

ADVICE FROM THE FRONT LINES

WHAT OUR CAREGIVERS SAY WORKS BEST ...

The
99 Cents
Store is really
great for coloring
books and
other toys

I have learned that giving the parents details on what you did while they were gone is really appreciated (which also holds you accountable to play with the children as much as possible, because you want to tell the parents all the fun things you did with the children), but you also need to keep the details short, because the parents do not want to talk a lot once they get home. Favorite toy: mini slinky and glow sticks. Favorite game: go fish and hiding an object to find. Fun activity: talk to the children about what they like and then trying to do that with them. Text or call parents only one time and let them know everything is great.

It's all about the toys! The more you bring, the better. Kids become excited to have you there right away. When I work with other caregivers, I'm really surprised by how few they bring. Some don't bring any. How does that work? Garage sales & thrift stores can really help. When I get there I try to engage the child right away, asking them what they've been up to today. After that I ask the parent, "What do I need to know about the children's routine for tonight?" (Also check on food allergies, bedtime survival items, etc.) I write down what they say. I dial their cell phone # so they also have mine in theirs. I tell them, "Call or text 20 times if you want." I also text them if we leave the room, the kids are asleep, etc. :)

I always let the parents know that they can text or call me at any time. Sending a quick text when their child is asleep is also helpful!

Smile! Smile! Smile! :) When you get to the room, when the inevitable awkward silence comes right after everyone has been introduced, show kids your toys and engage the parents in friendly conversation about their kids, vacation, plans for how they would like the evening to run, etc.

Presenting the business card as soon as possible with the caregivers name, cell phone number, and highlighted information on the back seems to really help the guests feel comfortable. Your favorite toys selected for the age of the children helps connect the children and caregiver right away as well as the parents. I call ahead of my arrival time to introduce myself over the phone to let them know that I am coming and I always verify the room number. It also helps me to find out what the child/ren enjoy doing and helps me to know what to bring. First: I find it very rewarding to pray for the families that I am assigned too, before I attend each job. Second: It's imperative that our cell phones be on vibrate and only use the phone for emergency and for guest contact and not for personal use while on the job.

I think the best tip is to get comfortable with the children right away. I've found that parents are willing to wait two or three minutes (as long as they aren't in a rush to leave) while you get to know the children you'll be caring for. It makes them feel better that you're not 'all business'.

I greet parent by shaking hands when I introduce myself. I believe this makes parents more comfortable and relax.

Here's a tip that I can share as a way to make parents feel more comfortable. Start the conversation with: What does Johnny like to do? Does he have favorite toys, things that make him comfortable? What is your normal routine? Then ask, "Do you have any special requirements regarding bedtime?" In the past, I have had caregivers (not Marion's caregivers) walk in my door and immediately ask me, "What time does she go to bed?" It makes me feel that the sitter is not going to provide my child with an enjoyable evening, but instead is going to be itching the whole time to get her asleep. I want to know that the caregiver is interested in my child and eager to provide an enjoyable evening for her.

I think a warm smile and a sweet voice does a lot to calm parents nerves and makes the children feel comfortable. I think the kids favorite thing to do with me are games. They just love them. I think a lot of kids these days do not play games and are thrilled to have someone to play them with. They love Jenga and Candyland a lot! I have gotten a lot of my baby toys from Craigslist (so much cheaper than the store).

I suggest that caregivers order off the kids meals, treat every kid like your niece or nephew with warmth and understanding, and always give a report with more positives than negatives (if at all). No one wants to hear that their kid was difficult.

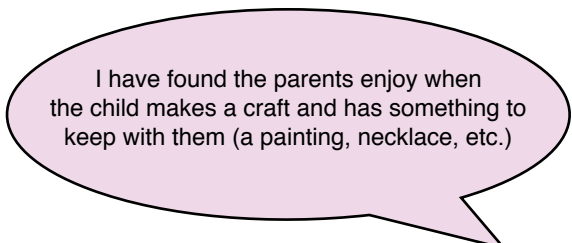
All children LOVE when you tell the stories! I just make them up and they always want me to tell them another. (I usually use kids their age in the story and make it really fun or scary if they like that). There are many travel size games at target that have come in really handy for me. Often you don't know exactly what the children will like so having a variety is really helpful.

