

Better Babysitters for Your Young Children

Injuries and accidents can occur in the few hours that your babysitter is alone with your children. Take note of these tactful tips to ensure that your young children are well taken care of under the supervision of a babysitter.

- Be selective when choosing your babysitter. Ask people you trust for their recommendations of a responsible sitter. If you are new in town, contact local community organizations.
- Conduct interviews. Meet each prospective babysitter face-to-face. Ask questions about scenarios, such as: 1) What would you do if the smoke alarm went off? 2) What would you do if a stranger came to the door or was lurking around the house? 3) What would you do if one of the children fell and hurt themselves?
- Check references of the babysitter. Ask for names and phone numbers of families the sitter has worked with or of a teacher or employer who knows them. It is a good idea to speak to at least three references. Ask them to comment on the babysitter's maturity and his or her ability to handle emergency situations. Speak to the babysitter's parents. Ask how they feel about their child babysitting for you.
- Be prepared by advising him or her of your expectations. Have the sitter arrive early to provide time for you both to go over important matters. In addition to your rules, routines and bedtimes, here are some important items to cover: 1) Remember to write down your home address, major cross streets and phone number in two locations in your home. One location should be visible by a home phone and the second should be on a slip of paper and placed in the babysitter's pocket. This will allow them to easily read the information to a 9-1-1 dispatcher if he or she is away from the first location where the information is written. 2) List different phone number options to make certain the babysitter will be able to contact you. 3) List emergency neighbor or relative phone numbers and check in advance to make sure they will be home. 4) Write down your children's allergies and medications.
- Leave a Temporary Medical Release with your emergency neighbor or adult relative. Most hospitals and physicians will not treat children without the permission of parents or legal guardians. This signed release will allow them to authorize treatment until you arrive.
- Always give a tour of the home. This should establish the location of the first-aid kits, fire extinguisher, batteries and flashlights, weather radio, and electrical box. And in addition, will identify potential hazards such as bee's nests, a neighbor's dog, or any interior dangers in your home.
- It is exceptionally important for the babysitter to know the workings of your doors and windows and for them to physically open and shut each window and door. It is imperative that the sitter can escape safely with your children and he or she is acquainted with where the family's safe meeting place is. This is the place, such as your mailbox or the end of your driveway, which your family will meet at if there ever is a reason to evacuate your home. Remind the sitter and your children

that after 9-1-1 is called at a neighbor's house or from outside your home, the firefighters will meet everyone at the safe meeting place.

- Review what to say if anyone comes to the door or calls. Anyone who calls should not know that he or she is alone with the children. It is best for them to say you are busy and offer to take a message. Remind the sitter that if someone is persistent with questioning them or is making them uncomfortable in any way they can always hang-up the phone and will receive no penalty from you. More importantly, the babysitter should never open the door to strangers. If there is an unknown person around your home ask the babysitter to make sure all doors are locked, to turn off all the interior lights and turn on all the exterior lights. This will notify the trespasser that they have been seen and the babysitter can call 9-1-1. If anyone claiming to be a delivery or repair person knocks, the sitter should question the anonymous person without opening the door and always request the person to come back at another time. Remind them that you would not schedule for a delivery or repair at a time when you would not be home and it is always better to call 9-1-1 even if it turns out to be a false alarm.
- Finally, let the sitter know when you will return and call if you expect to be late.
- Make sure he or she arrives home safely.

Babysitter training courses are available in many communities and teach these similar safety and awareness topics. Bonita Springs Fire Control and Rescue District and many other fire departments across Lee County offer these classes for youth ages 11-15. The course offers basic child care skills, injury prevention, first-aid, fire extinguisher and child/infant CPR. The Safe Sitter Instructors emphasize the topics to facilitate confidence in decision making skills and handling safety situations.

For more information on Safe Sitter classes, please contact Bonita Springs Fire-Rescue Public Educator Natalie Hughes at 239-949-6227.