

Consumer Product Safety Commission

THE SUPER SITTER

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Section 1: THE SUPER SITTER

Baby sitting can be a super way for you to earn money. And, it's a good way for you to learn a lot about children, about families, about having a job, about managing money ... and about PRODUCT SAFETY. Every job has certain guidelines. Baby sitting is no exception. There are certain things that will be expected of you as a sitter and things that you should expect of the parents. That's why the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has prepared this Super Sitter Guide. It is to help you become more aware of some of these guidelines, particularly:

- the need for constant observation and alertness to the child's environment
- selecting toys for children that are not dangerous
- the importance of children playing with toys in the proper manner
- the need for keeping children's products in good condition so they don't become dangerous for them to use

Section 2: WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE SITTER

There are certain do's and don'ts. In addition to "sitting" with the children, these are a few of the things you should know and remember as a Safe Sitter.

- Before the parents leave, get the names and phone numbers suggested in the Super Sitter's Very Important Phone Numbers List.
- Have the parents show you through the house or apartment and point out where the items you will need are located, such as the children's clothing or playthings.
- Always know where the emergency exits are located. In case of fire don't stop to try to put it out by yourself! Get the children out of the house without stopping to phone. Take them to a neighbor. Call the fire department, and then call the parents to let them know where you and the children are.
- Keep the youngsters safe by preventing accidents. Know where the potential hazards are, such as electrical outlets, appliances, and exposed heating elements. Also ask the parents if all medicine, bleaches and household cleaners are securely locked up.
- Stairs can be dangerous for youngsters. Keep a curious toddler from playing on or around them. Running or horseplay on them can lead to falls, particularly if the youngsters are wearing socks or other "slippery" footwear. Remember, too, that stairs are not meant to be a storage area. Anything placed on the stairs can become an obstacle to fall over.
- If there is a gate across the stairway, make sure it is kept latched. Babies in carriages, walkers or strollers should never be left unattended, especially in an area around stairs or ramps -- whether indoors or out. A malfunction of the carriage's safety brake or a sudden movement by the child could put it right over the edge. If a gate is not provided, place a barrier of some kind in front of the stairway that a child cannot climb over. Accordion-style gates with large V-shaped or diamond-shaped openings should not be used since they can entrap a child's head, causing strangulation. A gate with a straight top or small V's and diamond-shaped openings is safer. Make sure pressure gates are firmly in place and can't be dislodged by the child.
- Caution the child about the dangers of glass doors or windows. A child running or riding on a trike or bike could easily go through the glass. Be sure you keep toys, scatter rugs and other articles that could cause someone to slip or trip away from these areas. If you are caring for a particularly active child, place a large chair or other piece of furniture in front of the glass area for safety's sake. You also can suggest to the parents that large, colorful decals at eye level for both children and adults can make glass doors safer.
- Unless specifically instructed by the parents, do not bathe the baby. A clean facecloth in lukewarm water will suffice in most cases for cleaning the skin. Bathing a baby calls for utmost care and supervision; aside from the risk of hot water scalds, there is always the danger of drowning. While you may want to be of help to the parents, bathing the infant is not recommended.

- If you are changing the baby's diapers, plan on having everything within immediate reach so you won't have to step away from the infant even for a second. If you are not constantly watching them, babies can roll over and fall from changing tables or other high places. Have diapers, pins, etc., next to you so the baby is under constant supervision.
- Infants may choke on small items which they put in their mouths. Small pieces of food, coins, pins and other non-toy items could lodge in the baby's throat and cause choking or asphyxiation. It could also occur with small toys or parts of toys intended for older children. Watch the baby carefully to make sure these objects are not within reach. In the event of accidental choking, apply first aid measures to clear the child's airway. Also call the rescue squad. (If you don't know first aid, contact your local American Red Cross office or an approved community agency for instruction.)
- A "super sitter" will look for hazards before they surface. Loose, baggy clothing can be dangerous if it gets caught on furniture, cribs, playpens, etc., as children climb, play or scamper about the room. Clothing can also be a problem if it becomes tightly wound around the baby. Be on the alert for hazards such as these, and adjust the clothing so that it cannot become tangled.
- To prevent accidental injuries, keep doors and windows locked at all times. Remember that children, though under your supervision, can at times just "seem to disappear" from your watchful eye.
- Never open the door to strangers. If there is a question about someone at the door, call the parents to check with them.
- In case of accident or illness, don't try to be doctor or nurse except for minor cuts and bruises. Call the parents for instructions. If they cannot be reached, call your own parents or go to a neighbor for help. The sick or hurt child may require a doctor or emergency care.

