



*Wednesday, August 31, 2011*

By Sarah Lorge Butler



## **Treat Your Babysitter With Respect: 8 Rules**

This should seem obvious, but it's not. Ask any babysitter, and she (or he) will tell you of a time they got stiffed. I still remember one night when I was a 14-year-old sitter and a couple failed to mention they'd be out until 4 a.m. For the 10 hours I spent with their two kids, they paid me \$20. And my grandfather, with whom I was living that summer, stayed up the entire time worrying about me.

Rate calculators and [Sitter City](#) can help you calculate babysitter pay in your area of the

country. But both calculators assume the sitter is 18 and start with a base rate of \$10. I tend to use some sitters who are in their early teens, for 90-minute time blocks so I can work out, shower and chop a few vegetables for dinner. An eighth-grader, playing [Old Maid](#) with my kids while I'm in the basement on the stationary bike, doesn't start at \$10 per hour. But it's those younger sitters who are less likely to be assertive about their rates, and more likely to be taken advantage of. So see Rule 1: Round up.

Babysitters are like any other employees - they want to be treated respectfully. I asked two babysitters, one who works for me and one who doesn't, about their pet peeves when they're watching children. I'm not talking [Nanny Diaries](#) stuff here, just little ways parents can be thoughtless. These themes recur:

**Feed the kids.** Or if they're going to be hungry when you're out, be sure there's plenty of food in the house and instructions on what they can eat. Hungry children - and sitters - don't have much fun together. If a sitter is watching kids at her house, she doesn't want to have to empty her cabinets to feed your young 'uns. Pack them a lunch, unless you've formally made other arrangements with the sitter.

**Give them notice.** One caregiver tells me of people who routinely call her to see if she's available to sit three hours later. Um, no. She feels awkward having to turn them down all the time, but she plans her life out more than three hours in advance. Sure, unexpected things crop up now and then, and it's fine to give a caregiver a call, but when every time you ask is within 24 hours, it gets annoying.

**Group arrangements** require that all parents pay for their own kids. A sitter I talked to told me how one time she was watching two children when she got a call from their mom. The mom told the sitter her friend would be coming by and dropping off two more children. At the end of the night, instead of getting paid for watching four kids, the sitter was paid for watching only two. What gives? The rate goes up as the number of kids goes up. It's not that one parent pays and everyone else gets to dump their children there.

**Speaking of numbers,** don't push it. Even though our sitters are highly skilled, I don't feel comfortable when a single one is watching too many kids. Four is pushing it, five is the absolute maximum, and only then if everyone is out of diapers. Keep safety in mind.

**If you're going to be late,** just call. Or text.

**The sitter is the sitter.** Not the maid, or the butler, or the gardener. Sure, they'll pick up the toys they play with. And they'll clean up the dishes the kids eat off of. But don't ask them to do extra housework. One sitter told me of taking kids out to the park while the parents were having a happy hour party at their house. When she and the kids returned, and the parents were leaving for dinner, the mom asked the sitter to clean up the massive pile of greasy dishes from the party. Not cool.

**Sometimes, the person watching your children has to make a call.** If you're home with your kids for 10 hours during the day, do you answer your phone? Of course you do.

So it's unreasonable to expect your sitter not to answer a call or a read a text during the course of a long day. If the kids report that the sitter is always on the phone or constantly texting? Then you need another sitter.

**Pay on time.** It's best if you pay as an engagement ends. If you use the same sitter every week, pay at the end of the week. But if you never have money on hand, and you say you'll pay them next time, it's easy to forget. Your sitter is likely too polite to remind you.