

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Choosing Child Care in Your Home

You may decide that having a live-in nanny or a babysitter who comes into your home on a regular basis is worth the extra cost that this usually involves.

This arrangement allows you to specifically match a child care provider with your child and your own needs. You avoid the inconvenience and disruption of having to transport a child to an outside location and the worries of making emergency arrangements when your child is sick. And, perhaps the most important consideration for many parents, your child will be able to receive individual attention in familiar surroundings.

All these benefits, of course, are dependent upon hiring the right person. Like other child care providers, nannies and babysitters come from many different walks of life. The best are in the profession because they love children, enjoy helping them learn and take pleasure from their accomplishments. Others may, unfortunately, see the job as an easy way to obtain living accommodations or flexible, unsupervised work.

Another factor that can enter into your decision is your expectation or desire to have the in-home caregiver also shoulder some responsibilities for house cleaning/housekeeping. Be very clear on what your expectations are and how these fit with the caregiving priorities.

Take time to interview a number of candidates. Be clear about your expectations and needs, and ensure that they are consistent with the caregiver's abilities and objectives.

A Pre-Screening Check

When you first contact a potential caregiver, you can save yourself considerable time by asking a few simple questions to ensure that your basic criteria are being met. Some of these questions might include:

- What was the candidate's previous work experience? Was there involvement with your child's age group?
- Why did the caregiver leave his or her last job?
- How long did the caregiver stay in previous jobs?
- Would the caregiver be able to stay in this job for a minimum of a year?
- Does the caregiver have formal training or qualifications?
- Does the caregiver want to live in or out?
- How far does the caregiver live from your home?
- Would the working hours that you need be acceptable?
- When would the caregiver be able to start?
- Is the caregiver happy to be around any pets that you have?
- Is the caregiver a smoker?

Interviewing Candidates

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After your initial screening, you will want to interview several candidates in your home. It can be helpful to have your child close by during the interview, to see how the caregiver interacts with him or her. It will be important to tailor questions to meet your specific needs, but here are some questions you might want to ask:

- Why did the candidate go into child care? What does he or she most enjoy about the work?
- How would the caregiver organize a day for your child? What kinds of activities would be enjoyed together? Does the caregiver have any special talents or interests in areas your child enjoys?
- What approach does the caregiver prefer to take for discipline?
- Does the caregiver have any medical or emergency care experience?
- How flexible could the caregiver be if you needed to work late?

If you have some expectations regarding housekeeping duties, broach the subject in the interview and be clear on your expectations as well as the fact that the priority is caring for your child, not the housework.

Before the candidate leaves, be sure to request at least two references from previous employers. It's essential that you take the time to check these out and ask relevant questions about how the caregiver has performed in the past.

Formalizing an Agreement

Once you have selected the caregiver whom you wish to hire, it's recommended that you put your agreements in writing. Both you and the caregiver should sign the agreement to indicate that you each understand and accept all the terms.

This agreement should include hours and times of work, salary, holiday times and confirmation of how long the contract will run, together with details on how it can be terminated, if and when required.

It's also advisable to include a detailed outline of duties and responsibilities, plus a clear list of "house rules." You should each have a copy of the contract to keep.

By taking into consideration the screening process outlined in this article, you will be better equipped to choose a qualified caregiver for your child. Remember not to settle on the first candidate you meet. Keep your options open and always retain your child's best interests at heart.