

The Perfect Fit: Finding the Best Sitter for your Family

By Adrienne Stephens

The first time leaving your child with a babysitter can be a difficult experience for both you and your child. Several factors go into finding the sitter that best fits your family's needs and ensuring that it is a positive experience for everyone.

Some parents choose to have a family member stay with their child. Since parents and children are more familiar with family members, they tend to be more comfortable with them. However, situations arise when family members are unable to babysit, so parents must look for other options. This was the case for Sonia, mother of two from Toney, who explains, "My family and I recently separated from the Air Force and are still new to Huntsville. Currently all our family lives hours away."

Whether going through a babysitting agency or just using a friend's sitter, making sure the sitter is qualified will help ease your mind when you leave your child in her care. First and foremost, you should feel comfortable when you talk to the sitter. If the first impression is not good, you most likely will not ever feel completely at ease leaving your children in that person's care. Talk to other families who have used the sitter to find out if they are happy with the level of care the sitter provided. The sitter should be able to give you several quality references of families she has cared for in the past. Make sure the sitter has experience with other children in your child's age range. Even though a sitter might be very comfortable with toddlers, this does not necessarily mean she has experience with infants. Ask the sitter if she is CPR and First Aid certified for infants and children, so that if an emergency arises, she will have the knowledge to handle the situation. Performing a background check (with the potential sitter's permission) can also help put your mind at ease. For Sonia, finding a sitter with CPR

Once you have determined that the sitter is qualified, it is important to observe how the sitter and your child interact with each other.

certification and a background check brought some assurance to what seemed like an overwhelming process.

Once you have determined that the sitter is qualified, it is important to observe how the sitter and your child interact with each other. Having the sitter spend time with your child while you are at home can let you see how they get along. It was important for Sonia to "set up an initial interview with the sitter. It gave me a chance to meet with her and see how she responded to my children." You could have the sitter come over early while you are getting ready, or even have her visit the night before to walk her through your child's bedtime routine. If your child has any special needs or medical concerns, be sure the sitter is aware of how to handle them. Make sure the sitter also knows which toy is your child's favorite or where a comfort item is located to help calm him down if he becomes upset.

It is just as important to familiarize the sitter with your home, as well. When giving the sitter a tour of your home, mention the rules of the house, including off-limits areas, point out where the phone is located and how to handle incoming calls,



show the sitter how to operate the security system, and identify the location of the first aid kit and fire extinguisher. Leave a list of important contact information, and tell the sitter if you plan to call to check-in while you are out. While calling to check-in once helps put your mind at ease, calling more than once will distract the sitter from doing her best job of taking care of your child.

If you are still having a difficult time leaving your child, or if you think your child will have a hard time without you, start by just leaving for a short period of time. Run a few errands or just have dinner out. When everyone is comfortable, try a longer night out. When Sonia discovered the perfect sitter after researching dozens of options, she reported feeling "so fortunate to have found reliable, trustworthy, loving childcare." For her, doing the research paid off.

Although the first time leaving your child in someone else's care can be difficult, it can be a rewarding and exciting experience. It is an important part of a child's development to separate temporarily from parents and later be reunited. Don't forget, it is healthy (and fun) for parents to have some time away from home, too.

Adrienne Stephens is one of the proud owners of Rocket City Sitters, a local business that connects experienced, certified sitters with families in need of short-term childcare. Sonia, who shared her story above, finally found her sitter when she contacted Rocket City Sitters last month. For more information about Rocket City Sitters, and to find a sitter for your family, call 256-272-1727 or visit www.rocketcitysitters.com.