

Proper care when you're not there



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Foreword



Becoming a parent means you are responsible for the safety of your child. However, no one expects you to go it alone when looking after them.

Sometimes people ask family members or good friends to help them out. But not all people have family or friends they trust and can rely on to help look after their children.

One of your child's greatest needs is to be kept safe.

To make sure your child is safe when in the care of other people, as mothers and fathers as well as other carers, we must stop and think about how safe both the person and the environment is.

This booklet raises some of the important things to think about when you need someone else to mind your child.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernie Geary". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner

Everyone needs a break,
but children are precious
and we must make sure
they are safe when
they are in the care of
other people.



Stop



Think



Do

Does it feel right?

It can be hard to balance your work and social needs with the safety requirements of your child. When using friends, babysitters or child minders to look after your child, ask yourself these questions:

Should I trust this person to take good care of my child?	Think about how safe the person is – not all people offer to help for the right reasons. Think about why the person is offering to help out. If in doubt – do not leave your child with them.
How well do I know this person?	How long have you known the person? Do they have trouble managing their temper, do they use drugs or alcohol or have other troubles that may mean they cannot keep your child safe? Have they had problems managing their own children? Is the person mature enough to look after your child?
Does the person know what to do in an emergency?	Do they know how to contact emergency services and get medical or other assistance for your child?
Do they know how to look after children the age of my child?	Babies and young children need different types of care than older children. Experience in the care of a baby is vital to their safety. Does the person know how to appropriately comfort your child? Does the person know how to safely put a baby to bed (baby on their back and face uncovered)? Do they know that cigarette smoke is bad for babies?
Will my child be safe in the care of this person?	Does your child know the person? Is there anything about the person that makes you or your child feel uncomfortable? Will there be any other adults or children present who may harm or bully your child?

Where will the person look after my child?	Is the environment safe? – Is the house set up for a child? Are medicines and other dangerous products kept up high and out of the way? If there is a pool, is it fenced? Is there a secure front fence? Are power points and cords safe? Are there animals, such as a dog, and are they safe?
Can the person care for my child in my home?	Your house is set up for your child and is safe – theirs may not be. If you can't trust the person alone in your house, you shouldn't trust them alone with your child.
Will they need to transport my child?	If so, do they have an appropriate car seat? Do they have a pram if they need to walk some where with your child?
What was my child's reaction when they had previously been with this person	If you have any concerns about your child's reaction do not leave your child with that person again. ie. Was your child happy?
Can I speak to other people who have had this person look after their child?	Were they happy with their care?

If you don't feel confident about the person's care after answering these questions DON'T leave your child with them.

Things you can do to help keep your child safe

Plan ahead

All parents need a break from time to time and things can also happen that mean you need someone to look after your child at short notice. It helps if you have already thought about who you know and who you would trust with your child – speak to them and make sure they are happy to help you.

Developing networks such as playgroups and parent groups helps put you in touch with other parents in your area who may be able to help you out.

Also find out about child care benefits that you may be entitled to which may make child care an option.

If you are having difficulty working out a babysitting plan, speak to family and friends, your Maternal Child Health Nurse or other professionals you may be involved with. You can also get help by calling:

- Maternal & Child Health Line (for parents of children 0–6 years of age) call **13 22 29**. This service is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Parentline (for parents of children 0–18 years of age) call **13 22 89**. This service is available from 8am to 12 midnight Monday to Friday and 10am to 10pm on week-ends.



Teach your child to keep themselves safe

As your child gets older, it is important to speak to them about being safe. Let them know:

- It is OK to say no if they think what they are being asked to do is wrong.
- If they feel they are in danger, it is OK to yell, scream, or run to a safe place that you and your child have both agreed on – such as a neighbour you know well.
- They can tell a lie, even to an adult, if they need to get away from someone who makes them feel unsafe.
- To use a “code” word you both have agreed on, to let you know they are not feeling safe. As an example, using your first name when talking to you on the phone.
- To tell you or another adult if they have any problems or if someone is making them feel unsafe.
- Their body is their own – once no longer needing nappies to be changed or help with toileting, a carer or any other person should not touch private areas of a child’s body.
- A babysitter or any other adult should not ask a child to keep a secret.

**Let other people know
if someone is looking after
your child for you.**

When you are gone

- Be clear where the person can go with your child.
- Be clear what the person cannot do when caring for your child.
- Make sure they know where you will be and when you will be back.
- Give them contact telephone numbers if you can, such as a mobile phone number or contact details for where you will be.
- Let them know you will check to see how they are going.

Older children home alone

When deciding if your child is old and mature enough to stay home alone, it is useful to think of the following questions:

- Do they feel comfortable and confident about being left alone?
- Do they know how to keep themselves safe? For example, do they know not to answer the door?
- Are they mature enough to handle any problems that might arise like a fire or injury?
- Do they have any illnesses, such as asthma, that may make it unsafe for them to be alone?
- Can they use the telephone?
- Do they know how to access emergency service by ringing 000?
- Do they know appropriate adults in your local area who they can contact for help?
- How long will you be away? There is a big difference between you going to the shop for a few minutes and being gone for several hours.
- Who else is in the house?

**Do not leave infants,
toddlers or children without
appropriate supervision under
any circumstances.**

Warning signs

Look out for these concerns or potential warning signs:

- Any person who asks your child to keep a secret.
- Your child's bad or unusual reaction to the person (withdrawn, angry, frightened).
- Physical contact with your child that makes you or your child uncomfortable.
- Someone who wants to spend time alone with your child at times when they are not babysitting for you.
- Someone whose reasons for helping you are unclear.
- Bruises or injury to your child that happened when the person was caring for them.
- Any person you don't have a good feeling about – male or female, family or friend.

**If you see any warning signs,
don't leave your child
with the person.**

Babysitting checklist

This checklist gives an idea of the type of information that you should ensure your babysitter or child minder has readily available. The checklist can be photocopied, so you can complete it every time your child is in the care of another person.



Babysitting checklist

I will be back by:

I will be at:

You can contact me by phone on mobile:

Phone number of the place I will be:

The name and age of the child/children to be babysat:

Bed time is:

Health or medical issues about the child/children that the babysitter needs to know:

Medication

Illness

Asthma plan

Allergies the child/ren may have

Particular instructions about the child/children (you may need to use additional paper to record this information):

things my child/children enjoy doing

behavioural issues you need to know

toileting assistance (if required)

routine

ways to comfort my child/children

In an emergency contact 000

Our address is:

The nearest crossroad is:

Who else you can contact for help: family friend neighbour

Name:

Phone number:

Victorian Poisons Information Centre – call 13 11 26

If the person has collapsed, ring **000** for an ambulance.

DO NOT ring the Poisons Information Centre.

Parentline (telephone help line): 13 22 89

