

Information for Parents Seeking In-home Child Care Providers

Employing an individual to care for your child in your home is referred to as *in-home* or *nanny* care. There are advantages and disadvantages to this type of care. Some things to consider are:

Advantages

- Cost effective for multiple children
- Individualized care for an infant
- Care during non-traditional work hours
- Convenient and flexible
- Reduced risk of exposure to other children's illnesses.

Disadvantages

- Most expensive form of care
- Less socialization with other children
- High turnover rate and absenteeism
- Short supply of qualified providers
- Not subject to government regulation

It is important to find a person that is right for both *you* and your child. Be patient and persistent in your search; finding the right "match" will be well worth your time and energy. Ultimately, your decision probably will be based on your "gut instincts" about the individual. If you have uneasy feelings about the candidate, do not hire him or her.

Methods of Finding In-home Child Care Providers

1. Ask for personal recommendations from trusted people (friends, doctors, co-workers, etc.).
2. Post notices at universities' and community colleges' student employment offices and early childhood education departments, especially for part-time, evening, or summer care. You may want to mail or fax these notices.
3. Place an ad in the classified section of local newspapers or church bulletins; choose out-of-town college newspapers for live-in providers (see below for more details on advertising).
4. Call in-home/nanny placement agencies that specialize in child care help (a partial listing of such agencies is attached to this guide).

Advertisements

Placing ads in newspapers is the most common way of finding a provider to work in your home. The best times to place ads are Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. For convenience, use an answering machine or voice mail to retrieve messages, or specify times for calls. To attract appropriate responses, be specific about the job requirements and personal qualities you desire. There are no licensing or registration requirements for in-home providers. By choosing this type of child care, you are solely responsible for the interviewing, hiring, and monitoring of the provider.

Screening/Interviewing Process

Interview all applicants carefully. Strongly consider checking references, conducting the criminal record, child abuse, and driver record clearances, and requiring a medical examination and TB test.

1. *Initial Screening by Telephone*

If you listen carefully, telephone screening can save you time by helping eliminate unsuitable applicants. Find out about her background and child care experience. If she doesn't have related experience, politely terminate the conversation. To assess her true interest, be specific about the number and ages of children to be cared for, the schedule and duties required, and the rate of pay. Ask her to give you the names and telephone numbers of several related references. If the applicant seems promising, get her name and telephone number so that you can call later and set up a personal interview.

2. *Personal Interview*

The initial meeting can be at a mutually convenient site. To make the candidate feel more at ease, you may want to begin by asking, "Do you have children?" "Do you have siblings?" "Did your mother stay at home or work out of the home?" Answers to these questions can generate insightful information, and you—the interviewer—do not appear threatening.

During the interview, tell the applicant about your child's development, personality, and behavior. Ask specific questions that encourage her to describe how she would respond to your child's needs. Discuss child-rearing issues that are important to you. Go over your needs and the specific job requirements in detail. Give the candidate a clear idea of your expectations.

Additional questions to include in your interviews:

- Why do you want to be an in-home provider?
- What types of activities would you do with the child(ren) during the day?
- How do you discipline children and how were you disciplined as a child?

Invite strong candidates to your home and have them spend time with your child. You can observe how the child and the prospective provider relate to each other. Is the interaction stiff and guarded or relaxed and friendly? Setting up paid trial visits with your child is recommended.

3. *Checking References*

You may want to ask questions such as these:

- What did you like best *and* least about this person and her care?
- Under what circumstances did the person leave the position?
- Was the person reliable/dependable and how long have you known her?
- Would you hire this person again?

Make sure the responses are consistent with the information provided by the candidate. If you notice discrepancies, ask the applicant to make clarifications.

The Parent/Provider Agreement

It will benefit both parent and provider if an employment agreement is drawn up, thereby avoiding future misunderstandings. Some items you might want to include in a formal agreement:

- Hours and days the caregiver is expected to work
- The agreed-upon salary and when it will be paid
- Number of sick days allowed, holidays and vacations and whether they are to be paid
- Household chores/responsibilities, including daily schedules and routines to be followed
- Emergency plans and necessary telephone numbers
- Policy on visitors, phone calls, and amount of TV permitted for child and provider
- Amount of notice necessary to end the arrangement

Keeping lines of communication open is vital. Consider setting up specific times each week or month to discuss your child's development in detail.

Tax Information

When you have full-time in-home care, you are required to pay:

- At least minimum wage
- Social Security and Medicare taxes (FICA)
- Federal unemployment tax (FUTA)—if the caregiver makes more than \$1,000 per quarter (amount subject to change; always check with the IRS)
- Federal income tax withholding—only if the caregiver specifically requests it
- In some states, state income tax withholding

DCAP/Child Care Credit

Tax-free dollars for child care (often referred to as Dependent Care Assistance Program or DCAP) may be available to you via your employer. Check with your human resources department. Child care credit is available through the IRS, if you are not participating in an employer-sponsored assistance program. Request IRS form 2441.

Tax and Immigration Telephone Numbers:

Internal Revenue Service	-	800-829-1040
Immigration and Naturalization Service	-	215-656-7144
Delaware Tax Forms	-	302-368-6745
Pennsylvania Tax Forms	-	717-787-8094
Maryland Tax Forms	-	800-638-2937 in MD; 410-974-3951 out-of-state

For additional tax-related assistance, contact an accountant.

Another Option

Because in-home care is expensive, many parents cannot afford the cost alone. As an alternative, you could consider a nanny “sharing” arrangement with another family. This lowers the cost to each family, while allowing higher wages and better benefits to attract a quality provider. Some agencies will place nannies in shared care arrangements, or you can advertise on your own.

Placement Agencies

Some parents choose to purchase the services of a nanny placement agency to locate an in-home child care provider. Be aware there is no licensing or registration of these agencies in most states. Also, the demand for in-home providers is so great that many agencies do not have nannies available immediately.

When you contact nanny placement agencies, ask if they:

- Disclose their method of interviewing candidates (and find out what that method is)
- Check candidates' references
- Provide information on candidates' job qualifications
- Prepare a written agreement with each client family specifying their fees, refund/replacement policies, and services to be provided by the agency*

Even when detailed screening is done by the agency, you should verify as much information as possible and interview the candidates yourself.

*These are four practices recommended by the International Nanny Association.

Our aim in providing this information is to facilitate your search for care and to help you make decisions with which you can be comfortable. The Family & Workplace Connection does not endorse, recommend or guarantee any specific provider, program or agency, nor can we assure you that they provide quality care or service. Our goal is to help you become informed consumers.

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