My favorite game to bring is UNO Attack. It's for older kids but the little ones love pushing the button to see the cards spit out.

Take a book light to read by when you put the children to sleep in the hotel room so that they can have their room dark to sleep in. Or you can slide a chair in the foyer next to the bathroom door (cracked) to read by the light from the bathroom. The children will rest better.

Ask the parents questions before they leave to make sure you cover all your bases. It's best that they leave feeling that the caregiver is 110% prepared in case something happens. :)

Dollar store puzzles are always good. Make a connection with the parents as well so they feel comfortable with you.



I have found the parents enjoy when the child makes a craft and has something to keep with them (a painting, necklace, etc.)

I bought one set of toys and didn't have to replace them at all the four years I worked for Marion's. Buying toys that are good for a wide age range is key. I always had in my bag: puzzles (one for younger kids and two for older), playdough, and coloring supplies/stickers. Each of these occupies, usually, a long period of time and is fun for the kids if you get involved with them. All of this I bought at target for a total of about ten dollars? Markers, paper, and crayons included. I would highly recommend bringing playdough. I bought a small set that came with four colors and some toys from target and it stayed in very good shape for all four years. I usually did the playdough with the kids on the floor of the bathroom, outside, or on the desk/ coffee table depending on the ages of the children. Every kid I worked with got so excited to see the playdough. Showing them the toys you brought also provides a good distraction for parents to get out the door too if their little one is having separation anxiety. I think the key to making parents feel comfortable is making sure they feel they are heard and their kids are heard. When they are explaining the procedure for the evening, be sure to listen to everything they say intently. If you don't, it's noticeable. Also, if the kids are talking to you, listen and respond to them. Even if it's a delayed response, parents appreciate you acknowledging how their little ones are feeling and expressing themselves. It makes the parents feel more comfortable and the children feel more at peace too. I think those are the best tips I can think of.

I always tell the parents to call me, I'm not offended! With babies I jot down time of diaper change & food.

Puzzles, play dough, good books, tupperware toys, coloring books, card games for older kids (Phase 10, Skipbo, Uno).

I have found that original Dr. Seuss books are guarantees for an easy bedtime, especially "Oh the Places You'll Go". Many times the kids have not read them and are unfamiliar with the stories, but the rhyme scheme often lulls them to sleep which is great. Also, the basics, trucks, balls, and blocks seem to never fail regardless of the gender. I have found that puzzles aren't really worth bringing because the pieces get lost easily. Lastly, Disney Scene It is really fun for the times we get older kids.


I love shopping in the dollar section at Target for games and crafts as well as ordering from Oriental Trading Company. I think the most important thing to help nervous parents is just to show that you understand their nervousness and assure them you will keep them updated on how their child is doing throughout the day through phone calls or text messages :)

Do a Google Earth search for the address you are working at and see what shops, restaurants, libraries, and parks are near by. La Costa, and the Hotel Del have five dollar kid buffets in the restaurant for the children you are watching, I always tell the parents because it is a way to save them money. The Grand Del Mar has pretty affordable room service kids meals and they don't mind if we get them (with parent permission of course). Be super friendly and kind to the hotel staff. Remember they are watching you too! My favorite stores to buy things are: Dollar Tree, 99 cent store, GTM, and Target. Also after holidays you can get really good deals on craft kits at Michael's and JoAnne's. I love to take the kids outdoors if at all possible and I like to bring craft and coloring supplies. Uno has been a big hit as of late. Recently I knew I was going to a suite that had a kitchen and I brought all of the supplies to make homemade play dough. I was rewarded with an hour and a half of play. I also shaved crayons ahead of time brought my iron and we made stained glass windows with wax paper and crayon shavings. But you have to know your audience. That was after two prior days with these children and I have experience with group crafts. To make parents feel comfortable just be warm and caring. Tell them about your experience with children and try to engage their children but don't be too smothering. Also use your resources. I love to get books from the library and do a story time with the kids.

The swap meet is a great place to find fun things for kids.

The main thing that has really helped me connect with the families is bringing a bag full of games and coloring tools. I try to fill it with age and gender appropriate things so that it gets them more excited about staying behind when their parents leave.

I have never babysat for a toddler who does not love playing with Duplos.



Parents love lots of smiling!