

# NANNY MAGAZINE

WINTER 2023

**10**  
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**EXPECT**  
**WHEN**  
**BECOMING A**  
**NANNY**

**5 Tips**  
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**THE POWER OF**  
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**WHY ANNUAL**  
**PERFORMANCE**  
**REVIEWS**  
**MATTER**

**BUILDING**  
**CONNECTION**  
**FROM BIRTH**

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WINTER 2023



# NM

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Michelle LaRowe

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
Michelle LaRowe

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Giovanna Bali, Tina Bannon, Alejandra Del Valle, Sue Downey, Stephanie Felzenberg, Kellie Geres, Emily Gladson, Michelle LaRowe, Guy Maddalone, Kristy Jane Ruscoe, Kristin Sarmiento, Brooke Weglarz, and Ashley Zsofka.

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### FOUNDER

Jennifer Kuhn, MPS

### ADVISORY BOARD

Daniel Butcher, Louise Dunham, Angela Johnson, Michelle LaRowe, Cate Matijevich, Tonya Sakowicz, Stella Reid

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### Happy Winter!

As I was preparing this issue for publication, it struck me. This is our tenth issue since purchasing *Nanny Magazine* and transforming it into the digital trade publication that you know - and hopefully love -today.

Per my usual preparing process, content is reviewed for balance, representation, and meaningfulness. Sometimes during that process, a clear theme for the issue emerges, other times, it takes a bit of flushing out. As you read through this issue, you'll see that connection is top of mind.

From building connections with the children in your care, to maintaining connections with prior employers for positive references, to perusing the calendar of events designed specifically for nannies, the value of connection in our industry cannot be understated.

As we embark on a new season, it's my hope we do so with intention to purposefully connect with those in our industry. It's connection that strengthens our industry and its connection that strengthens the individuals within it.



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Visit [NannyMag.com](http://NannyMag.com) to learn how to get published.



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## Nanny Snow Days

For many nannies and families, winter brings concerns surrounding inclement weather. If you have not developed your plan for dealing with winter weather storms, now is the time.

Topics to address when formulating your plan include expectations surrounding inclement weather commuting, dealing with non-travel advisories and school and community closings, managing mid-day changes of weather, and alternative childcare arrangements.

Discussing if the nanny can stay at the family's home, should she wish, during a storm, determining when it's too bad to drive, and how travel related changes of plans will be communicated are important conversations to have prior to the start of the stormy season.

Once you have come to consensus on your plan, be sure to put it in writing so that everyone is clear on the expectations and agreements.



**The Great British Nanny Conference** will be held September 30, 2023 in London, England. To learn more or to purchase your ticket, visit <https://uknanny.org/event/the-great-british-nanny-conference-2023/>.

**The US Nanny Association** will hold its annual conference in 2023. More information will be available on their website. Visit [usnanny.org/conference/](https://usnanny.org/conference/) for conference updates as they become available.

**Nannypalooza** will be held October 6-8, 2023 at the Hilton Washington, DC Dulles. For conference updates, to purchase your ticket, and to learn more about this annual event, please visit [www.nannypalooza.com](http://www.nannypalooza.com).

The 2023 **APNA Conference** will be held September 20-23, 2023 in St. Pete Beach, Florida. Visit [theapna.org/](http://theapna.org/) for updates as they become available.

In March, 2023 **Team Nanny Island** will be offering a training in the Philippines. DM @nannykimonthego on Instagram for more information.

**The Whole Nanny Self Care Retreat** will be held March 3-5, 2023 in Denver, Colorado. To learn more visit <https://www.nannytees.com/register>.

**International Nanny Training Day** will be celebrated April 22, 2023. More information about this event can be found at [nannypalooza.com/nntd.html](http://nannypalooza.com/nntd.html) as it becomes available.

**The International Nanny Association** will be hosting its 2023 Annual Conference May 4-7, 2023 in Orlando, Florida. Please visit [inaconference.org/](http://inaconference.org/) to register or learn more about this event.

The 2023 **NCS Enrichment Conference** will be held June 1st - 4th, 2023 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Visit [www.ncscon.com](http://www.ncscon.com) to learn more.

