

Babysitting: Get the FAQs

Tips for finding and keeping good babysitters.

by Kate Winn



Q: Is my child ready to be a babysitter?

Is she responsible and mature? Does she love kids? Is she confident and a problem-solver? Is she able to go without her cell phone and computer for hours at a time? If so, then she may be ready. Ensure that she takes a course, and teach her to treat babysitting like a business. She

must be reliable and prompt, respect the privacy of families when in their homes, and provide exemplary customer service.

Q: How much do I need to pay my sitter?

The going rate for a family of two children is \$5 per hour. This increases for three or more children.

Q: How can I ensure that the experience goes safely and smoothly?

The first step is to have the prospective sitter over for a visit or two to play with the children while you are there. This way, the children can get to know him and you can see how well he interacts with them. Plus, he can get a tour of the home and instructions for safety devices such as baby gates and fire extinguishers. (When leaving for the first time, make sure your rules for the sitter are clear (e.g., answering phone, use of television or other devices, etc.), as well as your expectations for the children. Write out a timeline with suggested activities, instructions for meals (try to have food prepared in advance) and nap/bedtime routines.

Be sure to leave all of your own contact information, as well as emergency numbers, and the address of your home. It's also helpful to have details about each child, such as height and weight, in case they are required in a medical situation.

Q: How can I hold on to a great sitter?

Here are some tried and true tips for letting your sitter know that she's valued:

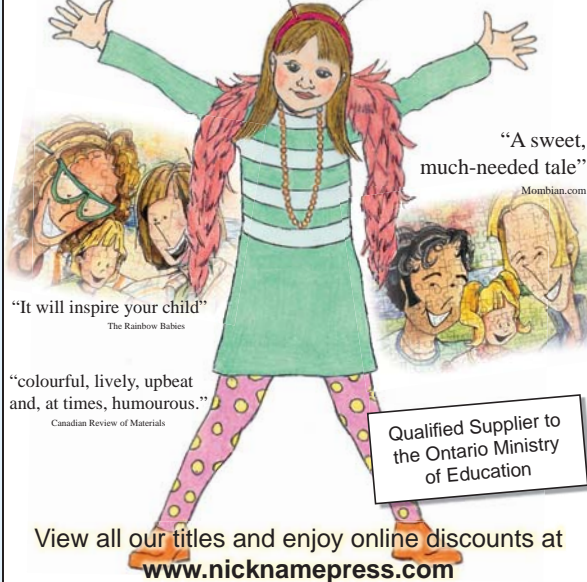
- ◆ keep some of her favourite snacks on hand
- ◆ give compliments and express your appreciation
- ◆ for a regular sitter, give a card/gift for birthdays or other holidays
- ◆ show respect: don't cancel unnecessarily, and be home when you say you will (or call with change of plans)

The most important thing to remember about babysitters is to trust your instincts. No one knows your children better than you do.

Kate Winn is a teacher and freelance writer. Check out her new blog at www.thismomloves.blogspot.com.

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These days, parents routinely plan for daycare before their children even leave the womb. But we seldom give as much thought to hiring occasional babysitters.

Whether you're working weekends, running errands, or scheduling a date night, the time will come when you'll be looking for a sitter. Though you may be lucky enough to have grandparents or neighbours on call, most parents entrust this important task to tweens and teens, which can raise many questions and concerns. We've compiled some babysitting FAQs to help you make the right decisions for your family.

Q: At what age can I leave my baby with a sitter?

If your baby can be fed by a bottle, or your absence will fall between feedings, he is physically ready to be in someone's care. Often it's mom or dad who isn't ready! With infants, you will want to be especially careful about choosing a reliable caregiver, and leaving ample instructions and contact information.

Q: How can I find a good babysitter?

The best sitters come through referrals from family, friends, and neighbours. You can also stop by your local elementary school, and ask teachers to provide your name and number to interested students whom they would recommend, and who meet your criteria (minimum age, responsible, mature, etc.)

Q: How old does a child have to be in order to babysit?

There is no specific babysitting age in the law books. According to the Children's Aid Society, the *Criminal Code of Canada* requires that no child under the age of 10 be left without proper supervision, but this doesn't mean that a child over 10 is ready to be left alone or to babysit others. St. John's Ambulance recommends that children are 11 before taking their babysitting course (www.sja.ca), and most parents look for sitters who are 12 and over. The characteristics of a sitter are much more important than his year of birth.

Q: What qualifications should I be looking for?

A babysitting course is important, especially with training in first aid and child/infant CPR. You may even want to offer to pay for the course and/or provide transportation if you have a neighbour, relative or friend whom you'd like to train for the job.