

# Know Who is Watching your Child

a gift for you from the  
"Single Parent Wisdom: If only I knew then what I know now" series  
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<http://www.singleparentwisdom.com>  
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Child care comes in a variety of ways for your child during the day, before school and after school:

**RELATIVE CARE...**A close relative takes care of your child in your home or theirs. If you can tell horror stories about the relative who took care of you as a child, don't use that person.

Why repeat mistakes of the past?

**NANNY...**A hired person takes care of your child in your home. This person may be assigned to only care for your child or also help with light housework. Check references. If your future plans include a run for the Senate or accepting an appointment at the White House, be sure the person is legally in the country.

**CHILD CARE CENTER...**Your child stays at a licensed, established business with staff experienced and educated in child care.

**FAMILY CHILD CARE...**Your child stays at the home of a babysitter, preferably licensed by the state. A common state requirement is only 6 children for every adult. Check with local social service agencies to see who is licensed in your area.

**COMPANY CHILD CARE...**Your employer provides child care for children of employees, usually for a fee and near your work. We need more of these.

**PRESCHOOL...**Once your child is 3 or older she can attend classes at a preschool before she starts regular school. It is usually for a few hours a day and only 2 to 3 times a week. Your child will learn how to socialize (play) with other children. Preschool often teaches ABC's, colors, and many other fun things. The U.S. government programs **Head Start** and **Early Head Start** for low-income families have great success getting children ready for kindergarten. To find this program in

your area, call 1-866-763-6481 or check the website <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/> Head Start (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families).

## When is the letter "P" a bad word?

A Family Child Care Provider washed my 5-year-old's mouth out with soap for saying this letter. The provider's darling 5-year-old daughter teased Maria into saying the alphabet. The provider was a minister's wife and assured me that she was justified in the punishment since my daughter had said the foul word *pee*. I informed her never to do that again and continued to use her. Make sure you know what kind of discipline is followed and that you agree with it.

Later I found out her doctor prescribed her bed rest for an extended period. She put her teenage son in charge without informing the parents. That was the final straw!

It can be difficult to find good child care on short notice, but please realize the importance of the care your child receives when you are not there. Not everybody who hangs a "Child Care" shingle will be a good child care provider. If you have any doubts, don't leave your child.



**Does your child like the person?** At first, I judged child care providers by their conversation skills with me. I chose someone I felt comfortable around, but didn't think about my child's comfort. With experience, I realized I should watch the provider interact with my child and see if she was happy and secure with that person. After all, your child will spend up to ten hours a day there.

### Drop in unannounced at child care

One day I left work early and stopped to pick up my children. It was nap time. There were literally wall-to-wall children sleeping on the floor. The provider had told the licensing agency that her 3 high school drop-out teenagers helped babysit. Sometimes the teens were there; sometimes they were not. The state-mandate 6 children to one babysitter ratio allowed her to have 24 children! They were all there that day, sleeping on the floor. I found a new place where my children could receive better attention.

### Too many untouchables in the room

My first child had been with the same babysitter since birth. When his dad and I divorced, I had to move. I found a babysitter for

my one-year-old closer to my new home. The new sitter came highly recommended.

**Warning!** She had a beautiful house with the living room filled with delicate statues on the coffee table. I thought it was strange since the only things in *my* living room were my son's toys. Newly divorced, too young, and needing my job even more, I felt I had no choice. People who recommended her must have known what they were talking about. Right?



I picked up my son after work on that first day. There at the end of the living room were several little faces peering through a child-proof gate to stop them from leaving the basement stairway. The sitter was in the living room visiting

continued on page 3

## Questions and concerns to find the right care for your child

Make a copy of these questions for each child provider you interview.