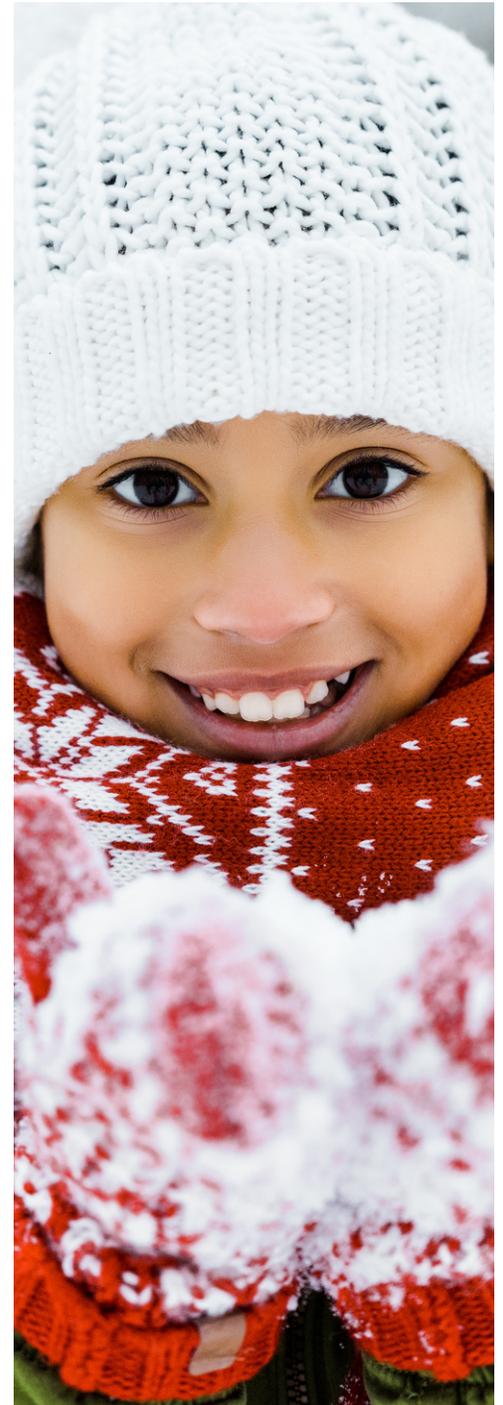
For nanny specific training that can be accessed online and completed at your own pace, please visit [NannyTraining.com](http://NannyTraining.com) and [GlobalNannyTraining.com](http://GlobalNannyTraining.com) to view the full course catalogs.

## Nanny Industry Calendar of Events

To add your event to this listing, please email [info@NannyMag.com](mailto:info@NannyMag.com).

## Fair and Legal Pledge

Nanny Magazine has taken the Fair and Legal pledge. To learn more, visit [FairandLegalPay.com](http://FairandLegalPay.com).





## EXPERT TIPS

# BUILDING CONNECTION FIRST

By Tina Bannon

What is Connection First? Essentially, it's my entire childcare and child development philosophy in two words.

Who am I? I'm just a mom and a nanny trying to do things a little better than we did before, hoping we're giving children the tools they need to improve even more.

I've been in this field for over twenty years. I went to school for early childhood education. I've worked in every kind of childcare center, from ones that really shouldn't be in operation to ones I'd like to clone worldwide. I've had a home daycare and volunteered at church nurseries and women's shelters. I've been a private nanny. In my career, I've met hundreds of children and parents and dozens of teachers and administrators. I've spent most of my life learning about child development from every source and angle I can find.

Twenty-plus years, and I've found the basis for success and challenges primarily comes down to the kind of connection the child has with their grown-ups. Too often, children are seen and treated as nonbeings. Like extensions of ourselves. Like beings for us to shape and mold to our purposes. Far too often, I see a child's thoughts, feelings, security, autonomy, and agency treated as afterthoughts, rather than essential parts of the equation. Far too often, I see adults focus on the behavior of a child before tending to their connection with the child.

Think about the people you admire. Think of the teachers, adults, and bosses you've had throughout your life. What is the one thing all the ones who really reached you had in common? They saw you first, then focused on what the world wants from you. They approached challenges with you at the center, not your performance. When have you been most confident? When your intrinsic value was celebrated, not just what you did or didn't do.

Is it so strange to think that kids feel the same about human relationships? We understand basic child development: kids walk, drink, eat, and climb like we do. Not as sophisticated, not as

practiced, but it's essentially the same activity. Why is it such a stretch to believe that feelings are the same?

So from the moment a child is created, it's important to see them as people first. New people, for sure, but people. But what does that look like?

