



Is a Nanny the Right Childcare Choice for Me?

In-Home Childcare Defined

When looking at childcare options parents have three choices, a daycare or preschool, a family care center (where the provider cares for children in her own home) or an in-home caregiver (where the provider cares for children in the children's home). This publication is designed to give you the information you need to decide if in-home care is the right choice for you. For information on choosing a day care, preschool, or family care center, visit www.ChildCareAware.org.

Although there are significant differences between the different types of in-home childcare providers, providers are often lumped together under the word "nanny" because that's the word the public is most familiar with. In order to hire the right type of caregiver, it's important to move beyond the familiar and gain an understanding of the different types of in-home caregivers and the different roles they play.

For **short-term new baby care**, parents often hire a doula or infant specialist. A postpartum **doula's** mission is to "mother the mother". The doula provides guidance and encouragement to a new mother until the mother feels confident in her own parenting skills and physically recovered from labor and delivery. A doula also supports the family as they face the many transitions a new baby brings. To learn more about doulas or to locate one in your area, visit DONA International at www.dona.org.

An **infant specialist's** mission is to provide complete care of a newborn and help the baby transition to a regular schedule and daily routine. These providers are often known as **nursery or baby nurses**. Although the title implies the caregiver is a registered nurse, that is often not the case. Many "baby nurses" are nannies that specialize in infant care and have at least 5 years of professional infant experience. For more information or to find an infant specialist in your area, google "baby nurse" for a listing of local placement agencies or check the AllAboutNannyCare.com Agency Directory.

For **long-term care**, parents have the option of an au pair, a babysitter or a nanny. These titles are often used interchangeably but each caregiver provides different services to the family she works for.

Many people refer to all twenty-something, foreign-born in-home caregivers as **au pairs**. While there are many young, foreign caregivers working in this country, not all are part of the au pair program. An au pair is an 18 to 26 year old caregiver participating in a federally sanctioned cultural exchange program. She receives a weekly stipend (under \$175 a week), room and board, and paid learning opportunities in exchange for providing childcare and child-related duties to her host family. She cannot work more than 45 hours a week or 10 hours a day, she cannot perform any duties beyond childcare and child-related tasks, and she cannot legally work in the United States for more than one year.

To learn more about the au pair program, visit the U.S. Department of State's information page at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges/private/aupair_brochure.htm#intro. Remember, only *official* au pair agencies offer you the standards and safeguards established by the U.S. Department of State. To locate an official au pair program, visit the International Au Pair Association at <http://www.iapa.org/Docs/index/index.php4>. There are many online databases that advertise "au pair matches or placements". These sites have nothing to do with the au pair program. They are employment sites helping foreign-born caregivers find nanny positions within the United States. When using these sites, don't be distracted by the language. If a person is applying for a nanny job (and clearly the caregivers listed are because they're not working within the parameters of the au pair program), she should meet the requirements for a nanny, regardless of her ethnicity. I strongly advise parents to screen "au pair candidates" from online sites using the same comprehensive techniques I outline for screening nanny candidates.

One of the biggest hurdles the in-home childcare industry faces is the common confusion between a **babysitter** and a **nanny**. A babysitter provides custodial care, keeping a child safe and entertained. A nanny provides care for the whole child, nurturing the child's emotional, social, cognitive and physical development. This difference is often hard to see because on the surface, the activities of a babysitter and nanny seem similar. But as with most things, the difference lies in the details.

Imagine a continuum with a babysitter on one end and a nanny on the other end. The babysitter represents a custodial approach, the nanny represents a whole child approach. For example, a babysitter will see two preschoolers arguing over a toy and quickly take away the toy to end the argument. A nanny will recognize the argument as a teachable moment and use age appropriate question prompts, role playing and brainstorming to build problem solving skills and develop empathy. A babysitter will read a favorite book to a toddler. A nanny will read a favorite book to a toddler, incorporating imaginary and reading games into the activity to make it an interactive and creative experience for the child.

