

Tips for Hiring an In-Home Caregiver for your Child

Child care that meets your family’s needs is critical to your ability to be succeed at your work or studies and your role as a parent. Welcoming someone into your home, into your life and around your children is one of the most important, difficult and personal decisions you make as parents. You should feel confident that your child’s physical, emotional, social and intellectual needs are understood and met by the person you have chosen.

Since locating high quality child care takes time, it is a good idea to begin your search before you might need child care, thus allowing yourself time to make a thoughtful decision. In the New York City area, infants and toddlers (children under age 24 months) are often cared for by in home caregivers. This type of child care takes place in your home, or that of a family member, relative or caregiver. The caregiver may have some additional responsibilities other than caring for your child (cooking, laundry, errand-running). When caregivers live in your home they generally work for room and board plus salary. In-home child care is often the most costly form of child care but can be the most flexible arrangement.

Glossary of Terms

Nanny or Caregiver is someone who looks after the child or children of another person. Nannies and Caregivers usually go to the home of the child to take care of him/her.

Au Pair is someone who is living as part of a family household while caring for the children. Monetary compensation is provided in addition to room and board. The terms comes from the French term au pair meaning “equal to” or “on par” indicating that the au pair is intended to become a member of the family, albeit a temporary one.

Babysitter is someone hired to care for another’s child or children. This term is commonly used to refer to teenagers who provide care on a part time basis.

Back-Up Child Care is a program offered by employers to assist staff when normal care arrangements are interrupted or when short term care is needed.

Nanny Share is the practice of hiring one childcare provider whose services and compensation is shared between two or more families.

There are many ways to find a candidate who will meet your in home care needs. Some ways have more safeguards in place than others, and it is important that you do your share of diligence during the process. Below are some tips to help you in your search for an in-home caregiver:

Questions to Ask Yourself as You Begin the Search and Define Your Needs

1. What level of experience do you want the caregiver to have?
2. Are there any additional qualifications that are important to you?
3. Are there safety certifications that you would like the caregiver to have?
4. What type of schedule do you expect the caregiver to keep?
5. Is driving required?
6. In addition to child care, what jobs do you want the caregiver to do?
7. What additional compensation would you include (transportation, food, cell phone)? Do you know the rate of pay in your community and are your expectations aligned with them? Who will pay the taxes?
8. What benefits or holidays do you want to offer? How do you prefer the caregiver to request time off?
9. Do you want the caregiver to travel with your family? How is that compensated?
10. How many and what kinds of references do you want?
11. Do you want to require a background check?
12. Does the caregiver need to pass a background check?
13. Do you have a review process in place?

Where to Look for an In-home Caregiver

- Post your job in the classified section of local newspapers or websites, with an agency that specializes in child care providers,
- Ask friends and neighbors
- Review listings at neighboring schools, parenting groups, libraries, community centers, churches and synagogues and pediatricians' offices.

Some listings may be free of charge while others have fees associated with them.

Conducting Your Search

1. Cull the responses to keep the process manageable. We suggest that you start with the top six candidates who best match your criteria based upon their response to your job listing.
2. Decide where you want to do the interview. Conduct telephone interviews or check search agency reviews about candidates in order to narrow down the number of candidates.
3. You might want to meet the candidate initially at a neutral location (a local coffee shop for instance) rather than in your home. A second interview can be done in your home to allow you to see how a candidate interacts with your child.
4. Create a list of questions to ask your candidates before the meeting.

You might want to use the in-home parent and child caregiver interview sheet to see samples of questions. Don't be afraid to include your partner or older children in the process. It might be advantageous to watch them interact with each candidate.

5. Check the references provided by your candidate and consider conducting a background check through one of many national services available online. Once you have your top final candidates, check their references by phone or email. For sample questions, you might want to consult the checking references resource sheet. Consider spending money on a background check as many search agencies which charge fees often include background checks of their candidates
6. Make your offer to the candidate who best meets your family's needs. Consider a trial amount of time with a performance review to allow both of you time to assess the situation and discuss any concerns. Consider creating a written agreement that outlines work hours, vacation and sick days and any other policies that are important to your family.
7. Some families choose to enter a cooperative care arrangement, referred to as nanny sharing, in which two or more families join their resources to hire one caregiver who will care for all of their children in one home or alternate among the families' homes. Such an arrangement is often more expensive than group care arrangements such as family day care or day care centers, but costs less than hiring an in-home caregiver for one or two children in the same family.

Few regulations apply to care provided in your own home. No license is required of the caregiver. There are employer guidelines related to immigration status and permission to work as well as paying federal Social Security and other employment related benefits. To find out about Social Security withholding you can call Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at 1-800-829-1040 and request the publication, "Employment Taxes for Household Employees," or go to the IRS web site at http://www.irs.gov/forms_pubs/ to download the form.

RESOURCES connected to this article:

Parent Candidate Interview Sheet

Reference Questions Resource Sheet