For one, consent. I'm passionate about consent. I believe it is the basis of all human interactions and how we best treat each other with respect and dignity. But what can a baby consent to, right? I mean, we must change their diapers, and we want to hug and kiss them, right?

I begin teaching and modeling consent at birth by respecting their autonomy. A few basic examples: If a baby turns away from me and doesn't want to be picked up, I don't pick them up unless I must for their health or safety.

When they are older, I tell them, "You are in charge of your body and your choices. No one else is in charge of them," "You are only in charge of your body and choices. You are not in charge of anyone else's body or choices," and "Yes, you are in charge of your body and choices. But I'm in charge of making sure that your body and choices are safe, healthy, and mindful of others. And so, you have to put your shoes on because it's not safe to go to school without shoes. Do you want to wear your sneakers or your dinosaur shoes?"

I ask, "Would you like a hug? No? Okay, you're in charge of your hugs."

I teach them that they never have to keep a secret that makes them uncomfortable. "If anybody asks you not to tell anyone but that makes you feel bad, it's okay to tell a grown-up that you trust." And I teach them the difference between a secret and a surprise.

I evolve the lessons as they grow.

This teaches them from day one that I see them as a person first. It tells them they have power. It tells them they can trust me because I'm not going to use my size, age, or position to bully them into doing what I want. It means that from birth, they learn about boundaries. They learn to enforce them. They learn to respect them in others.

Now the child feels physically safe with me. My other job is to connect emotionally. I do this by letting them know that all emotions are valid and okay. It's okay if you hate me right now. It's okay if you're scared. Sometimes saying you're scared is a brave thing to do. I do this by centering the impact of my response to the child over the behavior I want to see.

So, it's okay to be angry. I get mad too. And I let the kids see that I'm angry. Or scared. Or overwhelmed. Empathy is a powerful validation tool. Plus if they never see that we are angry, how can we model how to process anger? And mistakes. I make mistakes. And I own up to them. I recently had a conversation with the four-year-old I nanny. I was just cranky that day. And when I was putting him to bed, we talked about how Miss Tina was cranky. I told him that I was sorry, that just because my inside feelings were yucky, it was not okay to use a mean voice with him. We talked about how he saw Miss Tina take a deep breath and count to four. (Thanks, Daniel Tiger!) By the end of it, our bond was even closer because he learned that even grownups have bad days.

I could let my pride refuse to own up to my mistakes. I could choose not to reflect on the impact my actions have. I could yell. I could spank. I could put them in time-out. Or I can connect. I can teach them that healthy authority can always be questioned. I can teach them they should always understand why, and if they don't, ask. I can teach them that who they are is the most important part of them. I can teach them early on that feelings are okay so that when they encounter these feelings as an adult, they are old pros at regulating their lives. I can teach them that people matter first, because they have always mattered first.

Imagine, for just a moment, a world of adults who have been empowered and valued from birth. What a world that would be!

Build it with me?



**Tina Bannon** is a nanny to three curious and cuddly boys under five in Phoenix, Arizona. She has over twenty years of experience working with children in various settings, from traditional childcare centers to women's shelters. She is passionate about childcare and educating others, which she channels through her Facebook group, Connection First Caregivers. In her free time, she is an activist, sings karaoke, and spends time with her family and friends.

To learn more about Connection First and to join the online Connection First community, visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/895352244738035>.

## GAIN ADVANCED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & CERTIFICATION

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# ASK THE NANNY

Dear Stephanie,

Since COVID, my employers have started working from home more and letting me go home early when they do. This is great, except I am losing money I count on in my check each week. I recently learned that guaranteed hours are a standard industry practice. I have been with this family for two years, so this isn't in my contract. How do I bring this up?

Big City Nanny



Dear Big City Nanny,

You might want to explain to your employers that you can't afford to work for any family that won't pay you a guaranteed living wage fifty-two weeks per year.

Without guaranteed hours, it is hard for you to budget and pay your bills on time. You need to know what to expect every pay period so you can plan accordingly.

In exchange for guaranteed payment, you guarantee that you are available to work for their family during those hours. You should be willing to work by coming to your nanny family's house to organize children's living and play areas, bring in mail, or care for pets.

You also guarantee those work hours are dedicated to them. You won't apply for or work any other job during that time.

If you are available and willing to work, but your employers do not need you to work, then you would be paid as usual for those hours.

Best of luck,

Stephanie Felzenberg

## GUARANTEED HOURS

### WHAT

Guaranteed hours are the minimum number of hours a nanny is guaranteed to be paid each week.

