the sitter where the protective gear is stored, and that it must be worn.
- Leave written information and guidelines, including:
 - who and when to call for help.
 - feeding, bathing, bedtime and special needs instructions.
 - safety tips appropriate for your children; update them as necessary.
 - your name, home address and home phone number.
 - how to reach your home from major intersections.
 - important phone numbers, including where you can be reached, the phone number (and relationship) of someone to call in case you cannot be reached, the doctor, ambulance, fire department, police, poison

control center, and veterinarian.

-phrasing for the sitter to use to answer the phone or doorbell.

Set Clear And Rigid Rules

- Instruct the sitter to never leave your child alone - even for a second.
- Clearly establish areas which are "In Limits" and "Off Limits." For example, the sitter should know if it's permissible to play in the back yard or enter the basement.
- Allowing guests is not advisable. (Remember Marisa and Kendall?). Discuss whether it's okay to make phone calls to friends, watch TV or use the computer.
- Ask the sitter to keep the drapes or blinds closed at night and to keep both an outside light and inside light turned on.
- No smoking, drugs or alcohol are allowed.
- Tell her to get your child out of the house immediately if they see flames or smell smoke or gas.
- Show her your family gathering spot outside the house in case of an emergency evacuation.

NOTE: If you leave your child at your sitter's home, make sure you review the above information and check out the home beforehand to see that it is childproofed.

Some information courtesy of the Safe Kids USA organization.■