Section 3: WHERE THE CHILD IS ...

With several children -- particularly toddlers (2 and 3 year olds) -- you won't be doing much sitting." You'll be playing with them and supervising their play activities. Where They Play ... Just a reminder that whether you're actually playing with the children or supervising them, keep them within safe play areas, preferably within your sight. Keep them away from potential danger areas in the home such as the kitchen, bathroom, workshop and storage areas. They move fast, so you will have to be able to move even faster!

The Playpen

You should be aware of hazards to a child left alone in a playpen. A string

of toys across the top or even to one side of the playpen could be a strangulation risk. Dropside mesh playpens and portable mesh cribs, used with a side left down, can pose a serious hazard to newborns and infants. When the side is down, the mesh forms a loose pocket into which an infant can fall or roll and suffocate. Dropsides should ALWAYS be up and locked securely in position when a child is in the playpen or crib. Don't put any toys in the playpen that a child can climb on to get out. And little fingers can get caught in hinges.

Baby Walkers ... the baby hot rod!

Baby walkers seem fun to scoot around in, but they also can scoot down a flight of stairs, into a hot stove, against a table edge or into a glass door. They offer limited balance to a child not yet completely able to stand or walk. If unstable, walkers can easily tip over. Stay with the child when he or she is in the walker, and assist it over thresholds or carpeting.

High Chairs

A child in a high chair requires almost constant attention. Babies can slip out of a high chair in an instant if not properly strapped in. An unstable high chair can tip over ... with the baby in it! Make sure that any safety belts or straps on the high chair are securely fastened and that the tray is properly secured. Don't let the child stand up while in the chair, and keep other children from climbing on it. Keep the chair away from "traffic lanes," doorways, refrigerator and stove, and far enough away from tables and walls so that the child can't push the chair over.

The Crib

If baby is to sleep safely, make sure that the crib is as safe as you can make it. If there is too much room (more than two fingersdth) between the mattress and the side of the crib, an infant's head could get caught in between and the infant could suffocate. Roll up a couple of large bath towels and place them in the space. If the slats are more than 2-3/8 inches apart, the baby's body can slide between the slats and the baby can suffocate.

If the child is old enough to stand up, the parents should set the mattress at its lowest position, with the side rail at its highest position. Check the mattress support frequently to make sure it hasn't become unhooked from the end panels. Any toys you leave in the crib should never be ones that could be used to help in climbing out. Also, do not use crib toys that may have strings or elastic attached to them -- these can strangle or choke!

Cribs with decorative knobs on the cornerposts can be a strangulation hazard. Children's clothing and strings or necklaces can catch on the protrusions, especially if the child is trying to climb out. Crib gyms should be removed from the crib when the baby is five months old or can push up on hands and knees, otherwise the baby can get his/her chin across the crib gym or catch clothing on it and strangle.

Section 4: TOYS THEY PLAY WITH ...

Teach children to play safely by showing them how to use their toys in a safe manner and by teaching them to put their toys away after play.

Be particularly aware of safe and unsafe toys. These are some toy dangers you should be aware of:

1. SMALL PARTS.

Tiny toys and toys with small removable parts can be swallowed or become lodged in a child's throat, windpipe, ears or nose. The seams of poorly constructed stuffed dolls or animals can break open and release small pellets that can be swallowed or inhaled.

