



## A Guide to Babysitters

### What is a babysitter?

A babysitter is someone who will look after your child or children in your own home for short periods of time. Many parents or carers will use a babysitter at some stage, to allow them to socialise in the evening, for example. It is important to remember that babysitters are not formal childcare.

### Do babysitters have to be registered?

No, babysitters are not registered and at present there are no regulations which govern them. Babysitters do not need any qualifications to look after children – anybody can advertise their services as a babysitter. It is important for parents and carers to decide themselves whether someone is suitable and responsible enough to look after their children.

### How old do babysitters have to be?

The law does not state an age at which young people can babysit. The NSPCC does not recommend asking anyone under 16 to look after a young child. If you use a babysitter who is under 16 years old, you as the parent are still legally responsible to ensure that your child comes to no harm. In other words, you and not your babysitter would be held to account should anything happen to children left in their care. Some young people, even at 16, may not be mature enough to be left to care for children.

### What does the law say about leaving children home alone?

The law does not specify an age when a child can be left at home alone. However, parents commit an offence if leaving the child at home alone puts him or her at risk.

### How do I find a babysitter?

From a recommendation. Friends or relatives with children may have used a babysitter whom they can recommend.

Through an agency. There are some national babysitting agencies and some local agencies for nannies and other childcarers who are prepared to do babysitting (see “useful contacts”). If you use an agency make sure you are clear what checks they have made. Ask if they have followed up references and undertaken Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and ask to see original copies.

You could place an advert in local shops or your local college but be aware you will need to be thorough in checking that any respondents are suitable to babysit for your child.

Visit First Point 8.30am to 5.30pm or ring us on 275 6699

8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

First Point is in the city centre at Howden House, Union Street - close to the Peace Gardens.

[www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint) [www.asksid.net](http://www.asksid.net)

You could use a babysitting circle. This is a group of parents who babysit for each other in exchange for points or tokens. There are several advantages to this system:

- No money changes hands.
- As long as there are enough members there is usually a sitter available.
- It is a reciprocal arrangement so you do not need to feel guilty about asking for a sitter.
- It works on a points system so it does not matter if you babysit for a different person to the one who sat for you.

If there is not one in your area you might consider setting up one yourself with other parents from your child's school or nursery.

### **How do I choose a babysitter?**

The NSPCC advise: 'Follow your instincts. If you have any doubts about a childminder, babysitter or other carer, don't take them on; listen to your children. If they seem unhappy with the person looking after them, try to find someone else' (NSPCC 'Home Alone' leaflet). Any concerns about a babysitter's suitability should be shared with Social Care Services (see 'Useful Contacts' below).

Invite them to meet your child before they babysit, and see how your child reacts to them.

Always get at least two references and follow them up. This could be a tutor at college or other parents who have used their services. Try to assess their maturity and their ability to cope in emergency situations.

Ask questions: What experience do they have? Do they have First Aid experience? What are their ideas about discipline? What television programmes do they consider suitable for children to watch?

### **What does the babysitter need to know?**

Discuss your child's normal routines and their likes and dislikes. Let them know about any allergies or special needs your child has. Discuss what they should do if your child is distressed or behaves badly when you leave. Make sure they know what they would do in an emergency and ensure they know how to contact you.

You should also make sure they know your 'house rules', e.g. can they smoke in your house? What can they eat? Can they babysit with a friend? Are there rooms you don't want them to have access to?

Give them a time when they can expect you back and ensure you contact them if you know you will be late. Agree payment beforehand and discuss how your babysitter will get back home - will you pay for a taxi for example?

### **Is your child disabled?**

SIL provides a specialist information service for families with children who are disabled or have special needs. It can provide information on services, support and specific conditions and disabilities. This service is called SIGN and is based at the Ryegate Children's Centre but also has an information line. For details see 'Useful contacts' section below.

# Useful contacts and information

## **Sheffield Information Link**

Tel: 0114 249 8271 (out of hours answerphone)

9 Leopold Street, Sheffield, S1 2GY

Email: [info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Website: [www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk](http://www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

*Sheffield's Family Information Service. Additional support for families requiring childcare and other services for children and young people in Sheffield.*

## **SIGN (Sheffield Information Giving Network)**

Tel: 0114 266 9476 (out of hours answerphone)

Ryegate Children's Centre, Tapton Crescent Road, Sheffield, S10 5DD

Email: [sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Monday – Friday 10.00am – 3.00pm, drop in and phone service

*Free information for parents and carers with children or young people with special needs or disabilities.*

## **NSPCC**

Tel: 0808 800 5000 - Helpline

Weston House, 42 Curtain Rd, London, EC2A 3NH

Website: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

For help and advice on keeping children safe and to download a copy of the leaflet "Home Alone: Your Guide to Keeping your Child Safe"

## **Children's Legal Centre**

Tel: 0808 802 0008

Website: [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

For free advice on children's law and a factsheet "Home Alone"

## **Sheffield City Council Children's Social Care Services**

Tel: 0114 273 4855 (including Out of Hours Duty Team)

[www.sheffield.gov.uk/safe--sound](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/safe--sound)

To download a copy of the Safe Parenting Handbook

## **\*Safehands Babysitting Network**

Tel: 0844 848 2810

Email: [info@safehandscare.com](mailto:info@safehandscare.com)

Website: [www.safehandsbabysitters.com](http://www.safehandsbabysitters.com)

National network of babysitters and nannies

## **\*Sitters – For Evening Babysitters**

Tel: 0800 389 0038

Email: [enquiries@sitters.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sitters.co.uk)

Website: [www.sitters.co.uk](http://www.sitters.co.uk)

Office hours: Monday - Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm (closed Bank Holidays)

A national service (but with varied coverage across the country) for parents to book babysitters or nannies for an evening.

**\* Sheffield Information Link has not vetted these agencies in any way. It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to make sure that the childcare services used are safe for their child.**

*The information on this factsheet is developed and maintained by Sheffield Information Link*

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