



**January 2006**  
**By Avery Hurt**

## **The Right Sitter**

Choosing a babysitter is one of the most important decisions you'll make as a parent. Deb Namiot, a mom in Ashland, Massachusetts, found a great babysitter for her sons, Jake and Ben, but only after a thorough interview and carefully checking references. "It's kind of like dating," Deb laughs. "It has to be the right fit." To help you find that fit, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers some tips for choosing a sitter:

- Have the potential sitter over before the day you plan to leave the kids with her (or him—increasingly boys are taking on this traditionally female job).
- Conduct a detailed interview, asking about her experience and quizzing her on how to handle scenarios that could come up (a fire breaks out, the kids get hurt).
- Be sure to check references. Many parents skip this crucial step.
- Find a sitter who, at a minimum, has had CPR and first-aid training. Even better, find someone who has taken a babysitting training course. The American Red Cross has a comprehensive course and many local hospitals offer similar ones. If you find a sitter you want to use often, consider paying for her to take a course. Locate a Red Cross babysitting course by visiting [redcross.org](http://redcross.org).
- The AAP recommends that a sitter be at least 13 years old, but the American Red Cross offers its training course to kids as young as 11. "The issue of age offers some latitude," says Dr. Denise Dowd, a chief of the Section of Injury Prevention at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City and spokesperson for the AAP. "It depends, of course, on the maturity of the sitter, but a good rule is the younger the kids, the older the sitter."

### A different kind of matchmaking:

Genevieve Thiers, who put herself through college by babysitting, has put the Internet to work helping parents. Her site, [Sittercity.com](http://Sittercity.com), is a database of more than 100,000 baby sitters. It has profiles, references, customer ratings of sitters, and information on how to screen and interview sitters. "It makes finding a sitter easier and safer than before," she says.