

HIRING A NANNY 101

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WHY A NANNY?

Childcare Resources of Washington State said it best: “Nanny care gives parents more control over their child’s environment than any other form of childcare.” When your child attends school, you will have little choice as to who influences them during the day. Hiring a nanny on the merits of their experience and what they have to offer your child through one-on-one attention is the number one reason people choose this form of care. The second is of course, is the luxury of convenience. You eliminate travel expenses and commute time in the morning and evening, and have someone you can rely on when your children aren’t feeling well and a daycare would be unable to take them. The nanny can be productive in the home while you are away, eliminating household chores that will bog you down in the evening and weekend which take time away from you and your children. You also have the opportunity to develop a long term relationship with someone who will care for your home and children, providing familiarity and stability.

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MAKING THE DECISION TO HIRE

Once you make the decision to hire someone who will work in your home to care for your children, it's time to conduct a search. The advantage of using an agency to act as a third party provides a safeguard which allows for the development of a more professional relationship between yourself and the nanny. Nannies know this, and many who consider this a career choice choose to work through an agency for this reason. Additional benefits include the depth of screening, support and third party accountability before and after the placement. An agency provides professional services support, and coverage in the form of a replacement should the nanny leave.

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HOW TO INTERVIEW

When meeting applicants a key element will be the chemistry between the provider and your children. Even if you have a newborn, the level and sincerity of the individual's interest in your baby is of paramount importance. When interviewing, a potential nanny who immediately gets onto the floor and is more focused on the children than your line of questioning is not bad a thing! You may also wish to meet the nanny for the first time in a neutral, quiet location without the children (such as a coffee shop); those who pass this screening can go on to an interactive meeting with the family. Note that if you use an agency, this step is not mandatory as the agency has already pre-screened and personally interviewed the candidate. We have seen families approach the interview in every way imaginable. Some clients conduct a highly formal meeting with more experienced friends or family present for support, and take notes from a list of detailed questions. Others invite the nanny into their home and share an informal (and often chaotic) chat over pizza with the kids. (This is known as throwing them in at the deep end. If it fails to ruffle their feathers, they may be the one for you!) You will decide what is most comfortable for your family, children and home. If there are pets, be sure the applicant is aware and comfortable with their presence prior to interviewing.

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MAKE AN OFFER

Once you decide to make an offer, a formal written presentation of this offer is advised. You are setting the tone of professionalism for your relationship with the nanny, and establishing expectations upfront.

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YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER

You may hear that you can hire a long term nanny as an independent contractor but this is not true. You will be required to obtain an Employee Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS and to pay taxes. SNN offers a variety of services including retention consulting, human services support, tax and payroll, and training.

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BENEFITS

The current market indicates the following PTO to be standard: two weeks of vacation, personal or sick days to be used at the discretion of the employee, plus holidays (often mirroring those provided by your own employer). About half our clients offer a health insurance stipend, typically dependent on need. If a nanny hopes for a contribution toward their current plan, a budget can be established to allow for the health insurance stipend. Some of the more creative benefits we have heard of over the years include a family who offered a substantial bonus to their nanny after three years of service and not before. Families who have worked for certain companies who offer benefits have at times extended those to their nanny. Some particularly useful benefits include offering a stipend toward further education. Note of caution: always insist on a probationary period of time before benefits kick in, typically three to six months.

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VIDEO SURVEILLANCE

Some clients ask about secretly taping their nanny during working hours. We encourage you talk to your nanny first, and share your concerns about leaving your home and children. Our agency asks applicants during their formal office interview if they have ever worked under surveillance in the past, and many have, and are fine with it. If they are unsure of whether or not they have been monitored in the past, we let them know it's always a possibility and that we will not disclose when and if clients do it. We will not work with applicants who are not comfortable with this however we find that in this age of digital technology and connectivity most candidates are comfortable with being observed – so as long as its disclosed upfront.

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EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS

We offer templates, and guidance in completing formal written guidelines for your employee. This is your opportunity to be very clear about your expectations and give both parties a point of reference should there ever be a misunderstanding.

Washington employment is “at will” and you may let your employee go for any reason or no reason. You are not bound to continue employing them nor are they bound in any way to continue working for you. However, making a clear outline of the duties and any expected benefits will be invaluable as the relationship evolves.

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HR

Think of your home as a small business. In order to keep it running smoothly the members must work together cohesively. Even though yours is a small operation, your level of dependence on child care is critical, for without it you are unable to meet your own responsibilities. Keep the lines of communication open at all times! Schedule regular informal (chats) and formal (written) evaluations to make sure that all parties are on the same page. If you establish from day one that every Friday you will have a weekly review for 15 minutes before the nanny leaves, then it won't feel awkward when you implement it. And if you agree that no raises will be given without first sitting down and discussing job performance, it will be a matter of course.

Your nanny will appreciate your effort, as they consider themselves professionals, and this to be a 'real job'. As an agency, we offer evaluation forms and tell our clients to 'blame it on the agency'. In this way we offer a neutral and unobtrusive platform to generate discussion between the employer and nanny, thus encouraging a positive flow of communication.

10 SPECIAL REQUESTS

We often hear from families who wish to hire a nanny who speaks a foreign language. Depending on a number of variables this may or may not be possible. We believe that hiring a nanny is an art and not a science, where a multitude of factors go into making the ‘right fit’. If we have someone who is great with infants, has years of experience and lives nearby but doesn’t speak Mandarin Chinese or French, ... you may want to consider letting the language piece go. We get requests for male nannies, nannies with teaching certificates, nannies who can travel for four months of the year and nannies who can live in the basement apartment. We are willing to search for almost any special request, but only with the understanding that the more specific the requirement, the greater the limitations of the search.

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SHARE THE CARE

One nanny who is shared by two families means cutting your costs in half. This could work beautifully for many families, if they could just find each other! We host a free community posting board on Facebook to make it easier for families to find one another. Search "The Seattle Nanny Share Network" in your Facebook search bar.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheSeattleNannyShareNetwork/>

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BACK UP CARE

We have seen everything from hospitalized family members to business trips that take our clients to the other side of the world and require overnight care with no notice. We can help. You must first submit the paperwork for backup care to the agency so when the need for urgent care arises we can act fast in providing care for your family. For more information please visit seattlenanny.com and you'll find Back Up Care under our services.

HAVE A QUESTION?

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