



BE A

You might not be able to pull a lamp out of a carpetbag, but with these babysitting tips and tricks, you'll be just as magical as Mary Poppins.

**BY BRITTANY TAYLOR
ILLUSTRATION BY BILL THOMAS**

Once upon a time, all a babysitter needed to do was turn on the TV, nuke some nuggets and read a quick story before tucking the tots into bed. Nowadays, parents are seekin' out much savvier sitters. To nab your next gig, you'll need to up your game, girl. Welcome to Babysitting 2.0.

KILLER CREDENTIALS

UP YOUR EXPERIENCE. While word-of-mouth can kick-start your sitting career, impressive experience with kiddos will keep ya booked solid. So when you're not sittin', keep yourself busy with activities that'll improve your kid-wrangling skills. Whether it's watching your younger sibs or corralling toddlers during Sunday services, you'll be able to familiarize yourself with all sorts of pint-size personalities.

TAKE A CLASS. Taking a babysitting class and first aid or CPR certification will give you a big boost in the eye of potential clients—and give your hourly rate a bump. Try: American Red Cross Babysitter's Training Course (redcross.org) or Safe Sitter (safesitter.org). Also, contact your local hospital for deets on certification.

SHOWCASE YOUR SPECIAL SKILLS. Worked with kids who have conditions like asthma, allergies, autism or diabetes? Let people know. That knowledge will make ya so much more desirable as a sitter. Trust us, concerned parents will take note.

SHARE YOUR SMARTS. Parents want sitters who can transform their babes into brainiacs. Top-drawer talents you can share with the kids could put you at the top of their list. We're lookin' at you, chess club champs, science fair ribbon-winners and brilliant bookworms.

ROCK THE INTERVIEW

BE PROFESSIONAL. The first meeting with your clients will likely be casual, but that doesn't mean you

SUPER SITTER



should kick back and relax. Come prepared with a list of references and be ready to discuss what makes you the best girl for the job. Be energetic, friendly and show interest (ask to meet the kids!). And, when the interview is over, offer up a firm handshake, a genuine smile and your sincere thanks that they are considering you for the job.

ASK QUESTIONS. Don't be afraid to speak up. Ask your potential clients the four Ws: who (how many kids?), what (fixing dinner and walking the dog, too?), where (at their house?) and when (afternoons? evenings? weekends?). Take a minute to inquire about payment, too. If you do get the gig, you'll be grateful to have these details in advance.

SET UP A PLAY DATE. Kids can get cranky fast when the 'rents run out and leave 'em with a stranger. After you've been hired, avoid tot trauma by asking if you can hang out with the little ones for an hour while Mom and Dad are home. When it's time for your real gig, you can skip the getting-to-know-you phase and jump right into the fun.

WIN OVER THE KIDS...AND THEIR 'RENTS

TURN OFF THE TV. Sure, they've got dozens of movies and a DVR filled with cartoons. But remember—entertaining the kids is your, not the TV's. Come prepared with a bag full of activities: art projects, board games, a deck of cards or a fave kid's book to read. Games that get your charges outside will also score you big points with parents—and exhaust some of the kids' endless energy (just ask permission first).

TEACH 'EM WELL Reciting the ABCs? Passé. Teaching kids how to say "I love you" *en español*? Brilliant! Younger kids love learning foreign languages in small doses, so practice your Spanish or French or Chinese by teaching the tots colors or greetings to bust out when their 'rents return. Not a linguist? Brush up on another skill, like teaching math by counting with raisins or boosting their creativity by writing a simple story together. Whatever lesson ya share with the kids, the parents will be mucho impressed, guaranteed.

DON'T BE A PUSHOVER. So the 10-year-old is tellin' ya he and his sibs are allowed to chow down in the living room in front of *America's Funniest Home Videos*? Funny thing is, Mom said TV is a no-no on school nights and dinner is only to be eaten in the kitchen. No matter how much the kids beg and plead, follow the house rules. Tots love to tattle, so chances are you'll never get away with bending bedtime or serving up sweets. Standing your ground will make ya a stronger sitter—and you'll earn more respect (and cash!) from the 'rents. _

GET MORE CLIENTS, FAST

Love your current charges but looking for some more moolah? Here are 4 GL reader-recommended ways to connect with new clients.

Get the word out. Ask around at church, have your parents put up a flier at work, post on your Facebook.

Network. Talk to old clients, neighbors, family friends, tell other girls who sit you can work if they can't. Got younger sibs? Chat with their friends' parents to see if they need a helping hand.

Draw on your skills. Math whiz? Amazing at sports? Offer up tutoring or lessons to kids in your 'hood—then casually mention to their parents that you babysit, too.

Volunteer to watch the kids at parties or community gatherings. If the kids are glued to you by the end of the night, the parents will totally bring you on board.

TACKLE TEMPER TANTRUMS

10 dos and don'ts for ditching disciplinary probs

DO offer up alternatives. Try this: "You can't have M&Ms, but you can have yogurt-covered raisins."

DON'T get angry. Yelling at a toddler only makes 'em wanna yell back.

DO drop the M & D bomb. Breaking out your cell and saying, "I'm calling your Mom and Dad!" is an easy way to halt a meltdown.

DON'T be bossy. "Because I said so" will only fuel the fire.

DO set an example. If they can't have sweets, sorry, none for you, either.

DON'T leave the room. When kids are left to their own devices, scary things can happen in seconds.

DO bargain...without breaking the rules. Say, "Let's get ready for bed now, but we'll read two bedtime stories, OK?"

DON'T give in. Remember, you're the authority figure. And as long as you're there, what you say goes.

DO make them laugh. Asking silly questions about why they're throwing a fit will get ya giggles.

DON'T hit or spank a child. Ever. Period.

