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By Jen Jones



## Find a Baby Sitter Online

When the cost of hiring a baby sitter can sometimes exceed a night on the town, what's a budget-minded couple to do?

For Baltimore-based mom Erica Zidel, the solution was joining a local baby-sitting co-op in which families trade babysitting services gratis. "We were having dinner with some friends, and I was complaining about how expensive baby-sitting can be and what a pain finding a babysitter is," remembers Zidel. "They explained the concept of a co-op to me, and my eyes lit up. I then found one in my neighborhood that had been around for about 20 years."

Zidel's involvement in the co-op inspired her to think about how creating a similar community online could benefit families on a bigger scale. "A lot of families don't have extended networks close by, so we thought an online tool could really make co-ops accessible to modern families," she shares. "Our goal was to provide a wonderful child care model in a way that complements the online lifestyle today."

Enter [SittingAround.com](http://SittingAround.com), a website that introduced its beta version in March and will officially launch this summer. Zidel's brainchild allows parents to start or join co-ops in their area and use online tools to manage and streamline the process. Parents can post sitter requests or earn points for watching others' children, which are tracked in a bank-

like account. Currently the site has more than 50 active co-ops and is growing steadily; membership costs \$15/yearly.

Zidel's hope is that other families will benefit from the experience the same way hers has. "Being part of a co-op has saved us a lot of money so far," she says. "Our 5-year-old son calls it the 'Friends Come Over and Play Club,' and he thinks it's so much cooler than having a babysitter come over."

Of course, plenty of online resources also exist for families that prefer to go the "traditional" baby sitter or nanny route and want to identify great candidates too:

### **Other Cloud-based Child Care Sites**

[Care.com](#) and [Sittercity](#) are two popular options that allow parents to browse for care providers, obtain references and read reviews or even perform background checks. Other resources, like the U.K.'s [ChildCare.co.uk](#), also offer additional perks, like free magazine subscriptions and legal advice on child care and family issues. Cost can vary -- though most sites offer free accounts, premium membership for [Care.com](#) costs \$30 monthly, while [Sittercity](#) is \$140 annually, and the yearly fee for [ChildCare.co.uk](#)'s Gold Membership is 49.99 Euros.

Atlanta-based mom Deanna Barnicoat first came to use [Sittercity](#) in an unexpected way: She discovered that the agency she'd hired had found her nanny *through* [Sittercity](#).

"Needless to say, I was a little peeved to pay an agency a lot of money to do something I could have done for a few dollars a month," remembers Barnicoat. "On the flip side, I was a new mom -- I barely had time to bathe, let alone search online for a nanny. Our first nanny was amazing, and we are still great friends to this day. So when I recently needed to find another nanny, [Sittercity](#) was where I turned first."

After receiving five replies in two days from nannies who met her criteria, Barnicoat set up a series of interviews and found the best fit for her family: a recent Atlanta transplant from Jamaica with grown children and glowing recommendations. "We are very excited to have her start," reports Barnicoat.

No matter what type of child care you desire for your family, odds are an online resource can help you cast the broadest net for your search -- and just might deliver the best catch. And then vetting your new sitter comes down to the same thing it always has long before the Web came about: Trust your instincts and do your homework before you hire the person.