

# Babysitter blues

Looking forward to attending some of those seasonal festivities, but nervous about leaving your baby in someone else's care? Chill out with our top tips on how to relax when you part company with your little one for the first time

**Y**ou probably feel as if you've been watching every breath your baby takes since the moment you gave birth. But inevitably, there comes a point when it's time to step back and leave her in someone else's care, even if it's just for a few hours – after all, everyone needs a break. Whether you're leaving your little one with a relative, babysitter, crèche or just your partner, it can be a nerve-wracking time. But there are ways you can help yourself relax and make things easier for you, your baby and the person you're trusting.

According to Sarah Littmoden, mum of three and co-director of the Safe and Sound Childcare Agency ([www.safeandsoundnannyagency.com](http://www.safeandsoundnannyagency.com)), worry is the most common issue for parents, and she has this advice: 'Every mum thinks, "Will my baby settle? Is my baby safe? Is the nanny CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked?" You know that you're the best person to look after your child so, naturally, you're apprehensive. Make sure you always go to a reputable nanny agency. Our clients can meet their sitter or nanny beforehand on a no-obligation basis, so they know they're qualified and that their children like the sitter. A good agency will do CRB checks, interviews and allow you to meet the nanny or babysitter face to face.'

Psychotherapist and attachment specialist Maeja Raicar\* says, 'Introduce the person who's going to be taking care of your baby and spend some time with them together. This will help your baby to feel familiar and safe.

Gradually build up time apart (maybe up to half an hour to start with) from your baby beforehand. This will help you both feel more comfortable when you have to leave her for a while.

'Talk to your baby about what you're doing – she will pick up a lot from your tone. Now that people have mobile phones, you can call and say hello to your baby while you're out. This will help you check on how she is, as well as letting her hear your voice.'



## 10 ways to prepare for leaving your baby

**1** List everyone you know who loves and wants what's best for your baby. Look at all the support and resources you have. This will remind you that while you may be the main carer for your little one, she is very loved. It's not all down to you.

**2** To start with, practise leaving your baby in a different room to you for short periods of time. Start slowly to keep you both comfortable, and then build up to something simple like popping next door for a cup of tea while you leave your baby with someone you trust. If you're still in range, you could take a baby monitor with you for extra reassurance.

**3** Make sure that the babysitter (whether a family member, friend or stranger) is familiar to your baby. Spend some time with them both to make sure they're comfortable with each other before you leave, and if you're leaving your baby with an au pair or nanny, spend more time getting to know them first.

**4** Talk to other mums to find out how they felt when it was all new

for them. This will remind you that your fears are completely natural, but also that it will get easier. Babies are much more resilient than we think they are. Hearing other mothers' stories will help you to relax.

**5** Before you leave, take off the top you've been wearing all day and put it in the cot with your little one. This may sound strange, but your smell will be very comforting for her. One mum learned this trick when she had a puppy, and found it even more useful with her baby girl!

**6** Make sure the outing is something you really want to do. Make it worth your anxiety – there's no point putting you both through this separation if you're not going to return having had a great time. Instead of thinking about the things you feel you should be doing, ask yourself what you'd really enjoy.

**7** If you have family nearby, grandparents can be a great source of childcare. Don't take them for granted or assume they'll be available, but if they're happy to babysit, find out

what time would be best for them. Work it around their schedule as much as possible to make it easy for them to agree – it'll make you both feel better about the situation.

**8** Explain things to your baby. Even if you think she can't understand, talk to her. Explain that you're going out, love her very much and will be back soon. This is a brilliant way to build trust, and she will grow up knowing you can be counted on.

**9** Have lots of familiar things around for your baby so she feels more secure. Is there a favourite DVD or CD that helps with relaxation? Is there a night-light or music box that signals bed time? If you are leaving her somewhere other than home, bring familiar toys, pillows and blankets.

**10** Make sure you're back when you say you will be. Apart from lateness not being fair to the sitter, your baby could pick up on their anxiety and feel abandoned. The more your baby gets used to you keeping your word (even before she can talk), the more secure she'll feel! ♥

Words: Eve Perrettis-Cornery; Photos: iStockphoto.com; Illustration: Getty Images. \*Always book on child-centred attachment therapy is scheduled to be published next year. (Karnack)

### Sarah Littmoden, 40, mum to Max, 10, Tom, eight, and Maisy, six, remembers how she felt when she first left her children.

'My children sometimes stayed with their grandparents when they were little, and it was great having family support. I was reluctant to use an agency initially – you don't know who you're letting into your house, let alone leaving with your children. But when I met Helen [Madder-Smith, the founder of Safe and Sound Childcare Agency], she reassured me because she knew all her nannies and babysitters. She said, "I know a lady who'll be good for your three children." The sitter met the children while I was still in the house, so I could go off to the garden for half an hour. I now wish I'd done my research earlier – and I wish I'd known how much I'd enjoy going out! You are then a much nicer mum when you come back, because you've had a break.'



Your little one will enjoy interacting with new people!