

Is your babysitter ready for a fire?

Before you head out, brief up the person who'll be caring for your children.

You know the drill. If there's a fire in your home, you've got it all planned out: grab your kids, grab the phone, head out the front door to your family meeting place and call the fire department. Easy.

But does your babysitter know the safest way out of the house if the front door is blocked? Will your nanny know who to call if there's a fire or a medical emergency? Do they know your street address if the emergency dispatcher asks?

You may not have a lot of time to give a babysitter a detailed briefing before you dash out the door, so make a point of having a sheet of paper with all the relevant information ready to go on your counter.

Include important information like the family's designated meeting point, contact numbers for you and for the fire department (either 911 or otherwise), the name and address of the place you'll be at, and whether or not you'll have easy access to your phone during your time away. Keep the sheet simple so they can easily read it and suggest that they take a picture of the sheet on their cellphone in case they have to leave the home in a hurry. In addition, make sure you have the babysitter's cell phone number as well.

When giving a nanny or babysitter a tour of your home for the first time, make sure they know where alternate exits are. Is there a deck out the back door? Is there a special trick to opening the gate in the fence? While touring the sitter, also note the locations of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms (in case they go off) and fire extinguishers. Even if they're not going to be cooking, it's good to know where these things are.

If you live in an apartment building or condo, provide them with information about how to get out of both the suite and the building safely, including where the building's staircases are. That detail may not be obvious if they, like most of your visitors, took the elevator up.

For more fire safety tips and a resource sheet for babysitters that you can print and leave at your home with contact information, visit the Office of the Fire Commissioner's website at <http://ofc.alberta.ca>.