

Serious Business

Remember the first time you supervised your baby brother or sister? Or were asked to watch the kid next door for a few hours? A little scary wasn't it? And it should have been. Taking responsibility for another person is a huge commitment. Still, it's a common practice, and it can be a good way for young people to earn money. The goal is to keep it a positive experience for all involved.

Teens, before beginning your career, enroll in a babysitting class offered locally. Most teach basic child care techniques, such as feeding and diapering, plus first aid, age-appropriate activities, fire safety and home emergency skills.

Before The Parents Leave

- Get the names and phone numbers for emergencies, including fire and police departments, poison control center, the nearest hospital, a relative, a reliable neighbor, (and a veterinarian if applicable).
- Get the phone number where your employers can be reached. Know when they expect to return.
- Always leave your employer's name, address and phone number *at your own home* before going to babysit. And let your family know what time to expect you home.
- Get a schedule of activities (play time, feeding, bedtime).
- Tour the house with the parents. Know the locations of phones, emergency exits, first-aid supplies, fire-escape routes, and specific hazards that might attract children. Find out how to lock and unlock the doors.
- Find out where the items you will need are located, such as the children's clothing or playthings.
- Familiarize yourself with the potential hazards in the house, such as electrical outlets, appliances and exposed heating elements.
- Find out where the "danger" items are--medicines, bleaches, household



cleaners, and inappropriate toys. Keep them out of reach if parents have not locked them away in a secure place.

- Know who should be admitted to the home and who may take the child, such as relatives or friends.
- Know where a flashlight is kept in case the lights go out.

On The Job

- Dress for the job. Wear low-heeled shoes and washable practical clothing. Do not wear jewelry or decorative pins.
- Unless instructed by the parents, do not bathe an infant.
- If you are changing the baby's diapers, place everything you need within immediate reach so you won't have to step away from the infant, even for a second.
- In case of accident or illness, don't try to be doctor or nurse except for minor cuts and bruises. Call the parents for instructions, or others on the emergency list.
- Keep children within safe play areas, preferably within your sight. Keep toddlers away from stairs.
- Cook only with permission from the children's parents, and only if you can do so safely.

• Never play the stereo or television so loud that you can't hear a child who is crying. If you must use the telephone, make your conversation brief.

- The safest place for a young child when you are not able to watch her is in the playpen.
- Stay with her when she is eating.
- Don't take the child outside unless the parents give you permission. Then, make sure the child is dressed properly for the weather.
- If you are playing with or feeding a baby, and the phone or doorbell rings, take him with you or put him in his crib, carriage or playpen before answering.
- Keep all toys and objects small enough to be inhaled or swallowed away from babies and toddlers.
- Remember, infants should sleep on their backs.
- In case of fire, get the children out first and then call the fire department from a neighbor's house.
- If someone calls, tell them the parents are unavailable, and take a number.
- If your employer has been drinking, arrange your own ride home. ■