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Web Site Brings Sitters, Parents Together

CHICAGO -- It's Saturday night, and mom and dad want to go out and have a conversation that has nothing to do with the Teletubbies or purple dinosaurs.

One problem -- what to do with the children of the house for whom Teletubbies and purple dinosaurs are relevant and interesting topics of conversation?

Whether families live in the city or suburbs, finding a babysitter is not easy, NBC5's Allison Rosati reported on Monday.

"You can only ask friends so many times," said one woman. "They want to go out on the weekends, too."

In a sea of strangers, finding someone to watch the kids is a difficult task, but a Web site may do for babysitting what it did for dating.

Genevieve Thiers is the founder and CEO of Sittercity.com, which is like an online dating service, but for sitters and parents. Thiers, the oldest of seven children, came up with her idea after babysitting her way through college.

"I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if someone could go into a city and find all the babysitters in that city in one place?'," she said. "Within five minutes, you have access to a database of 3,000 sitters. This just wasn't the case before -- before you'd have to go through your church or friends and it was never that easy. Now, we've made it easy."

Parent who want that access can go to the Web site, pay a one-time \$40 fee, plus an additional \$5 every month, enter their preferences and they will have access to a list of compatible babysitters. On the other side, babysitters who are looking for work pay

nothing to enter their resume and references.

"The parents I have met through them have been very reliable," said one babysitter. "There's everything on there from 'looking for a regular fulltime sitter' to 'pick up the kids' to 'I need a babysitter next Saturday night at 7 p.m.'"

The Web site also offers feedback from parents and sitters, Rosati reported. Most of the sitters (about 80 percent) also have something in common -- they are college students. Sittercity does offer housesitting and pet-sitting services as well, and soon will offer full-time nanny matchmaking.

Once a sitter connection is made, parents can set up an interview, Rosati reported. For parents who want to be more efficient, they can take part in Sittercity's version of speed dating -- called speed sitting. Just like speed dating, parents and sitters are invited to a location, where sitters and parents can meet. Parents get to talk to a potential sitter for five minutes, then move onto the next candidate. Parents can then contact the sitters they like.

While Sittercity can make the connection between families and babysitters happen, there are no guarantees and Sittercity doesn't do background checks. Thiers said, however, that the Web site makes doing a background check easy.

"We have two affiliates you can go with, and you can do two types of checks -- national or local," Thiers said.

So far, 40,000 parents and sitters in 10 major cities have signed up as members, Rosati reported, and the numbers are growing.

Meredith O'Sullivan, a mother of two, is a regular on the Web site.

"We had success immediately," she said. "I met a number of interesting women -- some young, some old -- who just wanted to look after kids."