- All adults need CPR and First Aid Training provided by the *American Red Cross*. Highly recommended for grandparents, especially when caring for an infant. The fee is worth it.
  - One adult for every 6 children, much less for babies. Children over the age of 2 can handle groups better than younger ones. Infants require extra care.
  - What training do the caregivers have in child care?
  - How long does this caregiver plan on working in this business? Your child will grow attached to the person. Consistency with the same person is important, especially in the first two to 3 years of life.
  - Will the sitter take a vacation or other days off? Who arranges a substitute?
  - Friendly and inviting for your child. Is it warm and nurturing? Will she feel comfortable here?
  - Watch how your child plays with the adult in charge. Does the adult show patience and respect for her?
  - Caregivers join in play with the children.
  - Discipline is similar to your style. What kind of discipline methods are used by the staff?
  - Sinks to wash hands for children and staff. Safe food handling habits. Is the place clean? Equipment and toys in good shape and not broken.
  - Parents can drop in any time.
  - Is there enough room for your child? Some standards suggest 50 square feet per child.
  - Outside play areas are safe and fenced in.
  - Licensed for child care. Ask to see a copy of the license. If this person acts insulted by your request, find another child care provider.
  - Ask to see the schedule for the day allowing outside play, rest time, group play, individual time, active play, quiet time activities, creative play, and a limit on television and video games.
  - Are healthy snacks and meals served?
  - In centers with several adults, will Chris have one main adult in charge of her?
  - Enough seat belts and proper child car seat for each child when traveling.
  - Is there a sick room for children or do you need to find someone else when child is sick? Are children exposed to other children who are ill?
  - If your child gets hurt or ill what is the plan for contacting you?
  - What security measures do they take to make sure only authorized people are allowed to leave with your child?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- List other questions to ask the person who might take care of your precious child while you are away.



with a neighbor.

When the sitter let my son out, he came screaming to me with outstretched arms and tears running down his face. He couldn't talk much at that age, but he said enough. I gathered him in my arms and told the sitter that I didn't need her anymore. I took a few days off work to find a better caregiver for my precious child.

During my research for the **SINGLE PARENT WISDOM** series of books, I found I made a big mistake. My son had the same sitter since birth, and I changed him to a complete stranger. There was no gradual change, so he could get used to the new person. During my grief of the divorce, I didn't see his pain.



I should have driven the extra miles to take him to his old babysitter. She could have remained the one constant in his life while we moved to a new place and his dad wasn't around very much.

#### For strong brain development

Good child care helps your child grow and helps to reassure you that your child is well cared for. It has been studied and proven that your child's brain develops better when surrounded by positive relationships with warm, caring adults.

#### Get background checks on child care providers

"All you need to get started is her social security number and her signature on a release that will allow you to take a look at her driving record and criminal and civil background reports. Your local police or sheriff's department will be able to tell you what you need and how to obtain the information you're looking for."

Armin A. Brott, *The Single Father*  
(Abbeville Press, 1999)

#### Near your workplace

When your child isn't yet school age, find a child care provider near your work. It will be easier to drop off and pick her up. Stop by at lunch time and share lunch. After work, you'll have more time on the drive home to discuss each other's day.

#### Once you've found a childcare provider

- Before leaving your child with a new person, plan a visit to the child care provider for your child and you a few days, a few hours at a time

to help your child feel comfortable with the person/staff.

- Tell the child care provider of your child's habits, likes, dislikes, fears, allergies and medical history. (Save a copy of this information for your part-time babysitters. Keep a copy in your "Our Family" notebook. See page 8.)
- Give the child care provider the emergency phone numbers for yourself, other parent, child's doctor, plus family members or friends in case you are out of reach.
- Let your child take a familiar item from home such as a stuffed toy or blanket.
- As with any new experience, a visit to the library with your child is a good plan. Check out storybooks about child care and read to her. Answer her questions.
- When you leave your child, don't sneak out. Hug your child and be positive, not sad, that you're leaving. Assure your child that she will have a fun day.
- When you drop off and pick up your child, take a few minutes to visit with the adult to find out how your child is doing with this provider.



#### Exchange for food or time

Some child care centers offer lower rates in exchange for parents providing cereal and snacks. Parents might be expected to work one day a month at the center or help with field trips.

#### Affordable child care

There are centers that charge fees based on your income. Ask around.

#### Resources to find child care providers

- ✓ Other parents, neighbors, relatives, co-workers
- ✓ Local school
- ✓ **Child Care Aware:** 1-800-424-2246, website <http://www.childcareaware.org/> to locate the **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)** agencies in your area.
- ✓ City, county, or state department of social services
- ✓ Community resource agency
- ✓ Yellow pages under "Child Care"

**PLEASE CHECK REFERENCES**

## After School Child Care

Use the same steps to find an after school program or babysitter for your child. Ask about after school programs provided by your local schools, YWCA, YMCA, fitness center, churches, libraries, plus other profit and nonprofit groups. Local child care centers might have a van or bus to pick your child up at her school. Perhaps the school bus will deliver her.

