

Child care for older children

BY KRISTEN J. DUCA

I am sure you can remember a time in adolescence when you challenged parental authority, thus showing your desire for independence. The age when parents feel comfortable leaving a child alone is quite personal and varies on a family-to-family basis. It not only depends on the maturity level of the child, but also on the environment the child is growing up in. However, some parents with older children feel they need the security of a child-care provider to help them during after-school hours. Those parents who work may need a full-time childcare provider to help the child get off to school in a timely manner and to be there for any school closings, holidays, vacations, or schedule changes.

As you analyze your child-care needs for older children, please ask yourself the following questions:

- Can my child get to school with us or by himself?
- Would a chaperone be a great asset to our household?
- What is our family plan for school closures (scheduled holidays and vacations as well as unscheduled snow days, illnesses, or other surprise issues)?
- Does my child go directly to after-school activities that he can walk to, or is a helper needed to get him safely from one place to another?
- Does my child need help or encouragement with completing homework assignments, or is my child



self-sufficient?

- Could my older child benefit from having a buddy or a mentor?

Some parents hire a nanny or sitter for older children just to give their children companionship and themselves piece of mind. Because a caregiver to an older child does not have to be burdened with diaper changes, feedings, or tummy time, parents may want to consider hiring someone the child respects yet can view as a friendly authority figure. Ask any potential childcare candidates if they have experience taking care of older children. Additionally, make sure they are comfortable with taking older children to school and various activities in addition to supervising them in the home.

Parents should clearly define the caregiver's roles and perhaps even discuss

caregiver responsibilities with the older child so that everyone is on the same page.

Together, the parent and child could come up with a road map detailing how the caregiver's hours are spent. This way, the older child feels a sense of independence for acting as a critical member of the caregiver selection process and may not be as resistant to an extra household helper.

Some caregiver's responsibilities you may want to consider and evaluate when interviewing a caregiver for your older child are listed below:

Homework help

- Is the caregiver willing and able to monitor the child's completion of her homework each day or night?
- Will the caregiver teach the child good homework habits? Here are examples

of habits to teach:

1. Completing assignments in a quiet place without distractions like phones or electronic devices

2. Focusing on the task at hand with short study breaks (complete with healthy snacks) when needed

3. Managing stress when solutions do not come easily

- Can the caregiver review the child's work for errors or suggestions?

- Can the caregiver quiz the child for upcoming tests?

After-school transporting

- Will the caregiver be able to get the child to and from school and extracurricular activities in a safe and timely manner?

- Does the caregiver drive?

- Is the caregiver comfortable using various means of public transportation with your child (buses, trains, subways, ferries, and so on)?

- Is the caregiver willing to walk with your child to and from school or activities?

- Does the caregiver know the geographic area you live in well?

- Can the caregiver follow street directions accurately?

- Will the caregiver ensure your child

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gets to his or her destinations safely and on time?

Other chores

- While the child is at school or busy with an activity, will the caregiver tackle household chores such as light cleaning, dusting, vacuuming, and laundry?

- If the child selected some quick, easy, and healthy recipes, would the caregiver be able to make them for lunch or dinner?

- If you provide the funding, will the caregiver run household errands such as picking up the family's laundry at the dry cleaners, returning library books, dropping off packages at the post office, selecting birthday gifts, or picking up groceries while the child is not at home?

Creative activities

- Does the caregiver have ideas of creative activities to engage the child in when there is a lull in the schedule, including exposing her to something new? (Examples include knitting or crocheting, cooking, playing music, making art projects, visiting museums, building models, and so on.)

- Parents may want to purchase inexpensive and easy craft projects or a craft idea book to keep in the home for the caregiver and child to do together.

Extracurricular activities

- Can the caregiver keep the child off of electronic devices by encouraging her to read, play a board or card game, or engage in a healthy physical activity?

- Will the caregiver engage in sports with the child?

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