2. SHARP EDGES.

Toys of brittle plastic or glass can be broken easily, leaving dangerous, sharp, cutting edges. Metal and plastic toys sometimes have sharp edges due to poor construction.

3. SHARP POINTS.

Broken toys can expose dangerous prongs and knifelike sharp points. Pins and staples on dolls' clothes, hair and accessories can easily puncture an unsuspecting child.

4. LOUD NOISES.

Toy caps and some noise-making guns and other toys can produce sounds at noise levels that can damage hearing. Do not allow children to fire cap guns closer than one foot to the ear; also, do not use indoors.

5. PROPELLED OBJECTS.

Projectiles -- guided missiles and similar flying toys -- can be turned into

weapons and can injure eyes in particular. Children should never be permitted to play with adult lawn darts or other hobby or sporting equipment that have sharp points. Arrows or darts used by children should have soft cork tips, rubber suction cups or other protective tips intended to prevent injury. Teach children that these toys should never be aimed at people or pets.

6. ELECTRIC TOYS.

Electric toys that are improperly constructed, wired or used can shock or burn. Electric toys with heating elements are only recommended for children over eight years old. Children should be taught to use electric toys cautiously and under adult supervision.

7. WRONG TOY FOR THE WRONG AGE.

Toys that may be safe for older children -- like a chemistry or hobby set or games with small pieces -- can be extremely dangerous in the hands of little ones.

8. CORDS AND STRINGS.

Toys with long strings or cords may be dangerous for infants and very young children. The cords may become wrapped around an infant's neck, causing strangulation. Never hang toys with long strings, cords, loops or ribbons in cribs or playpens. Pacifiers should never be attached to strings or ribbons around a baby's neck.

Section 5: SUPER SITTER'S SURPRISE BOX

To overcome any outbursts from the children when the parents are leaving, you may want to have your own Super Sitter's Surprise Box. This can be anything in the way of toys or treasures for them to play with, to stimulate curiosity and to take away fear of being left "forever."

The box can be of your own design. It can be as complicated and complex as an overnight case filled with colorful, new, exciting and safe toys you buy (or borrow from a younger sister or brother). It can be as simple as a shoe box filled with toys you have made. It will help ease those first difficult moments and many more besides.

Here's how you can make your Super Sitter's Surprise Box:

A variety of colors of "sticky-back" tape and a medium sized box with a lid or an old overnight case are all you need. Cut the tape into strips, squares, triangles and circles and tape them on to the box or case. Besides being attractive and eye-catching, the shapes can be educational. Fill the Surprise Box with any of the "surprises" below:

- rubber animals
 - plastic or wooden animals with smooth edges
 - soft plastic or cloth covered books
 - plastic or wooden toy cars or trucks with no small detachable parts
 - large rubber ball
 - playing cards
 - set of measuring cups
 - different colored bandage strips to use as "puppets" on your fingers, or on the baby's fingers.
- Try to put a surprise or two -- a book, coloring book, game, puzzle or some item of amusement into your box for an older brother or sister.

When making your Surprise Box, remember to use only safe toys! Check to see that they don't have any of the toy dangers. Make your Super Sitter's Surprise Box a safe surprise!

Section 6: PLAYING OUTDOORS

Some of your daytime sitting may include playing outdoors with the children. Outdoor play equipment -- swings, seesaws and slides -- can be fun, but can be dangerous too. Play safety can be taught to even the youngest toddlers.

Children often do the unexpected on playground equipment. They are naturally and normally curious and adventuresome. Standing in a swing is "bigger and better" than sitting in one. Climbing to the top, sitting or swinging on it shows great daring. Little ones are unaware of risk ... often jumping off or in front of swings, seesaws or gliders. They may walk in front or in back of a moving swing. In an atmosphere of "the more the merrier," they may overload any one piece of equipment and tip the entire structure. Hanging "rings" are particularly dangerous to small children whose heads may be small enough to go through the ring, turning it into a hanging "noose."

All children should be supervised when playing on this kind of equipment.

