

Home ALONE

How to hire
—and keep!—
your perfect
babysitter

Chances are that necessity and sanity will eventually require you to trust someone else with caring for your child. Even if you're lucky enough to have family nearby to babysit, you'll most likely need a pinch hitter someday.

I learned this the hard way when I was working on a tight deadline and the grandparents were MIA. I was left shackled to my laptop, with a nursing babe attached to me like a little barnacle.

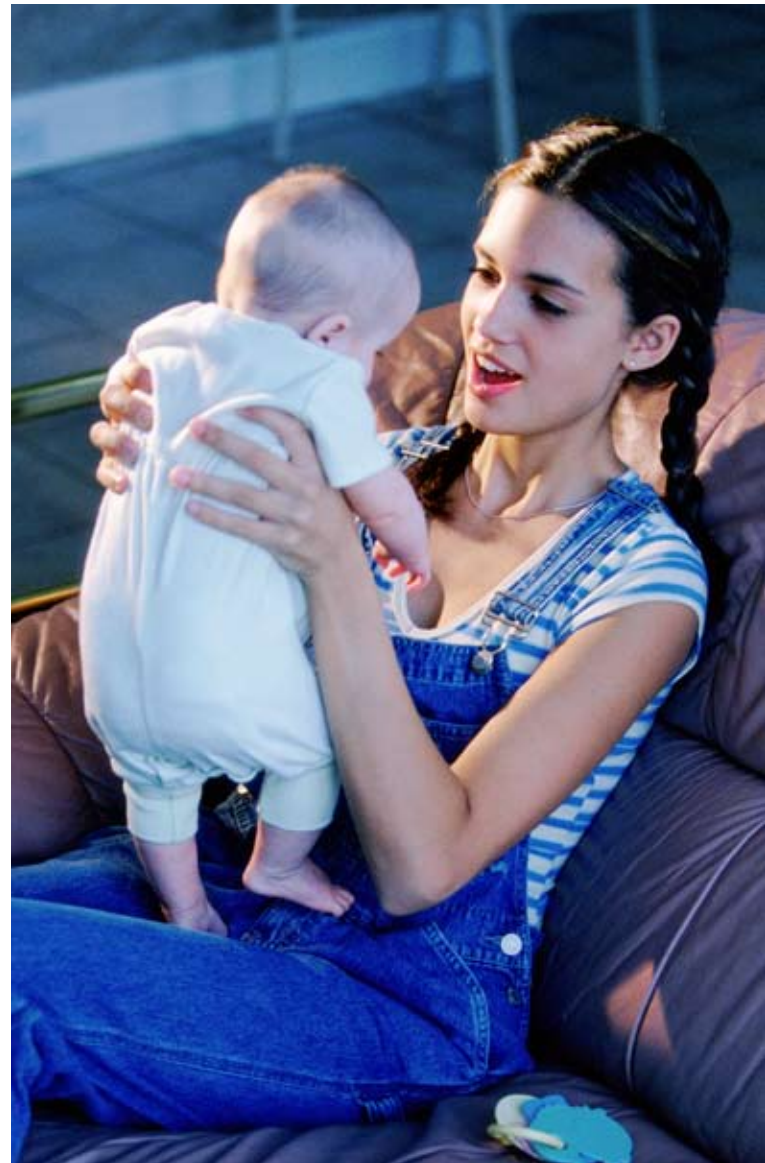
Somehow I managed to turn in the story on time, but I promised myself that I'd develop a contingency plan for the future. In my quest to find my very own Mary Poppins, I learned a thing or two. The following are my pearls of wisdom for babysitter acquisition and retention.

SEARCH FAR AND WIDE

Although there's no way you'll find a sitter who can clean playrooms with a snap of her fingers and employ constant whimsy to keep your kids happy, fabulous babysitters do exist. You just have to find them.

"There are a great amount of resources out there to find a babysitter or nanny," says Heather Dubuque, CEO of The Lillian Nanny Agency. "Check out your local placement agency, talk to friends and families about how they found their sitters, and ask your pediatrician for recommendations."

