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Choosing Care for Your Children

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A Babysitter in Your Home



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How do I find a babysitter?

If you are looking for a sitter to work in your home and provide care for your child, it is important to choose carefully. Usual ways of finding sitters include:

- Placing ads in local newspapers, community newsletters, or on community bulletin boards
- Reading ads in local newspapers, community newsletters, or on community bulletin boards
- Asking friends and neighbors
- Contacting community agencies, churches

What do I look for?

It is important to have full confidence in the sitter's ability to care for your child in a manner similar to the way you would provide care. Be certain to check the sitter's references. If the sitter brings written references, ask if you can call these people. You will probably feel more comfortable speaking to previous employers. Trust your instincts, too. If you don't like the person, your child probably won't either. Some of the questions you might ask are:

- Why are you interested in doing this work?
- Why did you leave your last position?
- What are your attitudes toward child rearing?
- How do you feel children should be disciplined?
- Do you have expectations about toilet-training?
- How do you feel about eating habits?
- Can you drive?
- How would you handle emergencies?

Spend some time talking about your philosophy of child-rearing and expectations you have concerning the babysitter and your child. Discuss limitations you may have about things like smoking, drinking, television watching, and using the telephone.

Arrange for the prospective sitter and your child to meet. Watch them together. If your child is old enough to understand the situation and is not

happy about it, the initial meeting may not be too successful. But observing how the sitter handles the situation may be helpful to you in making your choice.

If you are interviewing teenagers for after-school care, talk to them about their attitudes. Ask if they have had any babysitting experience and contact families they have worked for. Find out if they have younger sisters or brothers that they have cared for. Ask about the kinds of activities they have participated in. Check with teachers, counselors, 4-H leaders, and other adults who may be able to help you find someone who is responsible and capable.

Once the choice has been made

Once you've decided who you're hiring, sit down together and go over what the job requires. Some people prefer to write down the arrangements they have agreed to. This is definitely advisable. Having a written agreement can save misunderstandings later on. Both parties can refer to the list of agreements if there is a question. And, of course, agreements can be changed as needs change. Some of the things you may want to include in an agreement are:

- Days and hours of work
- Salary, including amount to be paid, when payment is due, payment for overtime, payment for additional duties, payment for holidays, sick leave, vacation
- Instructions for any special requirements like food, medication
- Emergency plans in event of accident, illness, fire, tornado
- Telephone numbers of parents, neighbors, other family members who can be called in the event of an emergency
- Other tasks to be performed such as housework, shopping, meal preparation
- Amount of notice to end the agreement

You may want to arrange for an initial trial period. Help the sitter get to know the house. And try to arrange for some time, possibly several days ahead of the official starting date, when you, the sitter, and your child can get to know each other and become familiar with the child's regular routines. Remember to prepare a medical release for the doctor or the hospital authorizing the babysitter to sign in case of an emergency.

Minimum wage and social security

The babysitter who works in your home on a regular basis, and whose primary vocation is babysitting, is entitled to be paid minimum wage. Casual, part-time babysitters whose primary vocation is not babysitting need not be paid minimum wage.

The "casual" babysitter is one who works irregularly, intermittently, and whose primary vocation is not babysitting. This person usually works less than 20 hours per week.

The "mother's helper" type of babysitter—a teenager or student who works full-time summers only—is still considered to be primarily a student, so the law does not require this type of babysitter to receive minimum wage.

If 20 percent of the time worked per week during the babysitting assignment is spent doing domestic work, the employee is to be paid minimum wage. This is the case even if the total number of hours worked is less than 20 hours or if this individual would otherwise be termed a "casual" babysitter.

A babysitter eligible for minimum wage who does not receive it can file a grievance with the Department of Labor during his or her employ or anytime after up to two years. If the grievance is found to be justified, the family is liable for the difference in wages.

Social security tax must be paid for the babysitter in your home. Form 942, available from the Internal Revenue Service or locally at banks or lawyers' offices, must be filled out. You are to pay 13.4 percent of the employee's wages. Some families pay the full amount, some families pay half the amount with the babysitter paying the other half. At the end of each quarter of the year, a report and a check should be sent to the IRS.

Child care credit on income tax

If you pay someone to take care of your children while you are employed you probably are eligible for a tax credit on federal and state income taxes. As you prepare your income tax, get Form 2441, Credit for Child and Dependent Care Expenses. For more information, see Pm-796g in this series, *Child Care Credit on Income Tax*.

You and your child

Getting used to the new arrangements may be difficult in the beginning for everyone. Plan special time together with your child and as a family so that the hours spent together will be valuable ones.

Other publications available in this series include:

Family Day Care Homes, Pm-796a

Day Care Centers, Pm-796b

Preschool or Nursery School, Pm-796c

Setting Up Play Groups, Pm-796e

Babysitting Cooperatives, Pm-796f

Child Care Credit on Income Tax, Pm-796g

For more information about young children, contact your local county extension office.

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