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Toolbox

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Is Your Babysitter Or Caregiver Safe? Performing Your Own Due Diligence Can Save A Child's Life

A judge sentenced a 29-year-old woman and her 21-year-old husband to prison after they admitted being on drugs when a boy strangled and killed the two-year-old girl the couple was hired to babysit.



The couple engaged in a "drug binge" of methamphetamine, sleeping pills, and marijuana, while caring for several children, including the girl. An 11-year-old relative of the couple strangled the girl and put her body in the closet while the two adult caregivers continued taking drugs for another day and a half.

Authorities learned of the death after another child staying in the home showed the body of the girl to a neighbor.

The state's law makes it a felony for a caregiver "to knowingly fail to report the death of a child within six hours of the incident."

A judge convicted the woman of several drug crimes, as well as "failing to report the death of a child," and sentenced her to 22 years in prison. Last November, a judge also sentenced the husband to 25 years in prison for using "methamphetamines and occupying a home where drugs were used."

Last summer, police arrested the boy who strangled the girl, but have not released any additional details about his custody. "Babysitter Admitted To Being High On Meth While Toddler Was Being Strangled To Death," www.inquisitr.com (Mar. 15, 2013).

To protect the safety of your child while he or she is in the care of another person, make sure that the caregiver has an established record of acting responsibly and safely.

When choosing a caregiver or daycare facility, start by asking people you know and trust for a referral. Before hiring a caregiver, ask for several references. Talk to the caregiver's references, as well as to anyone you know who has used the caregiver. Ask about the caregiver's competency in creating and maintaining a safe

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environment for children. Ask how he or she handled any emergencies that might have arisen.

Watch for signs of drug and/or alcohol abuse in a caregiver, and among all those who have access to your child at a home or daycare facility. Signs of substance abuse can include: secretive behavior; change in personality or mood; frequent absences from work; slurred speech or difficulty expressing thoughts; appetite change and/or weight loss; lack of coordination; red eyes or eyes that cannot focus; smell of alcohol; irritability and aggression; and burnout. If you notice these signs in any of the adults caring for your child, talk to the facility's manager about your concerns, and if he or she cannot assuage your worries, look for a different childcare facility.

Be certain that childcare facilities are licensed, and that all persons who will have access to your child, whether employees or volunteers, have passed a criminal background check. If hiring a private caregiver, require applicants to pass a criminal background check and provide references from former employers.

Periodically make unannounced visits to the daycare or caregiver's home. Make sure that your child is in a safe environment and unauthorized people are not with your child when you drop in.

Also, watch for changes in your child's behavior that may signal child abuse. A child who suddenly becomes withdrawn, clingy, or reluctant to be with their caregiver may be experiencing abuse. If possible, talk with your child and encourage him or her to be open about any feelings. Keep in mind that the abuse may be verbal, physical, sexual, or neglect. Abuse is not limited to adults only; a child at the facility can also commit abuse, so observe how well the children are supervised.

Here are some questions parents should ask when choosing a caregiver or daycare center:

- Can workers observe other workers at all times, so that a child is never alone with a worker without other workers or adults being present?
- Are children supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?
- Have all daycare workers been trained on how to prevent child abuse, how to recognize signs of child abuse, and how to report suspected child abuse?
- How many children are there for each adult? The fewer children for each adult, the better. Babies need an adult-to-child ratio of no more than 1:4. Four-year-olds and older can do well with a ratio of 1:10.
- Are caregivers trained in safety guidelines?
- How long has each employee worked at the day care facility?
- Is the day care provider accredited by a national organization?
- Are you encouraged to visit at any time and unannounced? If not, choose another childcare. If so, show up unannounced at different times and check out the environment.
- Who will be responsible for your child? Will the same people take care of your child regularly?
- Does the facility or caregiver have a policy restricting non-staff members from interacting with the children?

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