In addition, look to new referral sites on the Internet—such as babysitters.com, care.com, caresquare.com, and sittercity.com—where you can search for babysitters that match your desired qualifications and live in your area.



BY ● KATE WICKER

GRILL 'EM LIKE DONALD TRUMP

"When interviewing a potential babysitter, there's no question a parent should feel uncomfortable asking," says Michelle Janz, manager of disaster preparedness and health and safety at The American Red Cross, which offers babysitter instruction courses. "You're interviewing someone for a very important job."

Aside from exploring the obvious, like whether your potential sitter has past child-care experience and training in CPR, ask about discipline theories, how he'd handle difficult situations like inconsolable crying, and ways he might entertain your tot, Dubuque says.



Look for a sitter who takes the interview process just as seriously as you do. “Your potential babysitter should be asking you as many questions as you’re asking her. This will show she’s really listening and responding to the discussion and thinking critically about her role in your home,” says Genevieve Thiers, CEO of SitterCity.com.

And, as you would with any prospective

employee, get and check references—no matter how comfortable you feel with the candidate.

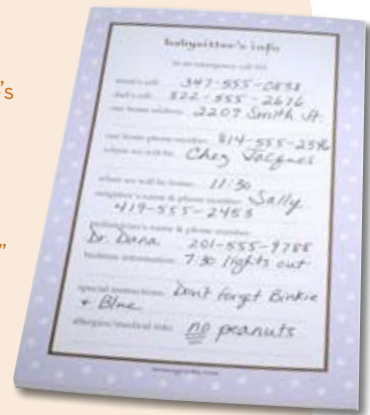
SET UP AN EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

Once you’ve chosen a babysitter, Thiers suggests bringing him over for a house tour and a “life tour.” “The house tour should cover things like safety features of the house, loca-

Sitter Success

Once you’ve found an all-star childcare provider, here’s how to ensure the arrangement is a win-win situation:

Arm your sitter with knowledge. “Leave your cell phone number, a neighbor’s information, pediatrician numbers, and the local hospital’s contact information,” Dubuque says. “It’s also important to write down your home address—this information could come in handy for a number of reasons, ranging from a simple pizza delivery to an emergency.” Don’t forget special medical information, such as allergies. The Babysitter’s Info Pad from MomAgenda (\$8, momagenda.com) makes this easy.



Talk, talk, talk. “Good communication is key,” Thiers says. “Check in with your sitter at the end of every job.” Discuss what’s working and what’s not.

Pay top dollar. “Pay them the going rate, and, if they’re amazing, pay them more,” Dubuque says. The average hourly sitter rate is between \$10 and \$20, depending on experience, where you live, and how many children you have.


Don’t treat your sitter like hired help. “Let them know that your home is their home while they sit for you,” Thiers advises. “Sitters that are treated like family are more likely to be loyal—like family.”

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tion of contact information, alarms, child locks, diaper stations, computer, phone, etc.” she says. “The ‘life tour’ is more about you and the quirks of your family.”

Discuss everything from your discipline philosophy to baby’s bedtime routine. “The more specific details you offer, the smoother things will go for you, your children, and your sitter,” Dubuque says. “There’s nothing worse for a babysitter than not knowing the specific book that must be read or the favorite pajamas that make sweet dreams come all that much easier.”

Consider giving the potential sitter a test run while you stick around the house. Don’t hover, but check in from time to time and observe how she interacts with your baby and vice versa before leaving them alone together. Bear in mind, things may get easier for your tot once you’re out of the house. “Once the child knows the parents are gone, he can calm down and get comfortable with the new sitter,” Dubuque says.

Still wary about leaving? “If you’re afraid your child will be inconsolable, put a time limit on how long you want him to cry and ask the babysitter to call you if baby’s still upset after the time has passed.” 

When she finds a babysitter, Atlanta-based freelancer Kate Wicker writes about parenting for magazines and at momopoly.blogspot.com.