

Parental guidelines in case you need a babysitter

Whether you work full time outside the home or are simply going out for the evening, you want the best possible care for your children while you are away from them. Before you hire anyone to watch over your children, make sure that he or she is a mature, experienced, and capable individual who truly cares about the welfare of children. Check all references, and make sure to observe the babysitter with your children.

Above all, ask your children whether or not they like and trust the babysitter and what activities took place during your time away. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has prepared the guidelines noted below to help you as a parent find and train a babysitter and prepare your home for temporary child care. Also included here are important safety tips for your family.

Finding a Babysitter

The best sources of information on child care are the recommendations of family, friends, and neighbors. You may also advertise for a babysitter through your local high school, church, civic organization, or other sources you trust.

If you are new to the area, check the yellow pages of the telephone book (under “Sitting Services”) for a list of child-care services. Certain sitting services advertise that their sitters are “bonded.” This means that the babysitting service has purchased an insurance bond that will cover certain damages or loss of your property; however, the bond most likely will **not** protect your children in any way. Determine whether the sitting service has made a criminal-history check on or has otherwise screened its employees.

In some states you may be able to obtain a listing of child-care services through the County Office for Children or even local law enforcement. Look in your telephone book under “County Government” or call your local law-enforcement agency. Child-care services are licensed, and you may be able to receive recommendations or check references through the licensing body.

Hiring the Babysitter

Once you have made a list of possible babysitters, carefully check their references. Contact the sitter’s past employers, teachers, counselors, relatives, friends, or neighbors, and ask them about the sitter’s child-care qualifications. Most importantly, interview several prospective sitters personally and observe their interaction with your children. Look for mature and responsible people who listen and respond well to your children and appear relaxed and happy with them.

Last, outline the babysitter’s duties and responsibilities and discuss an imagined emergency situation and how he or she might react. When you decide on a babysitter who meets your high standards, discuss the hours and fees for service. Also verify and write down his or her name, home address, and telephone number. In addition, ask for and write down any other key identifying information such as a driver’s license number. Many states provide access to sex-offender registries and criminal-history checks. Check with your state law-enforcement department on how you can access this information.

When the Babysitter Arrives

Ask the babysitter to arrive at least 15 minutes before you depart. Make sure that you let the sitter know exactly where you will be and how you can be reached. Write down the address and telephone number of the place where you will be. Also make a list of emergency telephone numbers for a friend or relative, the children’s doctor, the local law-enforcement agency, the fire department, an ambulance service, and the poison-control center.

Carefully go over any family rules and daily routines, paying special attention to eating and sleeping arrangements. Take the sitter on a tour of the house, showing him or her any first-aid equipment and all doors and possible exits. It is a good idea to discuss the family rules regarding television, snacks, and bedtime with both the babysitter and the children present. It is your responsibility as a parent to let your children know what rules are to be obeyed when you are out of the house.

Before leaving your home, share the specific instructions noted below with the babysitter.

- Lock all doors when left alone with the children.
- Carefully watch the children while they are awake, and be sure to keep them away from dangerous objects or chemicals and protected from household accidents.
- Sitters in our home are not allowed to have visitors or guests, nor leave the children alone in the house at any time.
- Regularly check the children when they go to sleep, and be sure to stay awake

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during your entire stay in our home to allow for such periodic checks.

- Do not tell anyone who calls the house that the children are alone with a babysitter. Ask the caller to leave a message for us.
- Do not open the door to anyone unless we have given prior permission. Again, ask to take a message.
- Carefully watch the children when going outside to the yard. This list contains the names of children who may play with or visit our children when they are outside, if the parents of the other children agree.
- When in a public place, carefully watch the children, and do not permit them to wander. Avoid sending the children to public restrooms alone. Make sure that you lock all windows and doors before you leave the house. If something seems suspicious when you return, such as a broken window or door, immediately call law enforcement from another house.

Your Return Home

As a parent, when you return home, ask the babysitter if the children are safe and if anything unusual happened—telephone calls, visits, and so on. Make sure that the babysitter is escorted home, and wait until he or she is safely inside before you leave.

Most importantly, when the babysitter has left, talk to your children about what happened while you were gone. Ask them what games they played and about any other activities. Ask your children if anything happened that made them feel uncomfortable or afraid.

Safety Tips for Your Children

Your children should be reminded of the safety instructions noted below, that apply to babysitters as well as others.

- If someone wants to take your picture, tell mom and dad or a trusted adult.
- No one should touch you on the parts of the body that would be covered by a bathing suit, nor should you touch anyone else in those areas. Your body is special and private.
- Trust your feelings about what is right and wrong behavior.
- No one should approach you or touch you in any way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- You can be assertive, and you have the right to say **NO** to someone who tries to take you somewhere, touches you, or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.

As a parent, above all, be sensitive to changes in your child's behavior, and find out from your child what caused the changes. Your home should be a place of trust and support where your children can feel safe in discussing fears and other sensitive matters and in relating experiences that made them uncomfortable. Good and healthy communication with your child can go a long way toward preventing child exploitation and abuse.

Detecting Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation should not be confused with physical contacts that are true expressions of affection. A warm and healthy relationship can exist if adults respect the child and place reasonable limits on their physical interaction. The reality of sexual exploitation is that often the children are confused, uncomfortable, and unwilling to talk about the experience to parents, teachers, or anyone else. But **they will talk** if you have already established an atmosphere of trust and support in your home, where your children will feel free to talk without fear of accusation, blame, or guilt.

Parents should be alert to these indicators of sexual abuse.

- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying.
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances.
- Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters.
- A sudden acting out of feelings or aggressive or rebellious behavior.
- Regression to infantile behavior.
- A fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people. Children should not be forced to give affection to an adult or teenager if they do not want to. Be alert to signs that your child is trying to avoid someone, and listen carefully when your child tells you how he or she feels about someone.
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in the private areas.

There is always a chance that a child may disclose past acts of exploitation or general feelings of fear. If this happens, we want you to be prepared to help your child. Follow the guidelines noted below if your child indicates that he or she may have been the victim of sexual abuse or exploitation.

DON'T panic or overreact to the information disclosed by your child.

DON'T criticize or blame your child.

DO

- Respect your child's privacy, and make sure you're in a comfortable place when you talk.
- Support your child and the decision to tell the story.
- Explain to your child that he or she has done no wrong.
- Seek out appropriate medical attention.
- Alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-abuse, or other appropriate social-service organizations. The police, sheriff's office, or other law-enforcement agency must **also** be notified.
- Consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child, and seek referrals for qualified individuals from the other professionals who are helping you.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information on missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs and descriptions of missing children worldwide; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses on missing-person cases; and provides information on effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 USC § 5771 and 42 USC § 5780.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in the United States and Canada for those who have information on missing and exploited children. The toll-free number when dialing from Mexico is 001-800-843-5678, and the "phone free" number when dialing from Europe is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline for online reporting is available worldwide at www.cybertipline.com. The TDD line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number is 703-274-3900. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

For information on the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

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A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Publications Department at



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OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
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