No caregiver provides custodial care one hundred percent of the time just as no caregiver provides whole child care one hundred percent of the time. Individuals fall along the continuum at different points, depending upon their overall approach. Your job as a parent and employer is to honestly evaluate your needs and to decide where on the continuum you want your caregiver to fall.

As a long-time advocate of quality in-home care, I believe hiring a nanny is always a great childcare choice. However, it isn't the best choice for every situation. For the parent who needs someone to care for her children after school and keep up with their laundry, an au pair can be a great choice. For the part-time, work-at-home parent who needs someone to entertain her child for two hours a day while she returns calls, a babysitter can be a great choice. But for the parent who works full-time and leaves her child with a caregiver for eight to twelve hours a day, four to five days a week, I strongly believe nanny care is the best choice.

What exactly is a nanny?

There are no legal or industry-wide requirements for working as a nanny. The title is self-imposed. Some caregivers don't give themselves enough credit, others give themselves too much. You'll find "babysitters" that consistently meet the needs of the whole child and you'll find "nannies" that simply provide custodial care for 12 hours a day. Judge a caregiver by what she can provide you and your child, not by what she calls herself.

There are two general categories under the title of nanny, entry-level and full charge. An **entry-level nanny** is often called a **mother's helper** and works under the supervision of a stay-at-home / work-at-home parent or full charge nanny. She supports the parent or nanny by taking on basic childcare tasks such as diapering, bathing, dressing, and feeding as well as time-consuming child-related tasks such as laundry, meal preparation and straightening up. The entry-level nanny also cares for the child when the parent or nanny is busy or out of the house. She is able to improve and increase her caregiving skills under the guidance of a mentor parent or full charge nanny.

A **full charge nanny**, also called a professional or career nanny, is responsible for the emotional, social, cognitive and physical development of the child she cares for. A full charge nanny may choose to work as a caregiving partner with a stay-at-home parent. In contrast to the parent's helper, she works "with" rather than "for" the stay-at-home parent.

What are the advantages of having a nanny?

One-on-One, Quality Childcare Of course this is the most important benefit of having a nanny, providing your child with a loving, capable caregiver that is devoted to creating a safe, happy, nurturing caregiving environment.

In-Home Environment The safety, familiarity and convenience of the home environment is a great benefit to children of all ages. With nanny care, your child will nap in her own bed, have meals in her own kitchen, and play with her own toys. Her daily schedule and routine will reflect her individual needs, not those of a group. And on those days when she's home sick or school is closed because of

snow or a teacher in-service, you won't have to miss work or scramble to find back-up care. Your nanny will already be there.

Flexible Schedule For parents whose work obligations don't fit into the typical nine-to-five schedule, the hours available in other childcare settings simply aren't enough. If you have to pick your child up no later than 6 PM, what do you do when you have a client dinner, a late afternoon meeting runs late or you have to travel? Many parents hire a nanny because a nanny's schedule is tailored to fit their individual needs, whatever those needs may be.

Control Over Daily Activities With an in-home caregiver, your child's day has endless opportunities. Do you want your child to take an art class or music class? Learn how to swim? Explore nature through the local arboretum program? Or do you want your child to simply have lots and lots of unstructured play time? Whatever you want your child's day to be like, a nanny can create it.

Consistent Caregiver Common sense along with an abundance of research tells us that having a long-term caregiver greatly benefits a child. A nanny often works with a family for years, providing consistent care through the many stages of a child's life.

Household Support Person Imagine not having to spend the weekend catching up on laundry, not having to stop for milk on the way home or not having to go into work late so you can register your child for swim lessons. Nanny employers don't have to imagine. By handling the multitude of tasks that are required to keep things running smoothly, a nanny can lessen the time you spend keeping up and increase the time you spend enjoying your child.

What are the disadvantages of having a nanny?

No Built-In Social Network When your child attends a daycare, preschool or family care center, there are built-in playmates. However, that isn't the case with nanny care. A nanny must make an effort to provide your child with social opportunities by spending time at the park, participating in local play groups, etc. Fortunately, most nannies enjoy getting out and about too so they are highly motivated to create an active social network for your child.

