

# Chicago Parent

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## **Logging On In Search Of That Elusive Sitter**

Chicago mom Peggy James has a solution to that perennial parental predicament: the hunt for the right babysitter. James turns to a less traditional, yet increasingly popular method of finding care for her two sons—the Internet. Using [www.sittercity.com](http://www.sittercity.com), an Evanston-based national database of parents and college-age babysitters, James found a dependable sitter for Ryan, 18 months, and Brandon, 4 months, and no longer worries about finding childcare.

"What I really liked about the Web site was that it made it easy to get in touch with many sitters," says James.

"We like to liken it to a dating service, but one for parents and babysitters," says Genevieve Thiers, CEO and founder of the company. "We make sure parents and babysitters are well aware of the fact that they have to screen each other."

For \$39.99 the first month and \$5 every month after, parents can post advertisements or access the profiles of about 750 babysitters actively looking for Chicago area jobs. Additionally, the Web site offers lists of sitters for New Year's Eve, Thanksgiving, Christmas and during the summer.

Sounds great, but is it safe? What about the old-fashioned way of finding babysitters through family and friends?

"Word of mouth is the safest because someone is going to recommend someone they know who did a great job," says Gloria Trevino, who coordinates babysitting education courses for the American Red Cross of Greater Chicago.

There are other options to search for babysitters, such as college and university job boards or talking to students who work at children's summer camps or in park district programs. But Thiers, a former college babysitter, says it is not easy for parents and she created the company after realizing parents had no good network connecting them with sitters. The company does not do background checks on babysitters or parents, but Thiers says [www.Sittercity.com](http://www.Sittercity.com) offers safety advice and recommendations for conducting interviews. She says, "We do make sure that safety is key."

A feedback system allows users to post comments about each other. Thiers says the company suggests, but does not require, that potential sitters provide at least two references. Trevino adds that parents should inquire if the sitter has been trained in CPR and first aid.

It may sound strange, finding someone to care for your most precious person over the impersonal Internet but a search for "find a babysitter" yields 163,000 sites. It shows sitters and parents are increasingly using online advertising.

"It really has made my life easier to have a few sitters available," says James. "It doesn't make me a nervous wreck on weekends trying to figure out what to do."