

## A STREETWISE GUIDE TO BEING HOME ALONE



Is there anything I should know about babysitting?  
You are on your own at home. Think !  
Here are a few more tips.

### **Babysitting**

Being alone in your home . . . looking after someone else's . . . sounds good? It can be, and in the case of babysitting, you even get paid for it. To enjoy it safely, take the time to think it through first . . .

### **The children**

Find out how many there are and their ages. If possible, try to call in and meet them before you turn up for the babysitting. If you think there are too many children for you to handle or that you won't be able to look after them, say you can't take the job. Babies can be especially difficult to handle if you have no experience of them.

### **The parents**

Babysit for family friends, not strangers. Most babysitters find they can build up a circle of regular customers this way. Don't advertise in newsagents' windows - you don't know who might answer.

### **The travel**

Work out how you'll get there and back. If you're being given a lift home, find out who will be taking you. If you're relying on public transport, check the times of the buses and trains, and make sure the parents will get you to them in time. If, at the end of the evening, the parents offer you a lift and for any reason you're not happy about it (perhaps they've been drinking, or you don't like the idea of being alone in the car with them), say no. Call your own parents or whoever looks after you and sort out what to do. You can always call a taxi. Don't leave the house until you have a clear plan for getting home.

### **When you arrive**

Where is the telephone? Notice the doors and windows - are they locked? Is there a way out in case of fire? If you'll be using the kitchen, get the parents to show you how to use the kettle, microwave and anything else you'll need. It's best not to try to cook in strange houses. If possible have food left for you - either sandwiches or a pre-prepared meal.

### **Telephone numbers**

These are very important. The parents should always leave you a number where they can be contacted if anything goes wrong. They should also give you the number of a neighbour, who will help if an accident happens. Some people leave babysitters their doctors' contact numbers too. Get these numbers before the parents leave. And if your family doesn't already have the phone number of where you are, phone it through to them now.

### **Company**

You may want to ask if you can have a friend around. It can give you confidence in a strange house and two of you might be better than one at dealing with problems. But please remember - you're there to babysit, not party.

### **Callers and visitors**

Ask the parents before they leave if anyone is expected. Agree with them that you won't let in anyone who isn't, and stick to it. Put the chain on the door for added security but don't answer it anyway. Instead call out that it's not a convenient time. You'll probably want to answer phone calls, but the same caution applies. Don't give the number or your name. Don't let callers know that the parents are out, or that you're alone with the children. Just say that the person they want can't come to the phone now. Make this a general rule for whenever you are alone in a flat or house, so you don't have to think twice about it.

### **The cash**

Agree on an amount per hour before you take on the job. Rates of pay are often different depending on how many children you look after and how much work they give you. Agree how long you'll stay before you get there, so you can plan how to get home.

### **What if . . .**

*You are babysitting in someone else's home when the telephone rings. You answer by saying "Hello." A voice sounds confused and asks who you are and what's your number. What do you do?*

Don't give your number or name. Ask who the caller wants to speak to, then say that they can't come to the telephone now. If the caller asks where they are, don't say they are out. Just say "Its not convenient for them to speak to you." The caller might give you a message to pass on. Keep the call short: say you'll pass the message on and hang up.

### **Alone in your own Home?**

Its much easier being on your own in your own place. You can work the TV and radio, you know where everything is - or do you?

To feel confident about being home alone, take time out beforehand to check:

That all the doors and windows are shut.

Where the keys are kept.

That you have the emergency numbers for gas and electricity where you can find them.

That you have a list of important telephone numbers: your parents, other relations, the doctor, neighbours, friends.

Where the phone books are, for any other numbers.

That you know how to work the kitchen equipment such as cookers, microwaves, grills.

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**Once you are alone:**

Keep an eye on younger brothers and sisters.

Put the chain on the door.

Stick to the phone code - don't give your number or your name. Say "They can't come to the phone" rather than "They're out".

Don't answer the door unless you are expecting someone. Even then, keep the chain on until you can check who it is.

Have a friend over.

Control your partying instincts.