


Is My Child Old Enough to Babysit?

7 things to consider before you let your kid take care of other kids

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Family
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For many kids, turning 12 or 13 coincides with landing their first babysitting job. But it can be nerve-wracking to think of your youngster as solely in charge of someone else's children. How can you be sure she (or he) is ready?

Whether a child is old enough to babysit depends on a variety factors. When your tween or teen is up for a babysitting gig, ask yourself these questions before you give the green light.

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1. Is she legally old enough? Most states don't mandate a minimum age or even a recommended age for staying home alone or for babysitting. However, some states do provide guidelines and a few have set minimum ages, so **check your state's laws**. **Maryland**, for example, requires children to be 8 to be home alone and 13 to babysit. **Illinois** has the country's strictest law, mandating children be 14 to be home alone. **Washington state's** guidelines say "parents need to take into consideration the skills and maturity of the child" for babysitting or staying home alone. Contact your local agency for child and family services to learn your state's guidelines.

2. Does he enjoy spending time with young children? No one wants to hire a sitter who prefers his smartphone to playing games or reading books with the kids in his care. Lynn Duddy, product manager for babysitting and caregiving at the **American Red Cross**, recommends having a candid talk with your child to figure out if he really is interested in child care and young children. If the idea of babysitting is all about the money, dog walking or lawn mowing may be a better fit for him.

3. Is she responsible? You probably have a good sense of how mature your child is, but if you're not sure, give her some additional responsibilities to see how she handles them, Duddy suggests. Assign her sole care of the family pet or have her **handle extra chores**. Does she follow instructions well? Notice how she manages her time and her homework, and how she responds when you ask her take out the garbage or make her bed. If she balks at doing these things, routinely forgets her gym bag or lunch and often doesn't finish school assignments, she may not be ready for babysitting.

4. Has he ever been home alone? If your child isn't comfortable by himself in his own house, he certainly won't be at ease in someone else's. Besides being fine with being alone, your child should be able to handle simple meals (making a sandwich or warming food in the microwave) and how to deal with situations like a stranger on the phone or at the door. Also, according to **SafeSitter.org**, babysitters should know **basic first aid** (like **how to help a choking child**), how to access emergency numbers and **when to call 911**.

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5. Has she had practice taking care of kids? Has she cared for younger siblings while you cooked dinner or ran errands, or worked as a "mother's helper?" These experiences are great ways for a child to get her feet wet in the world of babysitting.

6. Has he taken an online babysitter class? Duddy recommends an online course as a test of readiness. Sit with your child as he goes through the scenarios in the course to see how he responds to the questions. It's a good way to gauge his ability to troubleshoot situations. For example: What would he do if he smelled something burning?

7. Is she ready for an in-class babysitting course? If your child passes your own readiness tests, sign her up for an in-class babysitting course. This can give her valuable peer-to-peer training. Participants work in groups to problem-solve, make decisions, learn about leadership and positive behavior, as well as basic safety concepts. "The course itself will determine whether she's ready for the specific tasks of babysitting," Duddy says. Participants can also sign up to learn CPR.

Although a babysitting course isn't required to be a qualified sitter, many tweens and teens are certified these days, and most parents prefer to hire someone who's taken a course, Duddy adds. To find a reputable one, try your **local chapter of the American Red Cross** (for kids ages 11 to 15) or **Safe Sitter** (for kids 11 to 14).

Related: [7 Things to Put in Writing for the Babysitter](#)

Joanna Nesbit is a freelance writer specializing in education, parenting, lifestyle and family travel.



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