### WHEN

While not legally required, most knowledgeable nannies will require guaranteed hours as part of an accepted job offer.

### WHY

Since nannies are classified as non-exempt (hourly) employees in the US, guaranteed hours ensure a nanny earns a consistent paycheck.

### HOW

A nanny is paid her guaranteed hours each week, whether the families utilize them or not. If a family comes home early and lets the nanny go, she is still paid for her minimum hours scheduled each week.

### Stephanie Felzenberg

Stephanie Felzenberg has been a nanny, family assistant, and newborn care specialist for more than twenty-five years. As well as having a bachelor's degree, she has earned the US Nanny Association Newborn and Infant Care (NICP) credential. She has been the "Nanny Advice" columnist for Nanny Magazine since 2013, is the US Nanny Association newsletter editor, and publishes a blog at [bethebestnanny.com](http://bethebestnanny.com).

Stephanie



Submit Your Questions to Stephanie  
[info@NannyMag.com](mailto:info@NannyMag.com)

# AGENCY ADVICE

**FROM ALEJANDRA DEL VALLE  
LA LUNE SITTERS MONTREAL**

*Dear Agency Owner,*

*I am not new to nannying, but I am new to the subjects of legal pay, work agreements, and other professional resources and employer responsibilities. I have worked with a family for forty hours per week for three years. I know now, from nanny groups and online, that I am making much less than what others make, and I am not being paid legally. How do I approach this with the family? The job is great, the kids and I are connected, and I don't want to quit. I do want to be paid legally and earn fair wages.*

*Hoping for help.*

Dear Hoping for Help,

I would like to introduce myself; I am Alejandra, a nanny agency owner in Montreal, Canada, with an eighteen-year career in childcare as a nanny, and educator, and five years as a nanny agency owner.

I am so glad to hear you have a great connection with the kids and that you enjoy your job. However, it is important you are paid legally and earn a wage that you feel comfortable with. My recommendation is to

## **Alejandra Del Valle**

Alejandra, who hails from Mexico but lives in Canada, is a highly knowledgeable childcare provider with over eighteen years of experience as a live-in nanny, full-time and part-time nanny, babysitter, educator, and more. With a certification as an ABA therapist and support worker, Alejandra has filled roles as a special-needs therapist with nonprofit organizations and educational childcare institutions. Known for her warm, loving, and compassionate nature, Alejandra has a natural connection with children. Her approach is based on empathy, trust, and respect. With a keen sense of observation, Alejandra always finds ways to adapt to children's needs and engage with them in a fun and respectful manner. In the summer of 2017, she founded La Lune Sitters Montreal, and since then, Alejandra has created a beautiful community for families and nannies, following the core values of loving care, inclusion, and professional and quality service.



have a conversation with the family, ideally when the kids are not around. Communication is key when you work as a nanny. Once you agree to have a meeting, prepare for your meeting by listing the points you want to go over (e.g., wages, legal pay, and having a contract). Do research on how much nannies with your experience are getting paid in your area; there are great resources out there. Once you meet with the family, mention how much you enjoy the job and how special your connection with the kids is. Then you can go over the points that are important to you and come to an agreement with your employers, making sure everything is written in a contract. Often families are misinformed, and you can share resources about payroll companies, INA resources, nanny pay scales in your area, et cetera. Once you come to an agreement, make sure you feel comfortable with it. I hope my advice was helpful. You should be compensated for your experience and qualifications, and moreover, you should be paid legally as an employee.



## FINDING YOUR NICHE

# A SPECIAL NEEDS NANNY

EMILY GLADSON

Emily Gladson has over ten years of nanny experience and holds her degree from Ball State University in elementary education, with minors in Spanish and psychology. Based in Broad Ripple, an area of Indianapolis, Indiana, she resides with her boyfriend, two dogs, one cat, and five chickens. Emily recently completed a course and was trained at the associate level for the Orton Gillingham Reading Approach to aid in her work caring for special needs children.

### Before You Leave

I get my schedule every Sunday night, and I look over the week and prepare as needed. My day usually starts at 9:00 a.m. My little one has two hours of therapy every Monday and Friday. On those days, I make sure I have everything packed for therapy. I make sure I have a plan for each day so we are not sitting in the house bored. My little one made a goal of wanting to visit every water park within driving distance of the family's house this summer. Every Sunday, I map out where the parks are, find out what amenities and activities they have, and make a list of options so my little one knows the options to choose from. She struggles with making decisions sometimes, so I have found if I provide her with two to four options, she can decide a lot easier. I pack a bag with everything we could need for the day.

