

New Baby Sitters Need Parents' Encouragement

by Robbie Wright

When Marie first hired a sitter to watch little Sarah, she was concerned about the quality and safety of her daughter's care. Now, 13 years later, Sarah is beginning to baby-sit for other people's children, and Marie again finds herself faced with concerns, only this time from the perspective of the sitter's mother.

Does her daughter have the capabilities for this work? Will she know how to handle a difficult situation or emergency? What about Sarah's safety? Is the home secure? Are her employers reputable?

Baby-sitting is frequently a teenager's first paying job. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a clear job description, and the necessary training often takes place as on-the-job experience. It is, therefore, important that parents play an active role in preparing their daughters or sons for this valuable and highly responsible position.

Becoming a baby sitter is an exciting step in growing up. But it can also be a time of apprehension if teens are unsure of their abilities. You as a parent, however, can help your teenager become a conscientious and capable baby sitter by teaching some of the basic job and safety skills. Here are some guidelines:

- Assist your child in finding the appropriate training courses. The Red Cross, local hospitals, community centers and many schools offer training classes for baby sitters. These courses teach basic responsibility, child development, first aid, and how to handle emergencies.
- Help develop good work habits. Whether it is baby-sitting or any other job your child will eventually hold, it is essential to learn proper work practices. Parents can stress such issues as being reliable, showing up on time, learning to ask questions, and listening to and following directions correctly.
- Teach your teen to use caution when accepting certain jobs. Sometimes, a baby sitter will get a call from parents saying they received the sitter's name from another couple or another sitter. Under no circumstances should your child ever be allowed to baby-sit for anyone without first verifying the call. Tell your teen to contact the person who recommended her. Not only will this confirm the call, but it is also helpful in finding out more about the family who needs the sitter.
- Instruct your teenager to obtain the correct emergency information. Explain the necessity of always having the phone numbers of the police and fire department, medical assistance, where the parents can be reached, and a close neighbor. It is also vital to have the street address of the home where he is baby-sitting and clear directions on how to reach it. Make sure all information is written clearly and posted next to the phone.
- Stress the importance of working in a safe environment. Your child needs to understand it is essential to be in a secure and safe home in order to be an effective sitter. Suggest your teen take a tour of the house before the actual day to baby-sit. Ask him to be aware of where all

exits are located, if all doors and windows have adequate locks, where a working flashlight and medical kit are kept, the location of the circuit or fuse box, and if there are any pets, especially unfriendly watch dogs.

- Support your child in her new job role. This is a new experience, and at times it can be overwhelming. Problems do arise, and frequently your teenager will not have the assertiveness or communication skills to solve them. Encourage your child to talk about the baby-sitting jobs. Then listen carefully and be reassuring. By serving as a sounding board, you can help your teen become more confident in her ability to find solutions.

There also may be times when your child may clearly need your help or intervention. For example, tell your teen you will always provide transportation if the parents come home and have been drinking. Your child needs to know he has your support in these types of difficult situations.

- Finally, teach your child to set limits. Just because teenagers are new in the field of baby-sitting, it doesn't mean they have to take every job offered. Sit down and discuss such concerns as how frequently your child can baby-sit without affecting school work or other commitments, how late to baby-sit without interfering with school work or other commitments, and how late to baby-sit on school nights. Help your teen decide the number of children she can comfortably handle at one time, and talk about what would be a reasonable hourly rate to charge.

Your child also needs to learn to set limits by being able to say no to certain baby-sitting jobs. Perhaps the parents are always late returning home, or perhaps they underpay. It might even be simply a poor match between your teenager and a particular set of children. Whatever the reason, your teen needs to learn it is OK to say, "No, I don't care to baby-sit this time."

Teenagers want to feel competent in their work, just like everyone else. But this can be difficult without help. If parents take the time to teach the proper job skills in the beginning, it will not only help their children develop good work habits, but it will strengthen their capabilities for handling other types of employment in the future.

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