No Built-In Back-Up Childcare When a daycare or preschool employee is out sick or takes a personal day, the director simply assigns another worker to her classroom. However, when you are the employer and your nanny is out, you must find an alternative caregiver or become the alternative caregiver. Today, there are many back-up options for nanny employers. By registering with a center or service in advance, you can avoid a last minute crisis.

No Direct Supervision of Your Caregiver Unlike center care where caregivers are regularly observed by colleagues and supervisors, a nanny works almost exclusively on her own. This can lead to a lack of quality care if the nanny isn't fully committed to maintaining professional standards. To ensure your nanny is providing the level of care you expect, it's important to put in place checks and balances and then stay alert for potential problems.

What does a nanny do?

The basic responsibilities of a nanny are straightforward – quality childcare and child-related duties. But many families are expanding that basic description to include additional responsibilities to more fully meet their individual needs. Keep in mind when developing your job description that no one person can do it all. Make sure the things that are most important to you are at the top of your nanny's responsibility list.

Quality Childcare A nanny's primary responsibility is to provide quality childcare. The definition of that differs from one family to another. **TIP!** For a better idea of what a quality caregiver provides, download our free **Performance Review**.

Child-Related Duties In the broadest terms, a nanny is responsible for all tasks related to the care of her charge. This can include...

- ◆ housekeeping of child's areas. Within the traditional definition, a nanny is responsible for cleaning the child's areas including the child's bedroom, bathroom, playroom, and any other frequently used areas. This can include changing sheets, emptying the diaper genie, dusting, vacuuming, mopping, emptying the trash, and general straightening. In most of today's households, a cleaning service is responsible for most, if not all, of the actual cleaning. Generally, nannies are only responsible for keeping the areas maintained between regular cleanings.
- ◆ the child's laundry including washing, drying, *occasional* ironing, basic mending and putting clothes away.
- ◆ the child's meals including dinner preparation. Many nannies will prepare "extra" for the parents as well.
- ◆ transportation to and from activities.
- ◆ overseeing and assisting child with homework and special projects.
- ◆ rotating child's seasonal clothes.
- ◆ organizing clothes, toys, etc. in child's room and playroom.
- ◆ shopping for child-related items such as clothes, age-appropriate toys, party gifts, and school supplies.
- ◆ maintaining a communication log or journal.
- ◆ packing for travel.

Family-Related Duties Although family-related duties are not part of the basic nanny position, many nannies take on additional responsibilities in exchange for additional salary and / or benefits. These duties can include...

- ◆ family meal preparation.
- ◆ family laundry including washing, drying, and putting clothes away. Ironing and mending are generally done by a dry cleaning service.
- ◆ grocery shopping.
- ◆ parents' personal errands such as going to the dry cleaners, post office, and pharmacy.
- ◆ personal shopping for parents.

Household Management Depending upon the size of the home, some families hire a household manager to handle the details of a residence and some hire a nanny that has the necessary skill set to take on some or all of the household management tasks. Household management tasks can include...

- ◆ shopping for household items such as light bulbs, laundry detergent, and paper towels.
- ◆ keeping household financial records.
- ◆ interviewing, hiring, and managing other household staff.
- ◆ organizing and tracking warranties for household products and services.
- ◆ scheduling and overseeing regular car maintenance such as oil changes and tire rotations.
- ◆ scheduling and overseeing regular household maintenance such as opening the pool in the spring and having the chimney cleaned in the fall.
- ◆ researching, hiring, and overseeing repair personnel for household appliances.
- ◆ researching, hiring and overseeing contractors for small household projects such as retiling a shower or laying carpet.
- ◆ researching and purchasing household appliances such as a dishwasher, washer or dryer.
- ◆ coordinating social events such as small dinner parties and charity luncheons.
- ◆ pet care including scheduling and transporting pet to vet and groomer, administering medication, and daily feeding, watering and exercising.