### While You Are There

My list of responsibilities could go on for a mile! That is one of the reasons why I truly enjoy my job. Every day is different! But every day, I must make sure my little one completes her list of items. It includes chores, one hour of schoolwork, learning a new sign, and doing yoga stretches. While she is getting ready in the morning, I prepare the lessons that we will do that day. We do twenty minutes of reading, math, and phonics. I build each day's lesson upon the previous day's and consider her opinions and interests when creating the lessons. She enjoys using her hands and feeling different textures, so we often use flour, sugar, manipulatives, Play-Doh, slime, and anything she can play with. I plan activities that use multiple learning styles. I always include two or more different learning styles in each lesson. This is the best way to go for any learner. These activities use a combination of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading- or writing-based learning. For example, a math lesson could include using some dice to come up with a problem (kinesthetic), writing the problem down (writing), and saying the problem and answer out loud (auditory).

Since my little one is losing the ability to speak, communicating is extremely difficult. To help with this, we started learning American Sign Language (ASL). She can communicate her needs and wants to be better at using signs. It can be challenging, though, because everyone in the house is learning ASL together.

It can be difficult to remember what every sign is and means. To help, I made a list with all of the signs that we have learned, along with pictures showing the signs. While I am preparing the lessons in the morning, I also decide what sign we will be learning and teach it to myself. I try to use applicable signs that my little one will use, such as banana, cookie, dog, play, and bathroom.

Some days are spent entirely driving kids to school, appointments, and sports. Some days we spend the entire day doing fun things, like going to the water park, seeing movies, playing putt-putt, visiting the arcade, and swimming. I do the laundry for the house, organize pantries and cabinets, and clean heavily traveled areas of the house. I restock the pantries, pick up groceries, obtain or drop off important forms, send faxes, run errands that the parents cannot get to, watch the dog, check on the house while the family is on vacation, call and schedule HVAC maintenance and carpet cleaning, pick up and drop off the family at the airport, help set up parties, and do literally anything else the parents need of me!

We like to go to parks all over the city. Parks can be difficult for my little one, though, so I have to help her play and climb. She is unable to climb stairs independently, so if stairs or climbing are involved, I have to help her by lifting her legs.

### What You Do After

I leave work by 5:30 p.m. and try to come up with a plan for the following day. If there are no appointments or obligations, I will have some ideas for places to go or crafts and activities to do at home. I often bring supplies from my house to aid in crafts or activities. When I get home, I get those supplies together and put them by my purse so I don't forget them. On the occasion I do forget, my little loves to come to my house to retrieve the supplies and spend some time with my animals. I am fortunate that I don't have to spend much time at home preparing for the following day. After I have the supplies I need ready by my purse, I spend the evening relaxing with my boyfriend and animals.

My job is unique, and I love it! I have been with this family for four years and am so lucky to have found such a great family!

# WHY ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS MATTER

By **Guy Maddalone**

Performance reviews are standard in traditional work environments. Nannies and families also can benefit from them to help build successful working relationships.

An annual performance review is a good time to communicate feedback, set goals for the year, talk about personal job growth and look at areas for improvement. It is an opportunity to review how a nanny is meeting the objectives of the household and what they have accomplished.

Nannies and families shouldn't wait until an annual review for these talks. Informal discussions about job performance and goals are encouraged and expected throughout the year.

## How Performance Reviews Should Work

A best practice in household employment is to conduct a formal written performance review at the end of a nanny's introductory period and then on a scheduled basis, which can be annually or every six months. A nanny contract should detail when these performance reviews are conducted. When reviewing a nanny's work performance, the focus should be on their job performance and not necessarily on their personality.

During the performance review, nannies and families should be as positive as possible but also discuss topics in a straightforward manner and speak frankly. A family will cite specific examples of when their nanny has exceeded, met, or failed job expectations and set reasonable goals to work toward so their nanny can develop and improve their skills.

Discussion topics in a performance review can include

- Recent achievements
- Ways to improve
- Skills that were developed
- Feedback on the work environment
- Future expectations
- Employee strengths
- New practices for the household
- Clarification on responsibilities

A nanny can also share their observations and provide feedback on a family's performance as a household employer to help build a better working relationship and keep everyone satisfied with the employment arrangement.

