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EC64-529 Baby Sitting Basics

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Baby sitting offers many opportunities. It is fun, financially rewarding, and a respected occupation. You will receive many requests for your services if you take your work seriously and show you are a responsible person.

Baby sitting also provides excellent opportunities to study the growth and development of children. Because children more openly express their motives and feelings, you will be able to learn much about why they behave as they do.

Many motives and feelings of adults are similar to those of children, sometimes even causing us to act in childish ways. In the process of growing up, we learn to conceal some of our true feelings. Thus while studying children, you may also learn to better understand yourself and other adults.

Mutual Understanding of Responsibilities

As in other occupations, certain understandings regarding responsibility should exist between you and your employers. You must remain with their children, carry out their directions, and know what to do in an emergency. They will want you to like their children and for the children to like having you come.

Parents also have responsibilities. They must leave enough food, supplies and directions for caring for their children. They should inform you as to how long they intend to be gone. They should return at the appointed time or call you.

Have an understanding regarding how much money you are to receive. Make arrangements for your transportation if it is a distance from your home, and especially if you are to be out at night. Do not walk alone after dark.

It is best to work for people you know or who have been referred to you by a mutual acquaintance. Do not accept a baby sitting job from persons you feel are irresponsible or unreasonable.
Preparing for Your Work

If you are to sit with a baby, ask the mother if you might come sometime in advance to watch her do the things you will be expected to do. Let her show you how she feeds the baby, changes, bathes and puts him to bed. If the mother cannot leave enough formula already mixed, be sure she shows you how to make it. After you are an experienced "sitter", you perhaps will know how to feed and change a baby without going for a demonstration. However, do ask the mother for any specific instructions she might have.

Toddlers and pre-school children are often frightened when their parents leave and a stranger comes to stay with them. If possible, visit the home a time or two to play with the children while the parents are there so you will not be a stranger later when called in to care for them.

To guard the health of the children you are caring for you must be in good health. You should not accept a request to stay with children when you have a cold or feel ill, or have been exposed to a contagious disease.

When you are called by the parent, be business-like, making note of the date and time you are to work. Accept the job only if you are certain you can be there. If you refuse later, the parent may not be able to find another sitter.

As in any other occupation, appearance is important. The type of clothing you wear to school is appropriate. Do not wear a dress which must be dry cleaned. Your personal grooming should also be as though you were going to school -- no curlers in your hair, please.

On the Job

Be prompt!

Before the parents leave, write down the following information:

Where to reach the parents in an emergency.

Name and telephone number of the family doctor or close neighbor to call if parents cannot be reached in an emergency.

Specific directions as to when and what to feed the children, and when they should go to bed.

Where spare clothing is kept.

Special routines the children are accustomed to, such as at mealtime or when going to bed.

Any special precautions you may observe.

Know how to lock the doors, operate the stove, adjust the thermostat, and know where the telephone is. After the parents leave, lock the door if it is at night, or if you are in an unfamiliar area of town.

Stay awake. Take a book or some lessons to do if the children will be asleep part of the time. Do not take friends with you or invite them to come later while you are on the job. Avoid long telephone conversations. Do not raid the refrigerator unless you have been instructed by the parents to have something to eat. That fancy pie might be for company coming in later.
Insuring the Child's Safety

Your greatest responsibility is the safety of the child. Never leave children unattended. Always know where they are and what they are doing. Never leave a baby on a table or bed while you dash off to get something. If a baby is sleeping on a bed without rails, place pillows or a rolled blanket along the edge to prevent his falling off. Watch that the baby does not become entangled in his blanket or under a pillow in any way that he might suffocate. When children sleep, sit near the bedroom door so you will hear them call or cry.

The toddler wants to explore and move about, but lacks judgment regarding danger. Protect him from falls from high places or on the stairs; keep all sharp implements such as scissors and knives out of his reach; be alert for small objects he might put in his mouth -- pins, buttons, nails, paper clips, etc. Watch that he does not investigate electrical outlets, appliances, hot stoves or radiators. Be sure food cooking on the stove is well out of his reach.

