

BANANAS HANDOUT

Guide for Teen Babysitters



Babysitting is more than just a way to earn money. It's a job that requires a responsible, energetic and committed person. If this is you and you enjoy being with children as well, this may be your perfect job.

At BANANAS, the staff speaks to parents, babysitters and in-home caregivers every day. We understand many of their unspoken concerns. While this guide doesn't cover every situation a babysitter may encounter, it tries to offer some ideas for taking good care of children and for meeting the challenges of the job.

Please take the time to read this guide completely before you set out on your babysitting adventure. BANANAS also offers a teenage babysitting workshop every other month, as well as classes in first aid, CPR and child development.

Call 658-7353 or check our calendar at www.bananasinc.org to find out the dates and times of upcoming workshops.

Write This Information Down Before the Parent Leaves the Child in Your Care

- Phone number(s) where the parent(s) can be reached, including cell phones.
- Local Poison Control phone number and emergency medical, fire and police numbers (911).
- Phone number of the nearest neighbor, friend or relative whom the parent knows will be home during the time you are sitting in case you are unable to reach the parent .
- Address and phone number of the house you are sitting at. This information should also be given to your own family so they can reach you in case of an emergency.
- Names and ages of children.
- Basic information about the child care arrangements contained in your agreement with the parent (hours, rates, how you'll be paid, whether transportation will be provided, etc.). The BANANAS' handout, "Where and How to Look for a Caregiver to Work in Your Home" has a sample contract to help with this (available at BANANAS or from our website).

All parents are different and handle their children in different ways. Some are more strict and may give you more information and others may not be very specific. That's why it's also helpful to know or have in writing:

- The parents' schedules and when they are expected to return home.
- Bedtime and sleeping arrangements.
- TV, computer and/or video-game rules for the children.
- Mealtime and food preparation instructions.
- Where important supplies are kept – clothes, toys, first-aid kit, diapers and diaper pail, food.
- What is off-limits.
- Whether other children can come to the house to play.
- Special problems of each child, for example, fear of the dark, allergies, etc.
- How children are generally pacified and comforted.
- How to secure the house.
- Whether the parents expect someone to come to the house while they will be gone (neighbor, repairman, etc.).

How to be a Great Babysitter

Be On Time!

The biggest complaint we receive at BANANAS is tardiness. If you are unable to show up because of sickness or other circumstances, notify the parents as soon as possible. If you know of another responsible sitter who may be willing to take your place, the parents may welcome this information.

Be Very Clear About Rates

Set the rate with the parent **before** you begin caring for the child. If you charge more or less after a certain time, or for more than one child, or if you are unable to accept a check, be sure to let a parent know the specifics ahead of time. Know how the transportation is to be handled – whether you will be expected to provide your own or whether the parent will pick you up and take you home. If the parent is to provide transportation, make sure you set an exact time to be picked up and be sure the parent has your correct address.

Find Out What Your Privileges Are While You are Sitting

It's good to find out beforehand about such things as whether or not you can use the TV or stereo (and if so, how they function), what food you can or cannot eat, if it is appropriate for you to use the telephone or have visitors. It is equally important to find out what duties the parents expect of you. For example, if you should clean up the kitchen once the children are in bed.

Tips For Babysitting Greatness

- Make time to communicate with parents on a regular basis.
- Follow the parents' directions about discipline. You may have certain ideas about how children should be handled but you should follow (to the best of your ability) the rules laid down by the parents. Never discipline children by hitting, spanking, threatening or humiliating. Set clear limits, then stick to them.
- It's not a good idea to agree to do extra chores in addition to doing the child care (family laundry, vacuuming, etc.) unless you think you will have the time and you really want to. Remember that these extra chores come second to taking good care of the children.
- You are responsible for cleaning up after yourself and the children.
- Keep phone calls to a minimum. Children get into trouble when adults are occupied on the phone.