After school your child will be hungry and ready to play actively. Snacks, time to play and make friends should be offered at the care center. Small children need a quiet place to rest.

## Latchkey Kids

named after children in the 19th century  
who wore their keys around their neck  
while playing outside after school  
because their parents worked

### Stay home-alone concerns

When your child reaches nine or ten, she'll probably start to whine about having to be with babies at the child care center. This is the beginning of her strategy to go home after school.

### Laws, ordinances, policies

Does your town have rules on the minimum age a child can be home alone without adult supervision? Ask before you allow your child to stay home in case you are breaking the law. A surprise of a fine or a charge of Child Endangerment won't lessen your stress.

### Education

Does a hospital or agency offer an educational class, such as *Home Safe Alone*, for children ages 9 to 11? The class teaches a child how to be safe at home while her parent is away. The class discusses chores and responsibilities, meal preparation without using the stove, safety from strangers, and what to do during emergencies. The child receives a packet to list family safety rules, daily responsibilities, free time ideas, chart for important phone numbers, and first aid information. Find out if such a class exists in your area for your child to attend. This doesn't mean 9-year-olds should stay home alone. It's just preparing them for the possibility later.

A child should not be left home alone, or worse, in charge of younger brothers and sisters, until he is "big enough and sophisticated enough to fight off or elude an intruder, or handle other emergencies that might arise."

Abigail Van Buren, *Dear Abby*

### Alternatives

Before deciding your child can go home after school, contact the nearest high school to find a reliable teenager who could stay with her a few hours after school, for a fee.

### Lessons

Are there music, dance, sports, or art classes that your child can attend after school? Arrange transportation.

### Readiness Questions

Is your child ready to stay home alone?

*Or* is she afraid to be alone in the house for a few hours?

For the following questions, if you can honestly answer yes, still think long and hard before letting him become a latchkey kid. If you are uncomfortable with the idea, then the answer is no. Tell him you will consider it again in 3 months, or six, or next year.

- ? Will he follow house rules when you're not around?
- ? Does he do chores without complaint?
- ? Can he find something to do that is safe when alone in the house?
- ? Can he resist inviting friends over when you're not home?
- ? If someone knocks on the door, can he keep from answering it and not be afraid?
- ? Does he know basic first aid? Is a first aid kit or supplies available?
- ? Does he have common sense?
- ? Can he call you at work to check in?
- ? Is there someone close by he can call in case of an emergency, an adult friend, relative, or neighbor? Is there someone nearby who can keep a key in case he loses his?
- ? Does he really want to be home alone or does he just want a change from the child care situation?

### When you decide your child can stay home alone, create rules to follow

Suggested rules for staying home alone after school:

- ✓ Keeps doors locked until a parent arrives home.
- ✓ Phones you or another selected adult when she first arrives home. She will call if she has any fears or concerns.
- ✓ Will not tell anyone on the phone that she is alone.
- ✓ Will have a list of activities to entertain her in your absence.
- ✓ Does not share the code on the security system with ANYONE.
- ✓ Working smoke detectors are on every floor. Review the fire escape plan.
- ✓ Emergency numbers are posted by the phone.
- ✓ Does not use the stove or toaster oven. Review safe use of the microwave. I know it's fun to watch sparks fly when you put metal in a microwave — DON'T DO THIS!
- ✓ Absolutely no access to guns, alcohol, drugs, lighters, and matches.
- ✓ Review how to turn the power back on in case of an electrical spike or outage.
- ✓ Flashlight and radio with batteries in case the whole neighborhood loses power.

### Role play

Together, role play strangers coming to the door or calling on the phone so she knows how to respond with confidence.

### Only a few hours, not all day

It's such a big step to let your child stay home alone after school. If you have to work all day on weekends or non-school days, please find arrangements for someone to watch him or for your child to go somewhere. All day is too long for a child to amuse himself. There are just too many things that can go wrong.

### Phone home

If your child goes home after school, check with your employer to make sure it's all right for him to call you at work once he arrives home after school or you call him at the time he should be home. That phone call can relieve much worry on your part and make your child feel more secure. Your employer will have a better worker once your mind is relieved.

Complete a CHILD MEDICAL CARE AUTHORIZATION FORM for each child. (See page 7.) If your child needs medical attention before you can get to him this form will start the treatment. Give to your child care provider. Keep one filled out in the "Our Family" notebook. (See page 8.)

