

We have compiled a useful checklist covering things parents should think about when choosing and preparing for a babysitter.

Choosing a babysitter

There are a number of important details you need to find out about your potential babysitter. Check that you have answers to the following questions:

What is the carer's age and experience? Has this experience been with children of similar ages to your own?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the carer capable of keeping themselves and your children safe? Check for first aid and CPR certification.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will they actively watch and entertain your children? Review their CV or online profile for this information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
How will the carer deal with difficult behaviour, separation anxiety, crying and whingeing?	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would they handle an emergency situation? Do they stay calm and act quickly and instinctively?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they know when to ask for help?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel that the carer is really willing to accept responsibility for your children?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Ask questions

A good way to find out about the carer's attitudes and abilities is to pose some questions about certain situations. You can listen to the carer's response to determine how they would react in different scenarios. For example:

- What if the child suffers from separation anxiety and keeps looking for me?
- Have you ever had an experience where a child started to choke whilst they were in your care?
- What do you do if a child refuses to go to bed at the allotted time?
- How do you keep the children occupied and what activities do you do with them?

Preparing for a babysitter

The more prepared your babysitter is, the more comfortable they will be looking after your children. They will know where things are, understand your routines and be able to deal with any difficult situations.

Always give clear instructions before leaving and allow time for your children to become settled and adjust to the carer.

- Go over your expectations stressing that your priorities are to ensure your children's safety and care at all times.
- If possible, don't ask the carer to do potentially unsafe tasks such as cooking or bathing children.
- Review feeding, naptimes, bedtime routines, preparation of light snacks and drinks.
- Discuss children's pacifiers, comforters, blankets and special toys.
- Show the carer where nappies, wipes, changes of clothing, bottles, formula, food and snacks are kept.
- Discuss any medications that the carer may need to dispense and be sure to write down the instructions for use.
- Be sure that your carer knows what to do in an emergency situation. Take the carer for a tour of the house indicating entrances, exits, lights, burglar alarms, first aid kit, fuse box, flashlights and areas that are off limits.
- Leave a list of emergency numbers next to the phone. Include your mobile number, numbers for emergency services, alternative contact numbers should the carer not be able to get in contact with you.
- Tell the carer where you can be reached and what time you are expected to return.
- Leave a snack for the carer. This ensures that their attention is fully on your children not on the preparation of meals. Consider providing a special treat for your children also.
- Discuss rules for the carer's use of the phone, cable TV, Internet, carer's snacks and visitors.
- Be clear on your rules for smoking and alcohol consumption.

Written instructions for babysitters

There will be a lot of important information for the babysitter to understand and remember, so you may want to create a list. Suggestions include:

- Information about the child – include name, age, medical conditions
- Contact details and emergency numbers
- Routines and instructions – include when sleeping, meals, baths etc should happen, and any rules and guidelines eg preferred methods of settling babies.
- Toilet training and nappies
- Special needs and medication
- Safety
- Discipline
- Play – favourite activities, toys
- Television and computer use – what programs, games, web sites are allowed
- House rules – rules about receiving visitors, use of the phone, computer and television.

Keep this document up to date, and make sure both you and the babysitter have a copy.

Use our handy Parent / Babysitter Note to print out for the babysitter. List where you'll be, contact numbers and kids' routines. It even lets the babysitter report on whether the kids have been little angels or little devils! Save it to your computer and use it again and again.

