

Babysitting

Blues



*I needed Michael and Abbie to behave.
I needed a plan.*

By Lindsay Stevens Tanner

(Based on a true story)

"Oh, here we are together in our family"
(*Children's Songbook*, 261).

My little brother and sister, Michael and Abbie, are a handful. You just can't get them to sit still. I should know—I've tried. Mom says I'm old enough to watch them when she goes out for errands. I'm glad Mom thinks I'm responsible, but I'm not sure I *want* to watch them on my own.

Once, when my parents were out front working in the garden, Michael and Abbie picked some cattails outside. Cattails are plants with long stems and a hot dog-looking "flower" on top. When you blow on a cattail, the hot dog part turns into white fluff, and it gets *everywhere*. So guess what Michael and Abbie decided to do? They waved the cattails all around the living room and covered all the furniture with fuzz.

When I saw what they'd done, I was horrified. I went outside right away to tell Mom and Dad about the mess, hoping I wouldn't get in trouble for it. But they just made

Michael and Abbie help clean it up. They didn't even really get punished.

So today, when Mom went to the store and put me in charge, I was ready. I decided that in order to watch Michael and Abbie, I would need to get them to behave, and I knew just the way to do it.

"Who wants to play a game?" I asked.

They jumped up and down. "Ooh! Me! Me!"

"It's a game I just invented. It's called Baby Caterpillar. Do you want to pretend to be baby caterpillars?"

"Yes!" Michael yelled.

"Yay!" Abbie shouted.

I grinned. My brother and sister can never quietly agree to anything.

"To play this game, I need both of you to get a blanket," I said.

They both ran to their bedrooms as fast as they could and brought back two blankets.

“OK, now just watch.”

They stood quietly and watched, which was a first for them.

First I laid down both blankets and had Abbie lie right in the middle of one and Michael in the middle of the other. Then I wrapped them each in a blanket cocoon up to their chins.

“Ta da!” I said. “You are now baby caterpillars!” “Yay!” they shouted.

They wiggled around for a bit, and after a while they started talking to each other in their “caterpillar language.” Their smiling faces peeked over their blankets. I sat on the couch with a good book while they chattered to each other.

When I looked at my brother and sister, nestled in their little cocoons, I realized they weren’t so bad after all. In fact, now that I was spending time with them, I kind of liked them. I thought about how much fun we could have

playing a board game together after they were done being baby caterpillars. I put my book down and started to think of other games we could all play the next time Mom left me in charge. ♦

The author lives in Utah, USA.

BABYSITTING TIPS

Sometimes it's hard to babysit younger brothers and sisters. Here are a few tips to make the job easier.

1. Split the time into different activities. You could color, play board games, eat a snack, play outdoor games, and help with homework.
2. Always have backup activities. When you have more activities ready, you can make sure your siblings are busy doing something good.
3. Choose to serve your siblings—you will learn to love them more. Help them with a subject they're struggling with in school, or help them clean their rooms.



ILLUSTRATION BY BROOKE SWART