Be familiar with a few first aid techniques. Know where the Band-Aids are kept. Don't panic in any emergency. You will need to think clearly and act promptly. The child will need your reassurance, too, so be as calm as possible. If you feel you need help, don't hesitate to call the parents or the doctor or neighbor next door. You will have an added feeling of security to know the telephone numbers for the police and fire departments.

Fun with the Children

Happy children are fun to be with. Help the child feel at ease by your friendliness and warmth. Perhaps reading a story immediately will help him miss his parents less. Show an interest in his playthings; stimulate some ideas for constructive play. When it is evident he is tiring of one type of play, suggest other things he might enjoy. You will have few discipline problems if children are busy, relaxed, and having a good time.

All children enjoy surprises. You might take along something special for the children. Check out a few library books of the appropriate age level; or take along a box of old jewelry and trinkets for a little girl to enjoy. A few magazines, some paper and paste make all kinds of scrapbooks possible.

Muddling dough is fun for children 4 or 5 years of age, or older. You can make this by combining 1 cup salt, 1 cup flour, 1/2 cup water, and food coloring of your choice. Work with this on newspapers or a formica-topped table, preferably in the kitchen. Crumbs might spot upholstery or carpeting.

Simple songs, finger plays, nursery rhymes, paper folding or casting shadows on the wall are quiet activities which might help children relax before going to sleep. Avoid ghost stories and scary television programs.

You will be able to think of more activities to help make the time pass quickly. Choose simple activities appropriate to the age of the child, safe and constructive in purpose.

Helpful Tips

These suggestions may be helpful to you in working with children:

**DO:**

Use a kind, calm voice and relaxed, tolerant manner.
Use a positive approach. Make your quests in terms of something he can do, rather than all "do nots." (Example -- say, "Put your toys here on the shelf," rather than, "Don't leave your toys on the floor.")

Be patient. Give him sufficient time without nagging to pick up his toys or put on his shoes.

Be firm but pleasant in your requests you feel the child must carry out.

Be consistent in what you expect of the child.

Restrain a child, if possible, before he hurts another. Hold his arm if necessary to keep him from hitting. Calmly tell him, "We'll have to settle this another way. I can't let you hurt Mary." Then help him discuss or resolve the problem peacefully.

Praise his good deeds; give him encouragement when he tries.

Laugh with him (never at him); share in his fun.

DON'T:

Belittle a child; respect his feelings as you would a friend your own age.

Call him a baby when he cries.

Make children compete with each other by saying, "See if you can beat Johnny putting on your wraps." Their abilities may differ.

Give children a choice unless there really is a choice. Better to say, "It's time for bed now," than "Do you want to go to bed?"

Make a child apologize when it is obvious he isn't sorry. It's best to explain why he shouldn't have done the thing he did, and say you hope he won't feel like doing it again.

Spank a child.

One last suggestion to insure your success as a baby-sitter: before the parents arrive home, see that the toys are picked up (the children can help with this), snack dishes are washed, and the house is in order.

If you need further help you can check with the State Health Department at the State Capitol for leaflets which will help you understand children at different ages. The department also loans films illustrating baby sitting techniques. You can request forms to record information you will need when the parents leave you in charge.

If you are between the ages of 11 and 19, you can belong to a 4-H Club and do the Baby Sitting 4-H Project. The Club gives you a place to work out your baby sitting techniques under the guidance of an adult leader. Four-H members have regular workshops on baby sitting when they make toys, learn songs, games, paper folding and other skills which will make you a better baby sitter. See your county agent about organizing a club.

Good luck! You will have lots of fun caring for children and be rewarded by knowing you have a very responsible position.

Suggested references for you to read:

Dr. Spock's Pocket Book of Baby and Child Care
Red Cross Handbook of First Aid
Parents' Magazine