

Children in Foster Care: Babysitting Guidelines

As a foster parent, it is your responsibility to ensure that children in your care receive appropriate supervision while living in your home. When it is necessary to be absent from the home for a short time, appropriate babysitting arrangements must be made for your own children and foster children in your care.

What is babysitting?

Babysitting is considered short-term care and supervision of children for less than 24 hours that occurs on an occasional basis; it may be in a foster home or in the home of a sitter.

Hiring a babysitter

Apply the Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard when assessing and selecting a babysitter. Use the same good judgment in determining if a person is appropriate to occasionally babysit a foster child that you would use in considering someone to care for your own children. When hiring a babysitter, it is important to consider a foster child's age, physical, developmental and social needs. The sitter you choose must be capable of meeting all of the needs of each child.

Do I need to notify the responsible agency when hiring a sitter?

It is good practice to inform the responsible agency about plans for using babysitters. Plans for babysitting do not need to be included as part of the out-of-home placement plan.

Can a youth (your own child, relative, or neighbor) be a babysitter?

Anyone age 14 or older whom you know to be sufficiently reliable and mature may care for foster children. This may include your own child, a relative, or neighbor. The length of babysitting time depends on the maturity and needs of each child, and the maturity of the babysitter.

Can a youth in foster care be a babysitter?

Foster parents are encouraged to provide and support age and developmentally appropriate experiences for foster children and youth. Apply the prudent parent standard to determine if a foster youth is permitted to provide occasional supervision for other children, including your own children, if they are interested in providing care and are sufficiently responsible to do so. Allowing a foster youth to provide occasional supervision to other foster children in your home requires careful consideration; discussion with a child's case manager as part of case planning is encouraged to ensure they are developmentally prepared for this responsibility. Youth who have been sexually aggressive or physically assaultive, or have other restrictions related to unsupervised contact with children, may not babysit.

Do babysitters require a Minnesota Department of Human Services background study?

A background study is not required.

Are babysitters required to complete training?

Babysitters are not required to complete training, although CPR and first aid training may be helpful. A foster home's discipline policy should be reviewed with a sitter.

Basic guidelines for using a babysitter include:

- Meet the sitter in advance.
- Ensure a sitter is mature enough to handle common emergencies and provide first aid.
- Have a sitter spend time with you before babysitting to meet the children and learn their routines.
- Show a sitter around the house. Point out fire escape routes and potential problem areas. Instruct a sitter to leave the house with the children right away in case of fire and call the fire department from a neighbor's house.
- Discuss children's feeding, bathing and sleeping arrangements with babysitter.
- Tell your sitter about any allergies or specific needs of each child.
- Have emergency supplies available, including a flashlight, first aid chart and supplies.
- Tell sitter where you will be and how long you expect to be gone. If you will be gone longer than expected, contact the sitter to let them know when you will be home.
- Ensure you have an operable phone in the home. Post your address, phone number and emergency numbers near the phone.
- Provide the phone number of a neighbor, or someone else who can assist in an emergency, if you cannot be reached right away.
- Be certain that sitter is aware that they should never leave children alone or unattended in the house—even for a minute.
- Establish rules for a sitter, especially if a teenager, such as no visitors in the home while they are babysitting, use of cell phone and other electronic devices, etc.
- Determine rules regarding transporting children while in the care of a babysitter.