

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 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. If you have the opportunity, you may also want to stop by unexpectedly during the first occasion you use the new babysitter to observe how your children are interacting with him or her. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has prepared the guidelines noted below to help you as a parent or guardian find and train a babysitter and prepare your home for temporary childcare. Also included here are important safety tips for your family.

Finding a Babysitter

The best sources of information about childcare providers are the recommendations of family, friends, and neighbors. You may also advertise for a babysitter through your local high school, religious organization, 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 childcare services. Certain sitting services advertise the fact their sitters are “bonded.” This means the babysitting service has purchased an insurance bond to 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 otherwise screened its employees.

In some states you may be able to obtain a listing of childcare 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. Childcare 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 childcare 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.

Lastly, outline the babysitter’s duties and responsibilities and discuss an imagined emergency situation and how he or she might react. When you make a decision about 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 about how you may access this information, and visit www.nsopr.gov, the U.S. Department of Justice’s National Sex Offender Public Registry.

When the Babysitter Arrives

Ask the babysitter to arrive at least 15 minutes before you depart. Make sure you let the sitter know exactly where you will be and how you may 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 home, 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 watching television, eating snacks, talking on the telephone, using computers, and going to bed with both the babysitter and children present. It is your responsibility as a parent or guardian to let your children know what rules are to be obeyed when you are out of the home.

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.
- When using a computer carefully monitor the children’s online activity to help ensure all family rules are being followed about allowable web-site visits and online communications.
- Sitters in our home are not allowed to have visitors or guests, nor leave the children alone at any time.
- Regularly check the children when they go to sleep, and be sure to stay awake during your

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

- Do not tell anyone who calls the children are alone with a babysitter. Instead ask the caller to leave a message.
- Do not open the door to anyone unless we have given prior permission. Again, ask to take a message.
- Carefully watch the children when they go outside to play. This list contains the names of children who may play with or visit our children when they are outside, if the parents or guardians of the other children agree.
- After we have granted permission for an outing and you are 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 you lock all windows and doors before you leave. If something seems suspicious when you return, such as a broken window or open door, immediately call law enforcement from another location.

Your Return Home

As a parent or guardian, when you return home, ask the babysitter if the children are safe and about what happened while you were away such as telephone calls received, visitors who stopped by, and things he or she and your children did. Make sure 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 away. Ask them what games they played and about any other activities. Ask your children if anything happened to make them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

Safety Tips for Your Children

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

- If someone wants to take your picture, tell mom and dad or your guardian.
- No one should touch you on the parts of the body covered by a bathing suit, nor should you touch anyone else in those areas. Your body is special and private.
- Trust your feelings. If something makes you feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused, tell your babysitter and another trusted adult.
- No one should approach you or touch you in ways making you feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Be assertive. You have the right to say **NO** to anyone who tries to take you somewhere; touch you; or make you feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused in any way, and you should make every effort to get away by kicking, screaming, and resisting.

As a parent or guardian, 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 feel safe about discussing fears and other sensitive matters and relating experiences that made them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. Good and healthy communication with your child will go a long way toward preventing child sexual exploitation.

Detecting Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation should not be confused with physical contacts that are true expressions of affection. A warm and healthy relationship may exist if adults respect the child and place reasonable limits on their physical interaction. The reality of sexual exploitation is the children are often scared, uncomfortable, confused, and/or unwilling to talk about the experience to parents, guardians, 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. Sometimes parents and guardians will have to read between the lines for subtle cues and clues that something is bothering their children, since children aren't always comfortable discussing disturbing events or their feelings.

Parents and guardians should be alert to these indicators of sexual exploitation.

- 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 do so. Be alert to signs 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 a child may disclose past acts of sexual exploitation or general feelings of fear. If this happens be prepared to help your child. Follow the guidelines noted below if your child indicates he or she may have been the victim of sexual exploitation.

DON'T underreact to or minimize the information disclosed

DON'T overreact to the information or panic

DON'T criticize or blame your child

DO

- Respect your child's privacy.
- Support your child and the decision to tell.
- Show physical affection, and express love, compassion, and support with words and gestures. Strive to remain calm, noncritical, and nonjudgmental.
- Explain to your child the fact he or she has done nothing wrong.
- Help your child understand it was the offender's responsibility, not your child's.
- Remember children seldom lie about acts of sexual exploitation.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Seek appropriate medical care for your child.
- Notify law enforcement.
- In cooperation with law enforcement, alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-abuse, or other appropriate social-service organizations.
- Consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child and the entire family. 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 about 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 of and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.*; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in Canada and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing from Mexico is 001-800-843-5678 and 00-800-0843-5678 when dialing from many other countries. For a list of other toll-free numbers available when dialing from specific countries, visit www.missingkids.com and from the homepage click on the link to "More Services" and then on the link to "24-Hour Hotline." The CyberTipline® is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number when dialing in the United States is 703-274-

3900. The NCMEC business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

For information regarding the services offered by our NCMEC offices, 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.

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 at



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www.missingkids.com



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