- Write down messages from callers to give to the parents when they return. It's better not to say exactly when the parents will be getting home. Say instead, "They're not available now. Can I take a message?" If a caller is insistent on getting in touch with a parent immediately, take the caller's phone number and relay the message yourself to the parent.
- Don't have any visitors unless you've been given permission to do so. If you have permission, never delegate your responsibility to that person. Remember – you are the one who was hired and you are responsible for the children (and your guest).
- Keep all doors locked and do not open them for strangers. If the parents have told you that someone will be coming by, such as an appliance repair person, get some form of identification before letting even an expected visitor in the house.
- Don't take children out of the house to another place unless you have the parents' permission. If you do have permission to go someplace else, be sure to return at the time you said you would. If possible, you should give the parents the phone number where you will be, or your cell phone number.
- Be prepared to tell parents how eating, playing and bedtime went. Parents want information on how their children behaved in their absence. They will appreciate your input.
- It's all right to discuss problems or mistakes with parents. Most parents understand that everything will not always be "just fine." If you've had problems with a child, discussing it with a parent can be very helpful. If you've broken something or if something unusual has happened, honesty is always the best policy.
- It's a privilege to be allowed in someone's home. Please respect the family's privacy. Anything you learn about a family while babysitting should be held in the strictest confidence.
- Set a good example for the children by the use of appropriate language and behavior. You are an important role model for the children you care for and children learn many things, good and bad, by example.
- You don't have to accept everything that happens to you while you are babysitting. You may not like something about the family you are sitting for – it may be a question of different values or something more serious, like a certain way you've been treated. Minor problems can often be resolved but don't feel obligated to continue sitting for a family with whom you've had serious problems. You should feel in charge of who you work for.

Getting Along With Children



An important aspect of getting along with children is to know yourself. Maybe you don't enjoy the hustle and bustle of taking care of several children at one time. You might prefer older children or infants. Perhaps you've been sitting for a child who has been a problem for you and you feel you cannot babysit any longer. Be honest with parents about your preferences. If you are a new sitter, you might want to start out by sitting while the parents are at home.

Know your skills and abilities, then put them to use. To get along with children it's important to understand that they are all very different. Your skill as a babysitter depends on your ability to recognize how different and unique each child is and to adapt your approach to that child. Sounds like a big order doesn't it? This page has suggestions that you might find helpful.

Play

Children love to be played with. Keep it safe and interesting by making play appropriate to age – the younger the child, the shorter the attention span. Plan simple activities and don't be discouraged if the child doesn't complete what you've planned. If a child is playing happily, it's best not to interrupt.

Try not to be too active with small children. Roughhousing, especially around bedtime, can stimulate a child and make bedtime difficult. Acquaint yourself with quiet as well as stimulating activities.

Prepare a babysitter's kit for yourself. This would be your own collection of toys and surprises. Children will be delighted when you show up with any of the following: bubbles for bubble blowing, crayons and paper, old magazines and child-sized scissors for cutting, story books, a jack-in-the-box, balls, yo-yo, flashlight, music box, an old purse filled with objects for make-believe, or board games (for older children). Make sure your kit is age-appropriate.

Feeding

Parents should give you clear instructions on the types of meals and snacks which are acceptable, as well as things that are forbidden. Be sure to ask if they don't. Here are some general tips for mealtimes:

- Young children are messy eaters. Be prepared to clean up after them and don't get mad about the mess.

- Allow plenty of time because young children generally play with their food while they eat.
- Make eating enjoyable and encourage children to eat but don't force them.
- Avoid sweet snacks before mealtime.
- Sit down with the children while they (and you) eat.

Tips for feeding babies: Warm baby food or bottle by placing the container in a deep bowl filled with hot water. Stir food occasionally. Always test temperature by placing a few drops on the inside of your wrist. Hold the baby while you are giving a bottle. Be sure to find out from the parents the best way to burp a small baby. **Note:** avoid using microwave ovens for heating infant's food. Microwaves heat food and liquids unevenly which can result in bites or swallows too hot for baby to handle.

