

Parents/Carers Guide to Babysitting



Working together to safeguard
all Islington's children



How to find a babysitter

The best way to find a babysitter for your child is by word-of-mouth.

Ask trusted friends or a responsible professional – they might be able to recommend a babysitter. Alternatively, look within the community you know. Ask around at local schools, after school clubs, children's centres, youth clubs, your workplace and your place of worship.

Babysitters in the UK are not regulated. They do not need to be registered by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), or to have any specific qualifications or code of conduct.

At what age can a young person babysit?

The law does not state when a young person is old enough to babysit.

If you as a parent or carer decide to use a babysitter who is aged under 16 and your child is injured in their care, you may be held responsible and deemed negligent.

Both the National Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) recommend that babysitters should be over 16 years of age. It is your responsibility to decide on the suitability of a person to be your babysitter.



What to look for in a babysitter

It is important for you to be confident that your babysitter has experience with children of your child's age group.

Babysitters generally enjoy spending time with children, but to be a good babysitter they need qualities that will enable them to deal appropriately with any difficulties that could arise.

You need to know that your babysitter is a responsible, competent person, that they are reliable, honest, capable, tolerant, patient, kind but firm and can respond appropriately to an emergency.

Should I use a babysitting agency?

If you use an agency it is important that you know how the agency vets their sitters. They should undertake Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, interview candidates and take up references to help them assess the sitter's suitability to look after children.

Vetting a babysitter

You should:

- interview prospective sitters
- observe their interaction with your children
- look for mature and responsible people who listen and respond well to your children
- look for people who appear relaxed and happy with your children
- ask for at least two references
- talk to the referees yourself
- for young babysitters, speak to their parents about their suitability to babysit your child

Interviewing a babysitter

Some questions to ask:

1. Have you babysat previously? If so, please describe your experience.
2. Have you received any specialised training for child care, such as first aid and CPR, attended a babysitter course, or taken related school courses?
3. Do you regularly work or volunteer with children? If so, please describe
4. How would you deal with unacceptable behaviour?
5. What would you do in an emergency?
6. Do you have any health restrictions that could affect your ability to babysit?
7. Do you have a list of references? If you haven't already spoken with the referees beforehand.

Setting the terms and conditions

Confirm / agree the following with the sitter:

- their hourly rate of pay
- their hours and days of the week they're available
- do they need to be picked up and returned home?
- don't let a young babysitter travel home alone late at night
- don't leave a babysitter with a sick or upset child who you know won't settle

Instructions for the babysitter

When they come for the first time conduct a tour of the house, pointing out the location of telephones, first-aid equipment, doors and other possible exits.

Ensure that the babysitter knows your expectations and routines:

1. All outside doors should be kept locked
2. Never open the door for anyone – unless you have given prior permission
3. Give your sitter the address and telephone number of where you will be and your mobile number
4. Leave emergency telephone numbers for relatives, friends or neighbours and emergency services, including your doctor
5. Information should not be given to callers. Sitters should tell a caller that you are unavailable and should take a message
6. Your child is not to be left alone at any time
7. Children should be watched closely while awake, especially if taken outside, and should be checked regularly after they have gone to sleep
8. Who the children may play with or visit
9. Your child's favourite toys and comforts
10. Your bedtime routine, including sleeping arrangements
11. What your child is allowed to watch on television, and computer games they're allowed to play
12. How you want your child to be disciplined
13. What food and snacks your child is allowed to have
14. What food allergies your child has
15. Rules associated with the use of your belongings (e.g., telephones, computers, appliances)
16. Friends should not be invited into your home
17. Where they can find refreshments

Finally, tell the babysitter of what time you expect to be home and return as close to the agreed time as possible. If you are going to be late, let them know.

When You Return Home

Ask the babysitter about:

- your children's behaviour and activity
- telephone calls
- anything out of the ordinary

Ask your children about:

- what happened while you were out
- how they felt with the babysitter
- if they would like the babysitter to babysit again

Trust your instincts – never leave your child with someone that you don't feel comfortable with.

If your babysitter cancels do not leave your child home alone.

Information about services for children can be found on the Islington Family Directory: www.islington.gov.uk/familydirectory



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