Child Information Management Child Information Management (CIM) is a group of child-related duties focused on the details of a child's life rather than hands-on childcare. A nanny that provides CIM takes on the role of personal assistant for tasks relating to your child. The difference between CIM and simply having your nanny do some of these tasks is your participation. Like a good household manager, a good child information manager does everything behind the scenes. You don't have to ask, remind, direct, or question. The details are (seemingly) magically taken care of. Upper-level nannies have been providing CIM for years. We've given it a name and recognize it as a specialized task that requires a unique skill set from a nanny. CIM tasks can include...

- ◆ coordinating your child's overall schedule.
- ◆ researching, recommending and registering your child for age-appropriate activities such as Gymboree, Music Together and dance classes.
- ◆ researching, recommending, and registering your child for educational offerings such as preschool, schools, and tutors.
- ◆ researching, recommending, and registering your child for special services such as social skills classes and gifted activities.
- ◆ researching, recommending, and registering your child for extracurricular activities such as summer camps and sporting activities.
- ◆ researching, recommending and making appointments with professionals such as doctors, dentists, and psychologists.
- ◆ responding to social invitations your child receives and purchasing needed gifts.
- ◆ planning and coordinating child-related events such as birthday parties, First Communion celebrations, and Bar Mitzvah celebrations.
- ◆ monitoring your child's special needs such as medical conditions or counseling sessions to track progress and ensure appropriate and timely follow-up.
- ◆ scheduling and accompanying your child to doctor's appointments for well visits, sick visits, immunizations, etc.
- ◆ scheduling and accompanying your child to dental appointments for regular check-ups, correction procedures, etc.
- ◆ organizing and maintaining current medical records.
- ◆ completing, submitting and keeping current registration information for schools, camps, teams, and other activities.

Housekeeping General housekeeping is not a part of a nanny's job description. Nannies view the word housekeeping as a red flag, so it's important to be very specific about what you need when developing a job description and talking to candidates. If you simply say housekeeping or light housekeeping, many nannies will assume you expect tasks outside of those listed above and will not seriously consider your job.

What does a nanny cost?

A nanny's salary is by far the largest expense related to nanny care. Unfortunately, there are no cut and dry rules for determining salary. The most important factor is location. If you compare two identical positions, one in Short Hills, NJ and the other in St. Louis, MO, you'll find each employer can offer very different compensation packages and attract the same level of quality caregiver. The only exception to this rule is the salary for executive positions. These positions offer a high-end salary and benefit package regardless of location. **TIP!** For a detailed look at what factors influence a nanny's salary and the additional costs of employing a nanny, download our free publication **What Does a Nanny Cost?**

Should I hire a live-in or live-out nanny?

When deciding between a live-in and a live-out nanny, the primary consideration is space. Can you provide a live-in nanny with comfortable living quarters? The minimum requirements are a private bedroom and a private bathroom. There are some families that only provide a shared bathroom, but that is an arrangement very few nannies find acceptable long-term. If you have the space, consider the advantages and disadvantages of having a live-in nanny as well as your personality and lifestyle before making a decision.

By hiring a live-in nanny...

- ◆ you can offer a slightly lesser salary although the difference between live-in and live-out salaries is surprisingly small.
- ◆ you have a much larger candidate pool to choose from since live-in nannies can easily relocate from anywhere in the country.
- ◆ you *generally* have more scheduling flexibility since live-in nannies tend to have less life responsibilities (e.g. their own children) so they're better able to adjust to a demanding schedule.

Of course hiring a live-in nanny also has its disadvantages. You'll...

- ◆ lose privacy with another adult living in your home.
- ◆ incur increased household expenses such as utilities and food.
- ◆ *generally* have a more difficult time maintaining professional boundaries when your nanny lives and works in your home.

I've Decided to Hire a Nanny. Now What?

AllAboutNannyCare.com offers you great resources on finding, hiring, and keeping a quality nanny. Start by reading our free publication **Getting Started in Your Nanny Search**. It will give you a step-by-step overview of the nanny search process and help you decide on your next step. We also offer several consulting packages designed to help first time employers find the right nanny for their family. You can call or email our office for more details.

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