

Babysitter's Guide to Being Safe

Baby-sitting is a great way to earn money, help neighbors, and gain some job experience.

But it's also a big responsibility to be in charge of someone else's children in an unfamiliar home, and it can be a bit scary.

Here are some guidelines to help you be a first-rate baby-sitter.

Getting the Job Done

Baby-sit only for people you know or who have been referred by a friend.

Answering newspaper ads is not as safe as agreeing to sit for a friend of the family.

When someone asks you to baby-sit, find out what time the parents expect to be back and tell them how much you charge and whether you have a curfew.

Discuss how you'll get there and back safely.

Leave the name, address, and phone number of where you'll be sitting with your parents or a trusted friend.

Tell them what time your employer expects

to be home.

On the Job

Before the parents leave, have them write down the name, address, and phone number of where they will be.

You should also have phone numbers for the local police, fire, and ambulance services, the poison control center, a neighbor or relative, and the family doctor.

Have the address of where you are sitting next to the phone.

Be sure you know the locations of all phones in the home in case you need one quickly.

If there is an emergency alarm system, learn how to use it.

Know how to work the window and door locks in the house. Use them!

Make sure the outside light is on.

Ask about smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.

If you are in an apartment, find out where the emergency exits are.

Ask about the children's bedtimes,

favorite toys and stories, and what they eat.

Check on food allergies or medication.

Find out what you are allowed to eat and drink.

Be sure to clean up after the children and yourself. Wash all dishes, cups, and utensils that you use, and put all toys back in the proper receptacles.

Get permission and instructions on using the VCR, stereo, and other appliances.

Don't tie up the phone talking to your friends. Your employers may want to check in or call about a change in plans.

A friend should not come over to keep you company unless your employer agrees in advance that it's okay.

In an Emergency

If you suspect a fire, get the children and yourself out.

Go to a neighbor's or public phone and call the fire department.

Then call your employer.

Stay calm. Children probably won't panic if you don't.

Special Tips for Daytime Baby-Sitters

If you have children out in the back yard, make sure the front door is locked...and vice versa.

If you take the children for a walk or to the park, lock all doors and windows before you leave.

Be sure to take the keys and some change with you.

Never take the children to a deserted park or out alone after dark.

Be wary of friendly strangers.

If you feel uncomfortable in a situation, trust your instincts -- take the children and leave.

If anything seems unusual when you return to the home -- like a broken window, a screen ripped, a door ajar -- don't go in.

Go to a neighbor's home or public phone and call the police.

You don't need a coin to dial 911 or the operator.

When the Job Is Done

Tell your employer if anything unusual happened -- a strange phone call, noises, a stranger at the door.

Call your parents to let them know if your employer is going to be late coming home.

Be sure you are escorted home.

If your employer cannot walk or drive you home, or if he or she seems intoxicated, ask someone from your family to come for you.

Never go home alone at night from a baby-sitting job.

If your employers are unreliable -- always late, often intoxicated, etc. -- don't sit for them anymore.

Checklist for Sitters

Find out when the parents will return.

Make sure you know where they are and the phone number.

Write down the street address and phone

number of where you are sitting.

Have emergency phone numbers for police and fire near every phone.

Include the number of a neighbor on your phone list.

Ask parents about television, videos, video games, bedtime, play, and food rules for the children.