They should be told to sit in the center of a swing. Explain the following hazards: walking in front or in back of a swing; pushing other children off of the swing; swinging empty seats; twisting the swing chains; and, climbing up the front of the slide. Roughhousing, overloading equipment and misuse can be curbed from the start if you're there supervising their play.

Older children can be taught certain safety rules and why they are important. Asking them to assist you in supervising the younger ones will help them to understand these rules better. Dangerous roughhousing, stunts, overloading, abuse and misuse of equipment and showing off are unacceptable.

Section 7: POOL SAFETY

Daytime sitting can also include time in or around a swimming pool, wading pool or spa. Children are naturally attracted to water, therefore, a "super sitter" must take precautions at all times to prevent accidents from happening. Drowning is the third leading cause of accidental death nationwide to children under five years of age. In addition, some 3,000 youngsters in the same age group are treated each year in hospital emergency rooms as a result of near-drownings; some of these children are hospitalized for life as a result of near-drowning.

Drowning is a silent killer. When a child drowns, a baby sitter won't hear a cry or even a splash. Drownings can happen very quickly.

How do children drown? How can you prevent a tragedy from happening?

- Seconds count. In seconds, a child can leave the house and walk to the edge of the pool. In seconds, a child can drown in only a few inches of water. A child can drown in the few seconds taken to answer a telephone in the house.
- Eyes on the child at all times is your best bet. There is no substitute for constant supervision of the child.
- Children should be supervised and accompanied at all times, even though the parents previously instructed the children not to go near the water.
- Make sure gates leading to the pool are closed and locked. Lock all doors leading from the house to the pool area. Locks should always be out of reach of children.
- Don't consider a child to be water-safe even if the youngster has had swimming lessons or water-familiarity class.

- Don't assume a pool to be safe, even one with a pool cover or a fence.
 - Don't allow children to play on the apron surrounding the pool.
 - If the pool is above-ground, remove the ladder to prevent access by anyone.
 - Learn how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on infants and young children. Contact your local chapter of the American Heart Association or American Red Cross about registering for classes.
 - If for any reason you discover the child to be missing, check the pool, wading pool, spa or hot tub first.
 - Know the telephone numbers to call for emergency medical service. In some locations you dial 911, in others a seven-digit number. As a "super sitter" you can teach the children that safe play can still be fun play!
- **Section 8: POISON: FOOD FOR THOUGHT ONLY!**

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT...

Not everything that goes into a child's mouth falls into the category of food. Too often, what ends up in mouths and stomachs may be deadly! Growing children are curious about things that glitter and shine, pretty colored pills, bottles and containers of all kinds, and what's in them. Children under the age of five are in stages of growth where they are constantly exploring and investigating. This is how they learn. Unfortunately, what children see and reach for, they put into their mouths and swallow.

Every year thousands of youngsters across the country receive emergency hospital or doctor's care because of accidental poisoning. These are chiefly children under five who have ingested some common household item which suddenly becomes poison in the wrong hands (and mouths). These include medicines, cleaning products and preparations, insect sprays, lighter fluid and kerosene, turpentine and paints.

You can help prevent accidental poisonings, while baby sitting and in your own home too. Here are some things you should remember:

- All household products and medicines should be stored out of sight and reach of young children -- preferably locked up! (If you are sitting where household cleaning agents are stored under the sink and you are in charge of a "crawler" -- or the medicine cabinet is accessible to a "climber" -- you

can put protective tape across the front of the cabinet as an extra precaution.)

- As a baby sitter you should not be expected to give any medication. But in certain circumstances, you may be asked to give a medication during the time the parents are away. If it is absolutely necessary that you do this, have the parents leave explicit, written instructions for you.
- **SOME GENERAL POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT MEDICATIONS ARE:**

1. Read the label on the container carefully as well as the instructions from the parents.
2. Never leave the child alone with the medication. If the phone rings take the medication with you.
3. Return the medication to its safe storage place with the safety closure on securely.
4. Do not call the medication candy.
5. Do not give the medication in the dark.
6. Do not take any medication yourself in the presence of the child.
7. Be careful of what you might be bringing into the house.

