



Author Bonnie Remsberg builds up her "point" bank account as she sits with three neighborhood children.

We Solved the Baby-Sitting Problem

When a busy mother needs help,
the best place for her to
turn is—to other busy mothers!

By BONNIE REMSBERG



Points dwindle when Jennie Remsberg (center) stays with a sitter; Jennie, 2½, always enjoys these occasions.

HOW WOULD YOU like to save \$300 or more a year in baby-sitting fees, enjoy the freedom of a spur-of-the-moment social life, and know that while you're away from home your children are in capable hands?

You can—by the same magic formula my husband and I have discovered: a baby-sitting co-operative. Believe me, you'll find it the greatest boon to parenthood since Dr. Spock!

We joined the sitter co-op in our neighborhood soon after our daughter Jennie was born. At a general meeting, I was introduced to the other mothers. Then a committee of co-op officers visited our home to answer questions about the system and to give us a mimeographed list of the members, their addresses, and phone numbers. As new members, we were also given a credit balance of 50 points.

In the co-op, points substitute for money. When another member sits with Jennie, we pay her a specific number of points an hour. When I sit, the person "hiring" me pays me from her point "bank account."

The bookkeeping is handled by the co-op secretary, and all the mothers take turns at this clearinghouse job. When a mother finishes a sitting assignment at our house, she telephones the secretary and reports how long she sat. The secretary translates the hours into points, flips open her notebook of tally sheets, subtracts that amount from my balance, and adds it to the other mother's.

Our first week as co-op members was a typical one. On Monday morning, I telephoned the secretary and asked her to arrange for a sitter for the following afternoon. She called the mothers with the lowest point balances until she found one who could sit; then she called me and gave me the sitter's name.

"Take Jennie to the sitter's home," the secretary reminded me. "Only at night, when their husbands are home to watch their own children, can sitters come to your house."

I dropped Jennie off Tuesday and left for downtown. Five hours of baby sitting cost me 25 points—and they were carefree hours because my child was in the hands of a woman prepared by experience to cope with anything. The sitter told me later: "With four kids of my own around the house, one more was no trouble at all."

SINCE MY point balance was now down to 25, I was anxious to raise it. Thursday night I sat with a neighbor's three children from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m., adding 24 points to my account. As provided in the co-op rules, the children were fed, bathed, and in pajamas when I arrived; their father walked me home afterward.

Friday afternoon a minor domestic crisis arose. Unexpected guests were arriving that evening for a weekend visit with us, and I needed to make a

fast trip to the supermarket within an hour.

Because I couldn't give the required 24 hours' notice, the co-op secretary was not obliged to contact a sitter for me. But she did give me the names of several mothers whose point totals were low. Armed with this list, I did my own telephoning until I found a place to leave Jennie.

In that first week alone, I figure we saved at least \$13 in baby-sitting fees. All it cost me were a few evenings away from home, during which I had a chance to read and watch tv in the peace and quiet of someone else's house. Jennie is 2½ now, and the sum we've saved in that time is a tidy one.

Only once can I remember our co-op machinery breaking down. My husband and I planned a big party and, without thinking, invited more than half the couples on the sitter list. The secretary was frantic when she called the next day. "Bonnie," she said, "you can't do this. There's no one left to watch the kids!"

How the Sitter Co-op Works

- The operating rules of the author's baby-sitting co-op in Chicago could serve as a guide to other groups of parents who want to set up similar co-ops. Here are the major rules:

- No sitting between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. except by special arrangement.

- No sitting on major holidays or the eve of major holidays.

- If a sitter is unable to fulfill a sitting appointment, she must find a replacement.

- If a sitting is cancelled after 6 p.m., a five-point penalty is charged (except in the case of illness).

- If a member does not use the co-op for three months without an excuse which the executive board considers valid (such as illness, a new baby, a vacation, etc.), her membership is automatically withdrawn.

- If a husband is to do the sitting, permission must be obtained from the member requesting the sitter.

- Husbands must escort sitters home from night sittings unless other arrangements are made. Husbands also will pick up sitters when a sitting begins after dark, if the sitter wishes it.

- Each member starts with 50 points. Points are subtracted from her total each time she uses a sitter, and points are added to her total each time she sits. Here are the point charges:

- Daytime: One child, five points per hour. One point is charged for each additional child under five years; no points for additional children over five years.

- Nights: After bedtime and before 1 a.m., regardless of number and ages of children, four points per hour; after 1 a.m., six points per hour.

- Children up for more than one-half hour during the evening are charged at daytime rates for the amount of the time up. Minimum charge for evening sitting, 10 points. Extra charge for Saturday night sittings, five points.

COVER:

Photographed by Doris Pinney, this wide-eyed little miss is surely a joy to her parents—except perhaps when it comes to finding her a baby sitter. For a unique solution to this problem, see story above.

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