

Babysitting basics: Setting up your teen as a sitter

By JENNIFER COLTON

So your child wants to babysit. Once you've decided she – or he – is ready and able to supervise younger children, it's time to get active. Making a few conscious decisions and preparations can help keep your potential sitter safe and in control of a business where they'll learn responsibility, problem-solving and a little money management.

First steps

If your child is ready to begin babysitting, talk about what age kids he or she would like to care for. Is your child able to change a diaper? Is your child comfortable having control over older kids? These are all questions to talk about while you make a business plan. Make a plan that covers what types of children your sitter will watch, what his or her hours will be, and what he or she will charge. Will your sitter offer a discount for multiple kids? Will you charge by the hour or a flat rate? Make sure your child has a basic idea before going into negotiations with parents.

Certification and training

Having certification means your sitter-to-be has taken classes to understand some of the responsibilities and potential challenges of babysitting. It's not only a good option for all sitters, it's also evidence of your child's preparedness for parents who may not have a background with your child.

The longest standing and most well known babysitting certification comes from the American Red Cross. The organization offers classroom and online options for all ages, as well as optional first aid and CPR certifications.

In Hermiston, Good Shepherd

Medical Center offers "Babysitting Basics 101" for babysitters ages 10 to 15. It's a full day class – typically 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. on a Saturday – covering childcare techniques, what to expect, and basic first aid. The class is about \$35, and pre-registration is required. You can call 541-667-3509 for more information. Although St. Anthony's Hospital in Pendleton doesn't offer a regular babysitting class, it does offer tips for choosing a babysitter and making sure your child is ready:

- Get references and make sure sitters have a track record of demonstrating common sense, maturity and ability to follow instructions.
- Require first-aid training: At the minimum, sitters should know the Heimlich maneuver and how to use everything in a general first aid kit.

The Pendleton hospital also recommends making sure a babysitter knows the quickest route to the hospital and who to contact in an emergency.

Safety and security

Sending your child out into the world – even for an hour – has its share of fears and risks, and babysitting is just as much about the safety of the sitter as it is the kids he or she is watching. Do your best to minimize those risks by talking with your child about all expectations and setting clear rules.

Whenever you deal with parents you don't know, you may want to drop your child off to make sure you know where they are while babysitting and meet the parents. Make sure the home environment



is safe before you leave your child alone, and help them know how to stay in control in an unfamiliar house.

This is also a good time to talk about what the family's rules are and if any kids have allergies or special needs.

Marketing and finding work

The best place to start gaining babysitting experience is with people and places your child is familiar with. If you have other children, an older sibling can gain experience in your own home, and if you have friends who could use a sitter for a few hours, it can make it easier on both the children and your budding babysitter if they already know each other.

Once your child is ready to extend past your immediate circle, he or she can try advertising on Facebook or other local social media opportunities, and larger websites may also be an option. The website Care.com, for example, allows prospective babysitters and nannies to sign up and set up a profile. The site works in the same way an employment or dating website would: would-be babysitters make profiles and connect with parents looking for a sitter.

If you live in a small town, some

local post offices, libraries and stores have community boards where families may post about needing sitters – or your sitter can put up a flier advertising his or her new business venture. If you go with any public marketing, make sure you proofread what your child is submitting to make sure they aren't giving away too much personal information.

Balancing school and sitting

Just like any student job, babysitting requires striking a balance between school and work. While the money and responsibility can be a nice bonus, it should never come at the expense of school work. Before your child begins taking babysitting assignments, sit down and draft out a series of rules – including how late they can be out on school nights. Going into the experience with a plan gives your student a clear idea of what she or he should say no to.

When looking at the balance between babysitting, school, clubs, and sports, having a calendar can make a difference. Even if you have a family calendar, give your potential sitter a calendar – digital or paper – of his or her own to keep track of commitments and make sure they don't accept a babysitting job when they have a concert or a sporting event. While the class schedule may stay the same, sports and other activities vary, and you never want to leave a client without a sitter because your child forgot about another commitment.

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