

Help is on the way

Overwhelmed parents are hiring others to lend a hand with child-care tasks. Is that so wrong?

By **Nicole Caccavo Kear**

It takes a village to raise a child, the saying goes. But in a village like New York, it really takes a team of specially trained experts. "Child-care" services used to include nannies, baby nurses, maybe the occasional tutor; today, it's a bona fide industry, with providers who will diagnose the source of your newborn's colic, potty-train your toddler and teach your kid how to ride a bike. Child-rearing has always been a dozen full-time jobs wrapped into one, but now parents are following the lead

of big business and discovering the wide world of outsourcing.

Enter companies like newly minted Momcierge, whose founders, Alyssa Sadoff and Hilary Valentine, describe themselves as "everyone's go-to girls." For a fee (either à la carte or an annual membership), Momcierge will plan a bris, find water shoes in the dead of winter, enroll your toddler in the perfect music class or organize your grade-schooler's home library. "Our clients are really busy," says Sadoff, "and they opt to let us take care of these details so they can use that time to spend with their kids."

Unlike newcomer Momcierge, Lisa Spiegel has been in the business of helping parents since 1987, when she became a mom herself and cofounded the Soho Parenting Center. Weary

New York parents flock to the center for consultations with psychologists, play therapists and early-childhood specialists on everything from shyness to sibling rivalry. Needing an extra hand is nothing new, says Spiegel. "The things they need help with have changed," she says. "Parents are having a much harder time establishing basic rhythms in their household, saying no to their kids, and this is creating new kinds of challenges, like getting kids to sleep through the night."

Sleepless nights were exactly what sent Sydney Passin to Soho Parenting, and then later to in-home sleep trainer Kimberly Walker, who had Passin's eight-month-old son, Oscar, sleeping till morning after three nights on the fold-out couch. "We outsource a lot," says Passin. "I don't have any family in the

area, and my husband travels so much for work. I end up dealing with a lot of this stuff on my own."

Walker also specializes in personalized newborn-care workshops for parents of twins: "I offer basic 101 training—what's the best way to feed them at the same time, burp them, give them both baths," she says. With parents so overscheduled, shortcuts are at an all-time premium. For Judy Kress, a high-school math teacher and the single mother of 16-month-old twins Jacob and Lily, being pressed for time is a daily issue. Although she didn't used to be a big outsourcer, she says that single motherhood has made it a necessity. "If somebody can take care of something and do it the right way from the beginning," she says, "then why not?"