Children are normally curious and can get into a pocketbook, briefcase or overnight case of a guest which could contain medications. An otherwise "poison-proof" household can become the scene of an accidental poisoning incident.

**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW TO DO...
IF THERE IS A POISONING ACCIDENT:**

1. **DON'T WAIT** to see what effect it may have. If you think the child has swallowed medicine or a household product, call a Poison Control Center, doctor, or hospital **IMMEDIATELY!** (These should be emergency numbers on your list.) Describe what was taken and how much, giving as much information as you can. Describe the condition of the child -- vomiting, drowsiness, change of color, coldness of skin. In the event no medical instructions are available, check the label on the container for emergency procedures and directions, if any. **DO NOT INDUCE VOMITING UNLESS INSTRUCTED BY MEDICAL PERSONNEL OR THE LABEL GIVES SUCH**

INSTRUCTIONS. IF INSTRUCTED TO INDUCE VOMITTING, GIVE SYRUP OF IPECAC. (NOTE: PARENTS SHOULD KEEP ON HAND A ONE-OUNCE BOTTLE OF SYRUP OF IPECAC FOR EACH CHILD IN THE HOME).

2. Call in a neighbor who can help you take care of this emergency; get the child medical aid, or help take care of other children in the family. At this point, don't try to take on all of the care and responsibility yourself.

3. Call the parents. Explain what has happened, what has already been done and what is yet to be done. If the child is to be taken to a hospital or doctor's office, it may be more expedient to get the child there and have the parents go there immediately rather than come home first. Speed, of course, is important. But equally important is the way you handle the situation. Try to keep control. A frightened and sick child will become more frightened if you are excited or show panic. Accidental poisoning is a frightening experience, but if you know preventive measures, you will be able to handle the situation when it happens. (Tell the parents about child resistant safety packaging which can help prevent these kinds of accidents.)

Section 9: TIME TO LEAVE!

Before you realize it, the parents have arrived to find you and their children safe and sound, and to see you home safely. During your first sitting experience, you may have been nervous, but with each new one, you will gain confidence, especially if you remember the Super Sitter Tips we have discussed. Here is a summary of those tips which you should keep foremost in your mind until you are confident that you know them:

- Know what to do in emergencies by being prepared for one, knowing what could happen and how to react to it. Take first aid instructions.
- Always know where the emergency exits are located.
- Keep doors and windows locked for the safety of both yourself and the children.
- Know where the "danger" items are -- medicines, bleaches, household cleaners and electrical appliances. Keep them out of children's reach if the parents have not locked them away in a secure place.
- In case of accident or illness, don't try to be a doctor or nurse except for minor cuts and bruises.
- Keep your emergency telephone list handy -- use these numbers when you need them.

- Depend on the parents or a neighbor in any emergency situation that you are not sure how to handle yourself.
 - Prevent play accidents by keeping the youngsters safe -- supervise where they play, what they play with and teach them safe play. Keep these safety tips in mind ... they will make your baby sitting experience both safe and fun for you and the children. They will make you a SUPER SAFE SITTER.
- **Section 10: THE SUPER SITTER'S VERY IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

Post these names and phone numbers by the telephone. Then you'll have them when and if you need them.

Where parents will
be: _____

Nearby
friend _____

or
relative _____

—

or
neighbor _____

—

Children's
doctor _____

Fire
Department _____

Police
Department _____

Poison Control
Center _____

Hospital _____

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- The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. Deaths, injuries and property damage from consumer product incidents cost the nation more than \$700 billion annually. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard or can injure children. The CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters, and household chemicals - contributed significantly to the 30 percent decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 30 years.
- To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, call CPSC's hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270, or visit CPSC's web site at www.cpsc.gov/talk.html. To join a CPSC email subscription list, please go to www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.asp. Consumers can obtain this release and recall information at CPSC's Web site at www.cpsc.gov.

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