



**ERIN  
HARREL**

of Cape Coral has a PhD in education and is the mother of three children.

# Baby sitter blues turns to bliss

A **great sitter** makes all the difference!

**M**y husband and I have been extraordinarily lucky when it comes to baby sitters. My sister and her husband have been so gracious, and the kids love going to their house. If you ask them where their favorite place to go is, the answer would more than likely be "Aunt Casey and Uncle Bill's farm." Once, they even chose the "farm" over Disney or Epcot.

Still, we've needed to hire a sitter from time to time. This is not an easy task, and we've had some real doozies in the past.

When our first two children, Jude and Riley, were younger, we had Shawna and Devon. The kids still talk about their first sitters. They were precious girls but barely old enough to be left for any significant amount of time. We used them when Casey wasn't available and when we knew we wouldn't be more than a few minutes away.

Over the years, we sought out different sitters. We asked at church, tried daughters or relatives of friends, and once we tried a friend of a previous sitter. That didn't work out so well.

When I went to the door to meet the girl's mother, she said she hadn't seen her mother since the day before. She went on to tell me that she was a little worried about leaving her 5-year-old brother, and wanted to know our phone number so she could leave it for him. I told the girl thanks anyway, but she would probably be best staying home with her



Photo special to SWFL Parent & Child

Erin Kelly, age 13, our baby sitter

brother.

We were a little more successful with the next sitter, but had to hire a cleaning lady after she left. Now, I don't expect the sitter to do heavy cleaning. For that matter, I wouldn't even expect the sitter to clean up a mess that she walked in to. However, it is nice if she picks up or asks the kids to pick up the mess they make as they make it.

With the "messy" sitter (I'll spare her name) we never knew what we would find when we got home. Once, we came home to a whole box of Apple Jacks spilled on the patio floor. When I asked her what happen, she

just smiled and said, "Oh, they spilled." I thought maybe she was so busy playing with the kids that she didn't have time to clean up. However, the kids informed me the next morning that she spent most of the night on the phone. Needless to say, that was her last job at the Harrel house.

After spilt cereal, baby sitters who did nothing but talk on the phone, one that had the boyfriend slip out the back door as we entered through the front, and countless other mishaps, I think we have finally found the perfect sitter. Erin (what a great name!) is the daughter of a co-worker. She is as sweet as the day is long, but firm.

Our youngest daughter, Maggie, always gives the sitters a run for their money. She starts crying the minute the sitter walks through the front door. Maggie eventually settles down, but inevitably begins her "drama for her mama" again right about bedtime. We had never come home to her sleeping (no matter what time) until Erin started sitting. The kids adore her, as do we, AND she does the dishes and manages to coax the older kids into bed at a reasonable time.

It is such a nice feeling to be able to leave the house and be confident that your kids are being well cared for. Erin is a certified baby-sitter that seems to be capable of handling three kids, a cat, Maggie's drama and still have the house put back in order. What a difference a great sitter can make! 