

“The Care and Feeding of a Great Baby-Sitter”

Money just isn't enough...to secure a great baby-sitter that is! The window of opportunity from the time adolescents are old enough to baby-sit until they get a “real job” is small. Add this to the increasing number of teenage school activities and social calendars (which pale in comparison to most adults!) and you'll find a shrinking pool of available baby-sitters. So once you find a great baby-sitter it is not enough to just pay her well. To get an edge on the competition you'll need these tips:

-Do the prep work. Don't save feeding the kids, bathing and getting them ready for bed for the baby-sitter if you can avoid it. You are used to the fatigue that comes with caring for your children, but a teenager probably isn't. Do the “heavy” childcare duties yourself. This will allow her to spend time with your children doing something they will all enjoy like playing games and reading books. This creates a more enjoyable situation for everyone.

-Provide clear instructions. Don't give your kids a chance to fool the baby-sitter into letting them get away with things they shouldn't. Be clear about the plan for the time you'll be gone and let your kids know there will be consequences if they don't follow the instructions. Writing all of this down can help her reinforce the rules and keep your kids in line.

-Pay extra for driving. Hiring a baby-sitter who drives, has access to a vehicle and is actually willing to baby-sit instead of working at the mall is a rare find! So, tip her extra for saving you the time and hassle of driving, as well as the cost of fuel, which isn't cheap these days.

-Consider that men may intimidate her. Let's face it; most teenage baby-sitters are young girls. Even though they may never admit it, they are often naturally more comfortable around women. Adult men can seem intimidating and she may feel uncomfortable in one-on-one situations such as riding in a car. The same goes for waking up a baby-sitter who may have fallen asleep while you were out late. The last thing she wants is to wake up in a daze and find a man standing over her. If possible, a woman should be the one interacting with the baby-sitter.

-Monitor your alcohol consumption. One of the worst things you can do is drive your baby-sitter home when you are under the influence of alcohol. Don't put this young teen in the position of determining whether you are sober enough to get behind the wheel. Chances are she won't say anything because she will not want to be confrontational. Plus she may not know you well enough to analyze your behavior to determine if you are sober enough to drive. Watch how much alcohol you consume (or better yet, don't drink at all) to avoid a dangerous and possibly illegal situation.

-Provide some sort of payment if you have to cancel last minute. Baby-sitters are in high demand. Chances are she turned down a job or two (or at least a social outing) to

accommodate your baby-sitting needs. You don't want her to regret it, so provide some sort of payment if you have to cancel last minute.

-Be home on time. Nothing is worse than sitting up late in a strange house trying to stay awake for the parents to return. Baby-sitters often anxiously watch the clock, so don't be late. Refrain from calling to ask permission to be out later than you initially stated. She will most likely say yes to be nice, but won't be happy about it. Realistically anticipate how long you'll be out and stick to that time.

-Watch what you say about the baby-sitter in front of your kids. *"Why did mommy tell daddy she thinks your new haircut makes your face look fat?" "You can't eat us out of house and home this time."* What you may never have intended for your baby-sitter to hear may come flying out of your preschooler's mouth. Adults may be able to hear these comments and laugh it off, but a self-conscious teen may not appreciate the humor. So watch what you say in front of your children.

-Allow your baby-sitter to bring a friend. Allowing her to bring a friend can be a real bonus. The friend can help with the childcare duties and keep your baby-sitter company after the kids are in bed. You don't have to pay extra for this additional person. Just pay the same hourly rate and they can divide it up if they choose. An additional benefit is that this friend may become another potential baby-sitter.

-Have plenty of snack food around. This doesn't mean that you have to make a big grocery run before the baby-sitter arrives, but have some snacks around that teens typically enjoy. Just because you are on the latest tofu health kick doesn't mean that she is. Have some pop and a bag of chips available for her to munch on and inform her that she's welcome to it.

-Rent your baby-sitter a movie. No cable? Rent a movie to entertain her while you're out late. Pick out a few popular titles (check for the appropriate age rating) and ask her ahead of time which she'd like to see. Once the kids are in bed this can help pass the time when you're out late.

-Pay extra for "special circumstances." These "special circumstances" could be times when the baby is teething, the toddler is potty-training, and the 2nd grader insisted he's allowed to roller-blade in the house. A little extra compensation goes a long way when your "little angels" are being anything but.

Follow these tips and you'll have no problem lining up great baby-sitters when you desperately need a night out!

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