Diapering

- Don't be embarrassed to ask a parent about diapering.
- Gather all the things you need at the place you're changing the baby – clean diaper, wipes or damp wash cloth, toilet paper, toys.
- Never leave a baby alone on a changing table. Change the baby on a blanket or a towel on the floor if possible – it's the safest place to change a baby.
- Talk to the baby while diapering.
- Carefully clean the baby's bottom and always dispose of the dirty diaper according to the parent's directions.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after each diaper change.

Naps and Bedtime

Soothing babies includes walking, rocking and singing. If you follow the parents' instructions, everything should go well. Here are some helpful hints:

- Change the diaper before putting an infant down for a nap or the night.
- Stick to the usual naptime or bedtime routine.
- Let the child know at least 15 minutes ahead of time that bedtime is approaching.
- Make a game of having children put their toys to bed.
- Tell a story about a child "just like you" who got ready for bed and went to sleep.
- Offer to tell a favorite story when in bed.
- With some children, a firm but understanding approach is needed. This might even mean carrying them off to bed in a gentle way.
- Children who are potty-trained should be asked to go to the bathroom before going to bed.
- Once children are asleep, check in on them for general comfort every 30-45 minutes.



Common Problems and How to Solve Them

Saying Good-bye

If children are awake when you arrive, it's important that they say good-bye to their parents. Even though children may be sad to see the parents leave, it's best for parents not to "sneak" out. Your understanding and reassurance are very important at this time.

Temper Tantrums

There is not much you can do to stop a tantrum, so don't get angry when one occurs. Generally they don't last too long. Wait it out but stay close. When the child calms down try to divert his/her attention to a new activity.

Bickering and Fighting

When caring for more than one child, fighting and bickering are bound to occur. It might be too difficult to figure out what the fight is about or how it can be settled fairly. Try introducing a new game, offering additional toys or reading a favorite story. Sometimes separating the children into different rooms for a short time clears the air.

Bad Language and Sassy Behavior

Don't take bad language personally. If you don't like the language the children are using, tell them but don't over-react. Many times children like to tease or threaten a sitter. If the behavior doesn't improve or gets worse after you ask the children to stop, let them know that you will report what happened to the parents and then follow through when the parents come home.

Safety and First Aid

The safety of the children is your primary responsibility. You must always anticipate unsafe situations such as stairways, unsafe toys, or poisons. **Never leave children alone.** If an accident happens and you are unsure how to handle it, call another adult (nearby neighbor, family friend) or 911. Call Poison Control if a child drinks or eats a possibly poisonous substance.

Here are some simple first aid measures:

Minor Cuts: Stop bleeding by direct pressure with a clean cloth. Clean wound with soap and water and apply bandage.

Bumps: Apply cold rag or ice pack.

Minor Burns: Rinse body part in cold tap water. Never apply ice to a burn.

Poisoning: Call Poison Control immediately, 1-800-876-4766, and save poison container. If the child is unresponsive or not breathing, call 911 instead.

Choking: If the child can talk, cough, or cry, encourage coughing to dislodge the obstruction. If the child is unable to cough, call 911 and give abdominal thrusts: kneel or stand behind child and reach around abdomen; make a fist with one hand and grasp it with the other (thumb side into abdomen); thrust inward and upward into the abdomen with quick jerks, continuing until the child expels the object. If the child cannot breathe or is unresponsive, call 911 and start CPR if you know how.

Always tell the parents about any accident, however minor, which occurs while you are caring for a child. They will appreciate your honesty. Call BANANAS at 658-7353 to find out about the first aid and CPR courses we offer, or check our website, www.bananasinc.org.

Caring for children is hard work, but it can also be fun and is well worth it. We hope you found this guide valuable. Call us to share your suggestions and concerns for further revised editions – the BANANAS staff.