

SITTER SEARCH

Give grandma a break. Take our advice on how to hire the best person to watch your children.



Michael Gerard's company has helped match more than 10,000 baby sitters with local families.

Heather Campbell

*I*f your trusted baby sitter is heading off to college or grandma is finding it more difficult to manage the little ones while you're away, you may be on a quest to find a new baby sitter. Wondering where to begin? First formulate a list of your expectations, says Michael Gerard, executive director of Childcare Solutions in Beachwood, an in-home care provider placement agency. "Take off your parent hat, and put on your employer hat," he says. "Come up with a written job description with as much detail as possible." He also suggests having at least six potential baby sitters. "It takes some time and energy to get your list of qualified sitters established and maintained, but it can be a lifesaver when you need it", he says. Get your list started by following these rules:

SEARCH WITH CARE. With homework, extracurricular activities and social obligations, it's not as common as in decades past to find neighborhood teenagers who are available, Gerard says. Websites such as [SitterCafe.com] connect families with potential caregivers, although the responsibility is on the parents to do their own due diligence. [Some] sites offer preliminary checks, but details are scant since Ohio doesn't require counties to report arrest or conviction records to online databases. "Parents don't know what they don't know," Gerard says. Look for candidates who are college-age or older and are CPR and first-aid certified. Expect to pay between \$10 to \$12 an hour with another \$1 per hour for each additional child, he says.

GET ON THE SAME PAGE. Before you leave the house, review your written list of expectations, including meal preparation, media use, bedtime and even whether your sitter is responsible for light housekeeping. Prominently display emergency contact information. It's also courteous to provide food for the caregiver if he or she is working during mealtime. If your baby sitter doesn't have a car, finalize transportation with sitter's parents. "We prefer the care provider not use bikes or public transportation," says Gerard, citing safety risks. And if your caregiver uses his or her car to take the children out, reimburse for gas costs. Never expect your sitter to pay for caregiving expenses.

NIX THE NANNY CAM. How do you know if your baby sitter is performing her duties to your satisfaction? "Your children will tell you," Gerard says. "You will know by their reaction. Are they acting out? Or are they happy to see the sitter again?"

Childcare Solutions Executive Director, Michael Gerard, was interviewed by Cleveland Magazine for an article titled 'SITTER SEARCH' which appears in their June 2013 issue.

Space considerations in the magazine limit what can be conveyed in a short article, and unfortunately a lot of information for parents didn't make the edit. Following is the complete, unedited text we provided to Cleveland Magazine's writer answering the question submitted to us in writing and during our interview.

Define your child care needs. For an ongoing/ scheduled position, create a WRITTEN JOB DESCRIPTION with as much detail as possible

Experience has taught us that **the way to establish a good working relationship with your new employee is to discuss your expectations together and put your agreements in writing.** By doing so, you will eliminate nearly all of the misunderstandings that can come up later.

For occasional and on-call care providers, **create a written list of DO's & DON'Ts** along with emergency contact information for you, a neighbor or family member and your pediatrician. Make copies and each time you have a sitter come to your home, go over the list and have them initial and date it. For regularly schedule care providers, a written work agreement detailing the job duties, compensation, benefits and terms of the arrangement is a must.

One of the keys to having a great employee is to **be a great employer.** Anticipate your needs – communicate them in writing and be considerate.

Never expect your care provider to pay the expenses involved with caring for your child/ren – if they provide transportation, reimburse them for the use of their car/gas... if they take your child to activities, reimburse your care provider for the expenses involved.

Interviews are great – but only the starting point in making a hiring decision. Nothing will tell you more about a care provider than speaking with a parent who has employed that care provider in the past. A background check which includes a county level criminal records search, sex offender records search and driving records search should be completed after a job offer is extended but before you allow a care provider to begin work in your home.

The reason it is difficult to find a teenage babysitter who will work for less than \$7-\$8/hr comes down to how we each value our time. Between school, homework and extra-curricular activities, a teen's discretionary time is limited, and valuable to them. When asked to babysit for an evening it would not be unusual for her to respond, "well, sure – but do you mind if my friend Kathy comes with me?" Now, that may be okay with you if you happen to know the teen and her friend, but for most of us, it's not and we recognize the risks involved.

The biggest obstacle that prevents us from turning to the local teens for babysitting, aside from reliability, is that **more often than not, we need a sitter most when teens are least available:** when our own child is home ill and we have to be at work. Teens, of course, are in school during the same hours we are at work and are not available to us. So even if a parent has a terrific neighborhood teen who can help in the afternoons/evenings and on weekends, they usually still need an adult to whom they can turn for help during the day.

What we recommend to the parent seeking solutions to cover those days when they have to be at work while their child needs care at home, is to **be prepared: create a list of about a half dozen sitters** you can get to know ahead of time. That way, in the event that one sitter isn't available, you can turn to the next on your list. It takes some time and energy to get your list of qualified sitters established, and it needs to be maintained, but it can be a lifesaver when you need it.

The safety and well-being of both the children being cared for and our care-providers is our top priority. For that reason, at Childcare Solutions we do short-notice referrals of care providers only for our established clients. The only time we will send a care provider to the home of someone we have not interviewed in advance is if we receive a job order from the corporate benefits partner of a local company that has established a dependent care program for their employees (as so many companies do these days).

The length of time it takes to search for a babysitter is determined by too many individual things for me to be able to give a one-size-fits-all answer. If a family is seeking a babysitter for one or two days a week ahead of time, all it takes is a phone call to the agency to schedule the date(s). Most agencies will confirm a care provider within 24 hours. If a parent is using an online sitter-search website like SitterCafe.com or Care.com, then they have to take on the work of identifying qualified candidates, screening them, interviewing them, speaking to their references – and then performing a reliable background check. All of those things take time effort.

Managing a family system of babysitters is not difficult – but it does take time and organization. Some families prefer to turn as much of that work over to a professional agency as possible. Due to the costs of using an agency, other families turn to friends and neighbors – and sitter-search web sites for assistance. Parents all know one thing that works: networking with other parents, and helping each other out, is often an invaluable resource.

Congratulations: You are a HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYER.

A nanny or babysitter (working in your home) is a HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYEE – not an independent contractor. Be aware of your responsibilities under state and federal law. If you pay an employee \$1,800 in a calendar year, federal regulations require you to report your employee's income and make appropriate payroll tax payments... but that's not all bad news: there are significant tax breaks available to most households that employ child care providers. Ohio law requires household employers to carry a Worker's Compensation policy which will protect you and your care provider in the event your employee is injured while working for you in your home. (Think of this as a supplement to your homeowners insurance).

Be legally compliant! The IRS and the Department of Labor take household employment very seriously. Failure to report wages and pay appropriate payroll taxes can be felony tax fraud. (Paying someone 'off the books' (or under-the-table) is just a euphemism for paying someone illegally.) It is to your benefit – and that of your care provider – to be compliant with all labor and tax regulations.

Check with the Human Resources department where you work to see if they have an employee program in place for corporate child care. This is becoming more and more popular with companies seeking to become 'family friendly'. If they don't have a program in place, ask them to research it (or call Childcare Solutions).

Live-out child care providers working in your home are NON-EXEMPT employees; they must be paid for each hour they work. Ohio minimum wage (\$7.85/hr) does not apply to 'casual babysitters', but the federal minimum wage (\$7.25) does apply. The federal department of labor also requires that over-time wages (of 1.5 times the regular hourly wage) be paid for all hours over the first 40 hours worked in any seven consecutive days. Be aware that as an employer, you have certain record keeping obligations under the law.

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