



Informal Care Guide

COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic has increased the number of individuals seeking informal child care options. Please review [this helpful resource guide](#) from Care.com and visit [Cornell's Parenting & Caregiving Resources page](#) for more information about COVID, family life, and child care.

Guide to Locating, Hiring and Keeping Informal Child Care Providers

Ways to Find a Qualified Sitter

- Recruit from relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who you know and trust
- Contact [Diane Bradac](#), Cornell's Work/Life Consultant
- Use [Care@Work \(cornell.care.com\)](mailto:Care@Work@cornell.edu)
- If it will be a consistent, regular position, consider posting the position on the [Cornell student employment site](#)
- For regulated family and group home care providers, contact the [Child Development Council](#) of Ithaca.
- Use [Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network](#) for resources on best practices when hiring a caregiver. View sample contracts, checklists, and more.

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Interviewing a Sitter

Interviewing a potential sitter beforehand is recommended. A good interview should cover the person's experience and childcare skills, including any special training the person may have. Make sure to ask open-ended questions that will lead to a conversation so that you can get to know the sitter better. After the interview and reference check, if possible, schedule a "practice run" where the sitter comes to your home for a short time while you are there. This will help you see how they relate to your child(ren) and how the child(ren) react to the sitter. The next step may be for you to leave the house for a quick errand not too far away. Once you feel comfortable with the provider, it will become easier to leave your child(ren) with the sitter for a longer period of time.

Discuss payment before you officially hire the sitter. You can ask references how much they have paid the sitter in the past and/or ask around your neighborhood or friends as to what they pay. Consider drawing up a contract or agreement to avoid any confusion and have agreements in writing.

Interview Questions

- What are the ages of children have you provided care for before and in what circumstance?
- Have you completed any babysitter training, first aid, or CPR courses, and have you worked with children who have special needs?
- What do you do in your spare time? What activities are you involved in?

- What do you like best about babysitting and what activities do you enjoy doing with them?
- What would you do in case of an emergency?
- What is the most difficult situation you encountered while babysitting? How did you handle it? Present some "what if" scenarios to determine how the sitter would handle them.
- How do you handle discipline?
- How much do you charge and what hours are you available?
- Do you have any children of your own? How old are they?
- What is your citizenship status?
- What are your expectations of me as a parent?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Questions to Ask References

- Did your child(ren) feel safe and attended to in their care?
- How did the sitter relate to your child?
- Were they responsible, reliable, and punctual?
- Did the sitter follow house rules?
- How highly would you recommend the sitter's services and would you hire the sitter again?
- What did you pay the sitter?
- What were their responsibilities?

If you would like to perform background checks on any prospective sitters, you must, under federal law, obtain written permission from the prospective provider before running these checks. You can run checks to obtain information on the sitter's driving record, possible criminal record, lawsuits, and bankruptcies. There are many background check companies offering their services over the internet.

Sample Contracts and Information

It's a good idea to draw out an agreement or contract with your caretaker and talk honestly about job duties, pay and benefits, days off, rules of the home, expectations, and safety. Contact a family attorney for the best advice to avoid any legal ambiguities or confusion.

- [What every family needs in a nanny contract](#)
- [Sample contract](#) from Care.com
- [Domestic Employers](#) (English and Spanish examples available)
- [Hand in Hand Domestic Employers Network](#) - contract samples and checklists

Preparing Your Sitter

Sitters are often entering an unfamiliar environment, which can be overwhelming and intimidating. Consider ways that you can help the sitter feel more comfortable and safe. Consider keeping a few special snacks around. Remind your child/ren that the house rules are in effect even when you are not at home and that they are to listen to the sitter in your absence. If possible, have your child(ren) already fed and dressed in their pajamas. Ask the sitter to arrive at 30-45 minutes early the first time so that you can orient them to your child/ren, your home, and your expectations. Future leave-taking will take much less time, but allow at least 15 minutes to go over last-minute specific instructions and also give your child/ren a chance to adjust to your leaving and warm up to the babysitter.

Other Information to Help Orient Your Sitter

- Take a tour of your home and point out the location of telephones, first aid equipment, and exits. Helpful forms are available online that you can print out for emergency contact information, medical/insurance information and parental authorization for emergency medical treatment.
- Explain any alarm systems and how they work. Give the sitter code words in case of an accidental alarm.
- Discuss the emergency escape plan.
- Give the sitter a list of emergency telephone numbers: yours, friends or neighbors, emergency services.
- Let them know how to contact you: write down where you will be and your cell phone number.
- Review guidelines and rules regarding feeding, naptime, bedtime, computer, and television time.
- For babies, discuss the baby's pacifier, blanket or comfort toy, when/how you want your baby picked up, fed, and diapered.
- Explain possible behavior problems and how you would want them handled.

- Alert the sitter to any food allergies your child/ren may have.
- Remind the sitter to keep all doors locked and never open the door for anyone unless you have given permission.
- Point out the hiding place of an extra key in case they get locked out of the house.
- Information should not be given to callers. Sitters should tell a caller that you are unavailable or just let the answering machine pick up.
- Friends of the sitter should not be invited to your home.
- Let the sitter know whom your children may play with or visit.
- Leave a list of activities that your children would like and where the items can be found.
- Introduce the sitter to neighbors and friends that can keep an eye on things while you are away.
- Be clear that smoking and alcohol are not permitted at any time.
- Explain how the major appliances work.
- Explain what medications should be given, how, and where they are kept.
- Allow time for the sitter to ask you questions.
- If you know that you are going to be drinking while you are out, discuss transportation with your sitter beforehand. This way they can make arrangements ahead of time and not make the return home uncomfortable or embarrassing for anyone.

Babysitting Rates

Things to consider when establishing a babysitting rate :

- The number and ages of your child(ren)
- Where you live
- How much responsibility you are expecting of the sitter and how old and/or experienced the sitter is.
- Your child's age and temperament
- How far the sitter travels (you may want to add a couple of dollars for gas)
- Long hours, late nights, and special dates usually command higher fees.
- If you are pleased with your sitter and hire them regularly, then you should certainly consider paying them well and slightly higher than the going rate. This will keep the sitter happy and willing to continue providing care.

The following links may assist you in determining the rate of pay and understanding tax concerns. Please note that Cornell University does not provide wage/tax consultation to individuals looking to hire a babysitter.

Rate Calculators

- [Care.com Rate Calculator](#)
- [Babysitting-rates.com Calculator](#)

IRS & Department of Labor Information

- [Household Employer's Tax Guide](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor, Wage Information](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor, Youth and Labor Information](#)
- [Nanny Tax Guide](#)
- [1099 vs. employee: Why the difference matters when you hire a caregiver](#)

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