

Child care and safety

Babysitting

You may in the next few years get the opportunity to babysit young children. This may come easier for some as you may be used to many little ones in your home, but for others it might be a new concept. With a few essentials and a little knowledge you can be confident that you will be victorious if you are left with the task of watching little ones.

Managing little children can sometimes be a challenge. One moment they are snuggling up for stories and the next they are painting the walls purple! How do you deal and cope with that? You PLAN AHEAD for all kinds of possibilities.

Babysitting requires skills in creativity, adventure, and play. Those skills will be of no help if you do not know what to do when a child has a tumble off the swing set or you are not prepared for the realities of a two year old temper tantrum.

Have a plan

You want to begin planning before you actually get a babysitting job. The best way to spread the word is to family, friends, and neighbors until you get more experience watching little ones.

It is about your safety and comfort level as well as the children's. Find out if a job is right for you by asking careful questions about what the family expects.

Think about the ages of children you would like to care for. If you are not comfortable caring for an infant or one with special needs, don't take those kinds of jobs.

Do you know how to change a diaper? How to bathe a child? Learn these skills before you show up for your first day of work.

The most important and first priority in babysitting is to keep the children safe. Being a good babysitter means knowing how to handle everything from a splinter to a real emergency. Remember our lesson on basic first aid?

It is best to prepare for an event before it happens. It is unlikely that the child you will be watching will eat something poisonous. But knowing where to find the poison control number gives you a big peace of mind.

Even something as simple as feeding a young child can be dangerous if you are not prepared. Know which types of foods are choking hazards to young children. Where can you put young toddlers when you prepare the meal as to keep them safe? All good things to think about.

Parents love babysitters who help children have fun and learn-while still reinforcing rules and keeping discipline. Ask the children to show you their favorite toys.

Take the children outdoors if you can. Simple games like tag and hide and seek are great games to keep children active. Running around also will help tire little ones out so that they will nap and sleep well, which parents would probably appreciate.

Avoid any type of media. Skip television, unless you need to keep them occupied while you prepare a meal. Engage with them to avoid them being bored and wanting to play tablets and computers.

Know that children will challenge you, especially when you are the “new” sitter. Even though a child may try and fight rules, they actually need and thrive best on structure and boundaries. Find out what the rules are with the parents and stick with them. You may not agree with what the parents choose, but you need to abide. This will gain their trust and respect.

Here are 15 games that will help you keep children occupied for a time.

1. **I Spy.** Choose an object within view and using the phrase “I spy with my little eye, something ____” Provide a descriptive word about what you see and let the children guess what it is. Then let them pick something and you try to guess!
2. **Would You Rather.** You ask some random questions to each child. For example, “Would you rather have arms so long they hung to the ground or three legs?” Or, “Would you rather be a bird and fly the world, or a cat in someone’s home?” Or, “Would you rather eat a chocolate covered ant or frog legs?” These questions can vary to the ages of the children you are watching.
3. **Rock, Paper, Scissors.** The rock is a balled fist. The paper is a flat palm. The scissors are the pointer and middle fingers sticking sideways. Rock beats scissors. Paper covers rock. Scissors cut paper. Simply say “Rock, Paper, Scissors...go” and everyone throws their choice into the center of the circle.
4. **Name That Tune.** One person chooses a well known song and hums the tune. The other players try to guess the song. The person that guesses gets to hum the next song.
5. **ABC game.** Choose a topic like songs, animals, names, etc. Then go through the alphabet and say a different name for the topic that you chose. For example, the first person says Ant, second says Bee, third says Cow, etc, etc. There is a clapping rhythm part that you can learn to go with this. You take both hands while sitting and tap your legs two times, then clap two times, then snap your right hand, then your left, then say the word that begins with your letter. Repeat these motions and the next person then says their letter.
6. **Went To Market.** The first person starts, “I went to market and bought a ____.” Say it’s a cake. The next person lists what has been said before, then adds something. “I went to market and bought a cake and a doll. Person three: “I went to market and bought a cake, doll, and a bat. See how far you can get in remember the items.
7. **Simon says.** This game can be played anywhere, even in a car or other small space. One person is Simon and starts by saying, “Simon says, jump” Everyone must then do the action. However, if Simon makes an action request without saying, “Simon says” to begin the request, anyone who does that action is out. The last person still playing in the end will be Simon for the next round.
8. **Play duck duck goose.** Have the children sit in a circle facing each other. Choose one child to walk around the circle. As they walk around the circle have them touch each child’s head. As the child says “duck”, he or she has to tap heads until they tap one head and say “goose”

instead. The goose must get up and chase the duck around the circle. The duck has to try and run around circle and sit in goose's spot. If the duck gets the goose's spot, then the goose becomes the duck. If the duck fails to get the spot first but is caught by the goose and tagged, the duck must be the duck again.

