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## Parents are demanding more of their sitters

Baby sitters need to bring more than a Barney video and a stack of Necco wafers to keep kids (and their parents) satisfied these days.

Organic baby food, educational toys and nanny cams have marked the arrival of the well-rounded teenage sitter, who comes with references and demands more than a handful of quarters at the end of the night.

“Baby-sitting has changed because parents are becoming more concerned with who they are leaving her kids with,” said Cathy Brennan, an early childhood educator with the southern Adirondack Education Center in Hudson Falls. “Years ago, you called the nearest kid in the neighborhood... now they want to know if you have training.”

The whole concept of the neighborhood has changed, Brennan said, and that has altered the face of baby-sitting. Parents are expecting more from their sitters, and the young people who are in high demand are not plopping the kids in front of the television.

It can be a challenge to find a babysitter of any level. Sports and part-time jobs have taken many young people out of the market.

Those who are looking to earn some money baby-sitting should go to homes prepared to play with children and involve them in stimulating activities, Brennan said. First aid training is also recommended.

“If a babysitter has more of a background, they are more marketable,” said Brennan. “They can say, ‘Look, this is what I have done, and this is what I’m going to be asking.’”

Maureen Faherty of Queensbury said she tries to have fun with the kids she watches. The 14-year-old said she does crafts with the children and plays outside with them when the weather is nice.

The problem Faherty does have, she said, is figuring out what to charge. She lets the family decide how much to give her at the end of the night.

While rates vary, several young people in the area said they charge \$2.50 to \$3.50 an hour per child. This is dramatically lower than the rates in more populated areas.

Genevieve Thiers is the founder and president of Sittercity.com, a Web site that links qualified college-age sitters with families. She said sitters in her database get \$10 an hour on average, for up to two children. In Manhattan, the rate runs as high as \$12 to \$15 an hour. In Providence, R.I., by comparison, the going rate is \$8 an hour.

Thiers, who grew up outside Philadelphia, said she and her twin sister had a “baby-sitting monopoly” in their neighborhood as teens.

“We’d have two jobs a night. We marketed it like mad,” she said.

She launched Sittercity.com in the Boston area in 2001. The network has since expanded to several metropolitan areas and, within six months, Thiers said, it should cover a good part of New York state.

“Baby-sitting has evolved in a very interesting way,” Thiers said. “Parents are becoming more conscientious of things for their kids.”

Online resources like hers are just one of the ways babysitting has changed. Some parents, she said, are very careful about what their kids are given to eat. And many parents are very up front about not wanting their kids to be parked in front of a video.

Thiers suggests that sitters serve as a mother’s helper for an afternoon to see if they will be compatible with the family before agreeing to a permanent situation.

She also suggests that sitters have a checklist of questions to ask before the parents leave for the evening, to avoid misunderstandings.