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Questions Every Parent Should Ask the Babysitter

When you're in need of a night on the town and grandma isn't on call to look after the little ones, sometimes it's necessary to enlist the help of a [babysitter](#). And if you're using a sitter you don't know personally, you should ask a few preliminary questions to make sure you—and your child—are happy with the arrangement.

Here are five questions experts say every parent should ask before hiring someone to tuck in your most valuable assets.

What kind of experience do you have?

Melissa Marchwick, executive vice president of Sittercity in Chicago, advises parents ask potential sitters how long they've been caring for children, the ages of the children and how many they've looked after.

Parents should look for their sitters to have experience that meets their situation, says Marchwick. Parents of a newborn should make sure the sitter has experience with infants, including familiarity with things like how to prevent SIDS and changing and feeding practices. Parents of pre-teens (lucky you) should make sure a sitter is comfortable with that age group.

“I like to ask about their experience with children outside of the home,” says Brooke Woodard, founder of Metropolitan Sitters, a service that provides college-educated women for last-minute or on-call [babysitting](#). “I hire women who have experience in a classroom or volunteering, because it shows they can manage a larger group of children. They can multitask, and that’s key.”

What kind of skills/training to you have?

If it’s important that your sitter have first aid training, CPR certification or knowledge of the Heimlich Maneuver, don’t be afraid to ask.

“Certifications like this can be a great comfort to a family, but also to the babysitter,” says Robert Woodring, president and owner of NYC Nanny Finder, which places full time and part time nannies. “Especially with infants and [toddlers](#), they put everything in their mouths all the time. It’s good to know your sitter can step in if the worst happens.”

Woodring also says it’s acceptable to ask if a sitter has a college degree. An older child may need help with homework or help studying. By the same token, parents should feel free to ask a candidate’s language skills if children are bilingual.

“Don’t be afraid to really look at the candidate’s resume and determine if their skills are a good match with your needs,” says Woodring.

Do you have any references and would you be comfortable if I called them?

“It’s always good to see what other parents say about the candidate,” says Marchwick.

Previous clients can share little things that your sitter might not even know about, like whether or not their child would request them as their sitter, and whether or not the child was excited to see the sitter.

“I always like to know how long they were employed, how old the children were at the time, the types of things the child and sitter did together, and if there was any driving to and from activities,” says Woodard.

When you call references, verify how old the children were when the sitter cared for them. If the sitter tells you she has newborn experience, make sure she’s not fudging details, warns Woodring.

One other key question when you call references: punctuality.

“If I need to be at work at 7:00, and the nanny comes at 7:15, we have a huge problem,” says Woodring.

We pay \$12 an hour. Does that work for you?

“Tell them what you’re looking to pay before you ask them how much they want,” suggests Woodring.

“If you say you pay \$15, but they say they want to make \$20, hopefully you can meet in the middle and agree to something in the \$17 to \$18 range.”

According to Sittercity, the average national hourly rate is between \$11-\$15, but varies by region, the number of children being watched and the sitter’s level of experience.

“If you compensate them well, they do their best,” says Woodring. “Once you find a good fit with a sitter, it’s important to pay them well. If you have an especially flamboyant two year old, it’s great if you have an engaging, interactive sitter to care for them. When you come home, [your child](#) is happier.”

Why should I hire you?

A good sitter should seem excited about a potential new gig.

“Let them tell you why they are the best babysitter ever,” says Woodard. “If they just sit there and shrug their shoulders, it’s a red flag.”

Look for sitters to tell specific anecdotes about children they’ve cared for, she says. If they can tell you about a particular project they did with a child, or a particular book a child liked to read, it’s a good sign that they took the time to get to know that child individually, and that’s what you want in your babysitter.

Also be sure to ask a candidate how he or she has handled problems while on the job.

“You want someone who takes time to reason with the child and explain to them why they can’t play baseball in the house,” says Woodring. “Anyone can tell a child ‘no’, but a good sitter will communicate with the child on their level.”

Above all, a good sitter loves children, and will love talking about their experiences, she says.

Read more: <http://www.foxbusiness.com/personal-finance/2011/05/12/questions-parent-ask-babysitter/#ixzz1f82L5bo1>