9. **Hide the _____.** We usually play this game and use a favorite toy to hide. You can say to the child if they are getting hotter (closer) or colder (farther) away from the object.
10. **Red light green light.** With enough room, this game can easily be played inside. One person is the traffic light at one end, and the other players are at the other end. When the traffic light faces the group, he or she says, "Red light!" and everyone must freeze. The traffic light then turns his or her back and says, "Green light!" while the group tries to get as close to the traffic light as possible. The traffic light turns around quickly, again saying, "Red light!", and if anyone is spotted moving, they have to go back to the starting place. The first person to tag the traffic light wins and gets to be the next traffic light.
11. **Mother may I?** This game is set up in the same way as Red Light Green Light. One person in the group asks the person in the front, "Mother, may I take <insert number> steps forward?" The person at the front then says, "Yes, you may." or "No, you may not." You can vary your requests by including options such as taking baby steps, spinning steps, leaps or whatever creative steps they can come up with. Again, the first person to tag the person in the front wins and is the next person in the front.
12. **Hot potato.** Players sit in a circle facing each other. You pass an object, maybe a rolled up clean sock, or stuffed animal and they pass it quickly to each other while you hum a tune. The person holding the object in their hands when you stop humming is out. Continue playing until there is only one person left. You don't have to hum a tune, you can just say "stop."
13. **Hand clapping games.** The first hand-clap game most people have played is Pat-a-Cake with their parents. Songs and patterns get much more complicated from there. Usually there are two people involved, doing a series of clap patterns on their own and each other's hands while singing or chanting a rhythmic song. There are many rhymes listed online, but if you can learn from someone else or see it in a video, that is best, so that you can get the notes of the song and the rhythm of the clapping.
14. This is actually a board game, but you can play a version of it with some paper and pen. Choose something to draw and let your children guess what it is you are drawing. Very simple. Depending upon their ages, you can be simple and draw objects or be harder and choose songs, books, or videos.
15. If you were able to have access to a deck of cards this game is fairly easy. Shuffle the deck of cards up evenly among each child. At the same time each person puts down the top card from their deck. The person with the highest card wins those sets of cards. Continue doing this until your hands are empty, then reshuffle with the cards they won in the "war."

Choking hazards

Choking is a very real concern for your children. The size of a child's windpipe is about the diameter of a drinking straw. Knowing what to avoid is the key in prevention. Here is a common list of choking foods for young children:

- Hotdog cut into coin shapes
- Peanuts
- Popcorn

- Pretzel nuggets
- Whole grapes
- Raw vegetables
- Seeds
- Dried fruit
- Peanut butter in spoonfuls or with soft white bread
- Ice cubes
- Cheese cubes
- Candy, cough drops, gum, lollipops, jelly beans

Common household items:

- Balloons
- Marbles
- Coins
- Small bouncy balls
- Marker or pen caps
- Button type batteries
- Screws
- Rings

You can help prevent choking by cutting the child's food into small pieces. Cut hotdog rounds and grapes into quarters. Give small amounts to them while eating. Take note of what is in the area if you are watching little ones who may put things into their mouths. If they accidentally put something into their mouth and you can pull it out, do so. Be cautious not to push the object further down the throat. Tilt the child forward to help force it out. You will learn this if you take a CPR and choking course.

When you go babysit in someone else's home make sure you have the following information before the parents leave:

Know their contact numbers in case you need to get a hold of them.

Know the home address—if you have to call 911 you will need to know where they live😊

Know names and phones numbers of neighbors or nearest friend in case of emergency.

Know any allergies for the children.

The main goal to babysitting another child is to keep them happy (and safe). This comes with having some creative things to share. Learn how to make the coolest, fastest paper airplane. Do some internet research before you go and practice this. You can have paper airplane flying contest. This will occupy them for awhile.

If the parents don't mind, learn how to make homemade flubber. This would be a fun activity to do with older ones. Just be sure to keep it outside or on a table. Clean up any messes that occur.

Being prepared is the key to a successful, happy, positive babysitting job😊

