

# Babysitting 101

By Dawn Albrecht

Where to look, what to ask and how to hire a super sitter

**W**hen my twins were born 12 weeks premature and my daughter was only 18 months old, I never thought I'd be able to leave the three of them with a babysitter. These last eight years have been a stressful learning experience when it comes to finding a good babysit-

ter, however, I'm now comfortable leaving my kids with a sitter at least twice a month.

Knowing where to look, what to ask and how to best instruct someone to care for your child when you're away can seem overwhelming. Whether you're heading out for a night or looking for a sitter to care for your child on a regular basis, follow these tips to find a qualified

babysitter for your children.

#### Ask for a recommendation

How do you find someone who will care for your child the way you would? "Very carefully," according to single dad Darren Bornemeier of New Berlin. "I've got three babysitters who I rotate." Bornemeier, like most, found babysitters for his two children through recommendations from friends and neighbors.

Coworkers, friends and other parents are all great sources for recommendations. Once you've found a babysitter you like and who likes your kids, ask her to recommend friends who are also able to babysit.

#### Search your networks

Neighbors, churches and area schools are great networks for finding babysitters. Check with your neighborhood homeowners association to see if they know of any area teens who babysit. Some homeowners associations even have neighborhood directories that list kids interested in babysitting and yard work. Area middle schools and high schools can also be a good resource. "In the past, the school directory provided names of sixth grade boys and girls who took the Red Cross Babysitting Course," says Deb Steppe, a local mom of two.

#### Check out online services

Online tools have created opportunities for families in need of a sitter to connect with individuals looking for babysitting jobs. SitterCity.com and Babysitters.com are national subscription services that allow families to peruse profiles of potential babysitters based on location. Sitters post information about themselves, along with references, rate information, photos and in some cases, even a video. Both sites offer opportunities for parents—and sitters—to order

background checks, referrals and both include customer feedback as part of their services.

SitterCity charges \$39.99 for the first month and \$9.99 every month thereafter. Babysitters.com is less expensive at \$29.95 for a three month online subscription. Both have corporate accounts, so check with your company to see if they offer this benefit.

#### Interview before you hire

While a reference or background check may make hiring a babysitter easier, interviewing a potential sitter before hiring is critical in finding someone to meet your expectations. "The key is finding someone you can trust," says Bornemeier.

Personal interests and hobbies are important too. Ask about school activities, sports and scouting to get a better idea of the potential babysitter's personality and any interests she may share with your child. If you don't already know, find out how much childcare experience she has, including care for siblings, relatives and work in a summer camp or a church child care center.

#### Agree on costs

One of the most important parts of your conversation should include the cost of the sitter's services. While it may be tempting to avoid the issue of money, discussing this subject in advance is an easy way to manage the expectations of both parties.

Find the going rate in your area by asking other parents what they are paying for services. Consider how many kids are being watched, if a meal needs to be made, if diapers need to be changed or if kids are generally self-sufficient. The more work that has to be done and the higher number of children there are to care for, the more a sitter should get paid.



Everybody's happy when you find the right sitter.

The online babysitting sites recommend up to ten dollars an hour, although individual profiles vary depending on experience and age. "Generally we pay about \$6 per hour, but it varies depending on how many kids were being sat for, and whether or not dinner had to be served," said Brenda Lodermeier, Milwaukee area mother of three, ages 3, 9 and 11.

Regardless of the settled price, make sure the cost is something you both agree upon before you hire a sitter for a job. Offering an extra bonus or tip for a job well done is always a good way to cultivate a strong relationship with a sitter and show your appreciation for quality care.

#### Look for qualifications

Many kids who are getting ready to start babysitting consider attending the Red Cross Babysitting Course. "The course teaches kids to care for other kids—be that siblings or neighbors," says Shannon Hext, Red Cross babysitter training instructor and public support coordinator.

The class is designed for kids who are going to start babysitting or are ready to take care of themselves when parents are out. Kids

are taught how to change a diaper, decide which toys are appropriate for kids of different ages and basic first aid in this six hour course. Other topics include what questions a babysitter should ask parents and how to go over household rules and emergency numbers.

#### Write down expectations

Katie Morgan took the Red Cross Babysitting Course when she started babysitting over four years ago. Today, at 17, she's still babysitting. "I enjoy kids," she says.

Morgan recommends that parents put a list together for a new babysitter. "Lists are perfect for the first time. Then you know your guidelines," she says. "Lists can include medications, what the kids like to do, what foods they can have, rules of the household, family discipline and bedtimes."

It takes time to find and develop a good relationship with a babysitter. Once you have, leaving your children with a trusted babysitter makes going out more enjoyable.

Babysitting courses are offered at a variety of locations throughout the area. Check out the Web sites below to find out more. •



#### Online sitter sources

Looking for a babysitter for just one night or a few hours each day? Visit MilwaukeeMoms.com's Childcare Directory for a list of local babysitters, au pairs, nannies and childcare services at MilwaukeeMoms.com/childcare. Other sitter sites include:

**Sittercity.com**  
**Babysitters.com**  
**Care.com**  
**Local-baby-sitters.com**

#### Are you the parent of a potential babysitter?

The Red Cross Babysitting Course is offered at many local YMCA Branches, area park and recreation departments, community centers and hospitals. For a full listing of locations, see the Red Cross Web site at redcrossinsewis.org.



Children's Health Education Center offers Successful Sitter, a full-day program that teaches basic principles of child development and safety for sitters-to-be. Sitter CPR, which prepares babysitters to perform CPR and to clear obstructed airways for infants and children, is a separate half-day program. Contact Nicole Hosni at (414) 390-2164 for upcoming dates.

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