



CENTER FOR COOPERATIVES  
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## **BABYSITTING COOPERATIVES**

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Although American families with children are found in a myriad of different forms with diverse needs there is probably one universal they all share: the need for (at least occasional) babysitting. A babysitter may be needed for anything from a weekend business trip to an intimate anniversary dinner. For many parents, finding suitable babysitting arrangements is an agonizing process. Availability, quality of care, and cost are often the primary obstacles. One option for meeting babysitting needs is to form or join a Babysitting Cooperative.

A babysitting cooperative is a group of parents who exchange babysitting services with one another. Babysitting usually takes place in members' homes and no money is exchanged. The cooperative can include a small group of three or four families or include more than a hundred families. A babysitting cooperative can be organized in a variety of ways, but at its core is the traditional cooperative principle: the cooperative is owned and controlled by the membership so its organization fundamentally reflects the ideals, needs and values of its members.

The backbone of the babysitting cooperative is a system of recording to insure equitable exchanges. Some co-ops use coupons, others utilize a point system. One point or coupon is awarded for each hour a parent babysits a child and one is deducted for each hour a parent leaves their child. The secretary, who rotates among the membership at one to three month intervals, keeps a running total of each member's points.

Most cooperatives establish by-laws or regulations that govern the mechanics of operation as well as the child care itself. These regulations help the co-op run smoothly and ensure that parents in the group share a similar child care philosophy.

Co-ops do not require that members agree to all babysitting requests; individual members do not 'have' to sit when it is inconvenient for them or watch children that they don't feel comfortable with. Members do have incentives for sitting - when they sit for another family they are earning points that they can "spend" when they need a sitter.

Babysitting cooperatives can be organized through a variety of sources including: employee groups, neighborhood groups, churches, child care centers, or child birth classes. Many county resource and referral agencies can provide information to interested parents. Organizers can begin by announcing a meeting for interested parents. The first meeting should be an informal gathering to share feelings and discuss how the co-op should be run.

Although babysitting cooperatives are generated by mutual child care needs, it is common for the membership to become an important social group for all those involved. Members of babysitting cooperatives often form strong bonds that last beyond essential babysitting years.

