

Becoming a Nanny

Entering the field of professional childcare by becoming a nanny can be a wonderful start to a career in this area or merely a fulfilling way to be gainfully employed while attending college or graduate school, or while you are trying to decide your next move in the work world. While it is one of the more unusual forms of employment, being a nanny can have more profound rewards than any other form of employment. It gives you the opportunity to create loving relationships that may last for the rest of your life. What a wonderful way to have a positive influence on young lives!

Many of the responsibilities of a nanny are similar to those of a babysitter, but a nanny is a professional position that requires much more. If one makes the mistake of approaching the career with a casual attitude or enters the field choosing to take it lightly, it will be difficult to find and keep employment. Taking care of other people's children is a privilege and a serious commitment. Often, families will want to hire people with backgrounds or degrees/certifications in childcare or education, particularly Early Childhood Education. These are not necessary, but they do give families a measure of confidence that the field holds interest for the nanny and that she/he is serious about pursuing a career in this area. A nanny with a degree or certification in education will be a great resource for the family when it comes to learning and behavioral issues as the children grow.

Despite one's educational background, the most important qualification a nanny can hold is one of responsibility. Families will be looking for applicants with the maturity to take responsibility for the care of their children. They will expect the nanny to look after their children with kindness and keep them safe, just as they would. A nanny is in the strange position of not being a relative but always having to ask herself/himself, "How would I behave if I were the parent?" Eventually, this question will fade, and the behavior will become instinctive.

When you are a nanny, either part-time or full-time, you supplement the family dynamic in a way that can be very rewarding, if you live up to the expectations of your employers. Herein lies the fundamental issue of the profession: expectations. Before accepting a position, it is critical that both parties (the potential nanny and the family) are clear about their expectations...leave nothing to assumption! Every detail should be discussed and put into writing. If you expect to have holidays off, to get paid extra for working weekends, to have paid sick days, etc., all of these requests need to be settled prior to accepting employment.

However, even if you think you have considered every possible scenario, there will always be issues that surprise you. This is why it is important to have excellent communication with the family. Weekly or monthly meetings should be arranged to discuss the finer points of family life that arise, or major issues that need sorting. The employer-employee relationship should not disintegrate even when one feels as though she is a member of the family. Serious issues should be discussed with other nannies and professionals in the field before approaching the family. Sometimes, for example,

nannies will find that they disagree with the parenting-style of the family or decisions made by the family that affect the children. It is easy to become very protective of your charges! It may be difficult to know when to step in and raise these issues and when to let the family proceed on its own course.

Nannies come from a variety of backgrounds and age-groups – from college students to mothers of grown children. Some positions may require only a few hours a week, while others will require the nanny to live-in and work 60 hours a week. The nanny may be required to simply get the children to and from school, or she may be responsible for all daily activities, including cooking, laundry, and some cleaning. Again, the nanny's responsibilities will depend upon the family's needs and expectations. As far as pay goes, this will depend upon the time commitment, job requirements, and the market of a particular region.

The International Nanny Association (INA) (www.nanny.org) is a tremendous resource for those contemplating work in this area. The INA recently completed a survey called the "2009 INA Salary and Benefits Survey Recap." It provides excellent information regarding how much nannies of different regions and with different time commitments got paid, how they found their positions, tax information, and various other issues of compensation. Almost anything you would want to know about being a nanny can be found at this site. In addition, talking with nannies, both current and retired, is an excellent way to get first-hand information and detailed stories about their experience and what you might expect from the job.

Becoming a nanny can be an enriching and life-changing experience for everyone involved! Do your research and consider stepping into this rewarding field.

All the best to you and your family,

The NannyPro Team