### Tips for the occasional babysitter

*Early on it was hard to have a babysitter at night because I had to either wake her or leave her alone briefly to take the sitter home. I eventually had a sitter that was familiar enough with my friends so she could ride home with them or they could stay at my place while I ran her home. Eventually, my sitter could drive.* Kathy, single mother of a girl

When you plan to go out for the evening, prepare your child before the babysitter arrives. Don't spring it on her when the doorbell rings. Tell her what to expect — that you will be leaving for a little while and you will be back. You will see her in the morning.

Try to not leave your child while he is sleeping. To wake up to a babysitter instead of you can be alarming to a child.

"Never ever sneak out. Tell your children what you're doing, where you're going, and when you'll be back. Then say good-bye and leave. If you sneak out, the next time you try to leave the uproar will be horrific."

Karen Levine, *Keeping Life Simple* (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2000)

### Tell the babysitter what you expect

Make a list:

- play with your child
- how many stories to read at bedtime
- where the before-bedtime snacks are kept
- clean up any dishes they use
- not invite babysitter's friends over or chat on the phone with friends
- how to contact you
- plus emergency contact phone numbers of relatives or friends

If the babysitter is a stranger to your child, ask her to stop by the house a day or two before you plan to go out. She can meet her and play with her for an hour or two. Pay her. This allows your child time to get to know her and feel comfortable

around her.

Keep babysitter information with emergency contact phone numbers in the “Our Family” notebook. (See page 8.)

**Barter**

Take turns babysitting with other parents you know well. No money paid, just everyone takes a turn. Or do something for them in exchange for their watching your child.

**Child abuse**

If you ever think you might hurt your child, call for help. If you see or suspect a child is being abused, call the local police or Child Protective Services. That child needs your help.

**Childhelp USA** National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453), website <http://www.childhelp.org/> for local contacts.

**Resources for more information**

**Child Care Aware:** 1-800-424-2246, <http://www.childcareaware.org/> to locate the child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies with information on childcare providers in your area.

**American Academy of Pediatrics**, website <http://www.aap.org/>

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**, 1509 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426; website <http://www.naeyc.org/>, Families section

**National Network for Child Care**, website <http://www.nncc.org/>

Do you live in a country other than the United States? What resources are available to find child care? Please inform us by e-mail at [info@singleparentwisdom.com](mailto:info@singleparentwisdom.com). We'll include the information on our website in the section, Resources.

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**Notes**

# CHILD MEDICAL CARE AUTHORIZATION

This is to acknowledge that \_\_\_\_\_

is authorized to obtain whatever medical attention is necessary should my child:

Child's Full Name

Social Security Number

Birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_

be injured while in their custody.

## Insurance Information:

Insurance Carrier \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number \_\_\_\_\_

Group Number \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

## Medical Information:

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Dentist \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Known Allergies/Allergic Reactions

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Relationship to Child

Date

## APPENDIX: "OUR FAMILY" NOTEBOOK

This notebook is the perfect place to keep all your "family-related" stuff and helps organize it.

First, get a 3-ring binder. Find a place to keep it in your kitchen.

Store family information:

- *Contact Information:* Phone numbers of your work, relatives, friends, neighbors, emergency contacts
- Your child's school calendar
- Schedules of any other activities for your child or you, such as music or art classes
- Your child's sports team calendar and phone numbers of teammates
- *Food:* Menus for dinner, Freezer contents list, Grocery Shopping List\*
- *Household Chores Task List\**
- *Financial Management:* Budget Tables\*, Bills due list [You may want to keep this information in a place where others do not see it.]
- *Health Information:* Allergies, medicines, prescription information
- *Medical Authorization Form:\** complete one for each child
- *Discipline Guidelines:* House Rules, consequences, etc.
- *Babysitter Notes:* Your home address, phone numbers of fire and police, child's fears, and what you want the babysitter to do in your absence, such as wash any dishes used, bedtime routine (When is bedtime? How many stories to read? Location of snacks. Bath tonight?)
- *Auto Care Records:* Last oil change, repairs made
- *Safety:* Fire evacuation plan for each room of the house
- Plus whatever else you want to have in one easy access location.

A 3-hole puncher is needed to punch papers you wish to add to your notebook.

\*Forms available for download at the website [singleparentwisdom.com](http://singleparentwisdom.com), Forms

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