It's also a good idea for families to let their nannies examine their performance review and, if they desire, provide a written opinion of their own to be added to the review and placed in their personnel file. Both the family and nanny should sign the review before it's filed.

## How to Ask for a Performance Review

A family may not be familiar with the role of performance reviews in household employment. A great place to start is to request that annual (or six-month) reviews be included in a nanny contract. Nannies can let their families know that receiving constructive feedback on job performance can help them improve in their roles. It's vital to get that direct insight into a family's expectations and opinions of their work.

Asking for a performance review also displays self-awareness and accountability, shows that a nanny is proactive in their role, and demonstrates a commitment to helping the family. If performance reviews aren't formalized in a nanny contract, here are some steps a nanny can take to ask for one:

- *Choose the right time.* Approach a family when they aren't busy or preoccupied with other tasks. Maybe ask for a few minutes before or after a shift. Perhaps text or email ahead of time.
- *Be formal in a request.* Show a family that this is important, and explain the reasoning behind the request.
- *Emphasize the benefits of feedback.* Talk about the value of regular feedback benefiting both parties. Evaluations can motivate employees to work more effectively, which is also a big benefit for families.

When a family agrees to a performance review, a nanny should be prepared to talk about areas of improvement, goals for the year, and other topics the family brings up.



**Guy Maddalone**

Guy Maddalone has more than 30 years of experience in the payroll, human resource, and employment services industries. In 1991, he founded GTM Payroll Services to provide payroll, tax, compliance, and insurance administration for families that hired a nanny or other household employees. Guy is also the author of *How to Hire a Nanny: Your Complete Guide to Finding, Hiring, and Retaining Household Help* and *How to Hire a Caregiver for Your Senior: Your Complete Guide to Finding, Employing, and Retaining In-Home Help*.

**Performance Reviews and Pay Increases**

A performance review may also be a time to consider a pay increase.

A 2022 survey by GTM Payroll Services of household employers showed that 30% of families have increased their nanny’s hourly rate by \$4.00 or more in the last three years, while another 38% boosted pay between \$1.00 and \$3.00 per hour.

Especially in a tight labor market, families should be evaluating their nanny’s pay rate—at the very least on an annual basis—to make sure it’s still competitive in the marketplace so caregivers don’t look for a higher paying job elsewhere.

It should be clear, however, that pay increases are awarded in light of significant performance and at a family’s discretion. They are not to be considered guaranteed.

Pay increases may be evaluated on

- Ability to perform all job tasks and functions
- Attendance and punctuality
- Willingness to work
- Ability to cooperate with the family and any other members of the household
- Adherence to all household policies

In addition to pay increase considerations, families could also entertain additional benefits for their Nanny, including health care options and a retirement plan.

**Cost-of-Living Adjustments**

A family can consider a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), which is different from a merit-based pay increase. A COLA makes up for inflation. When the cost of living goes up by a certain percentage, a family can increase employee wages by the same percentage. For example, if the cost-of-living increases 2%, then the family would increase their nanny’s wages by the same percentage.

If the cost of living goes down, the nanny doesn’t get a pay cut. Instead, the family likely won’t give a COLA that year.

Giving a COLA helps keep a nanny’s wages reasonable compared to their living expenses and helps ensure they aren’t forced to look elsewhere for higher-paying work. A COLA could be part of a nanny contract.

**Bottom Line**

As always, both families and nannies should keep communication lines open, listen to what the other party has to say, and approach childcare and the performance review as a team effort.

Nanny Magazine is the premiere trade publication for the in-home childcare industry. Nanny Magazine’s readers are nannies who care for children ranging in age from newborn through age 18 and industry related professionals.

Nanny Magazine will cover:

- Current nanny industry trends, issues, and events
- Industry related news
- Hot topics affecting the nannies and children
- Useful products and resources that are of benefit to nannies
- Practical advice by industry professionals
- Nanny and industry leader profiles
- Advertisements geared towards professionals in the nanny industry.

The magazine covers everything from a nanny’s relationship with their charges to their complex relationship with the parents. The magazine offers provoking features on hot topics, advice for nannies who are experiencing ethical dilemmas on the job, and relevant information about tax laws and legally binding contracts.

Deadlines are as follows for the digital publication:

- Deadline: September 15 for January 1 Winter Issue
- Deadline: December 15 for April 1 Spring Issue
- Deadline: March 15 for July 1 Summer Issue
- Deadline: June 15 for October 1 Fall Issue

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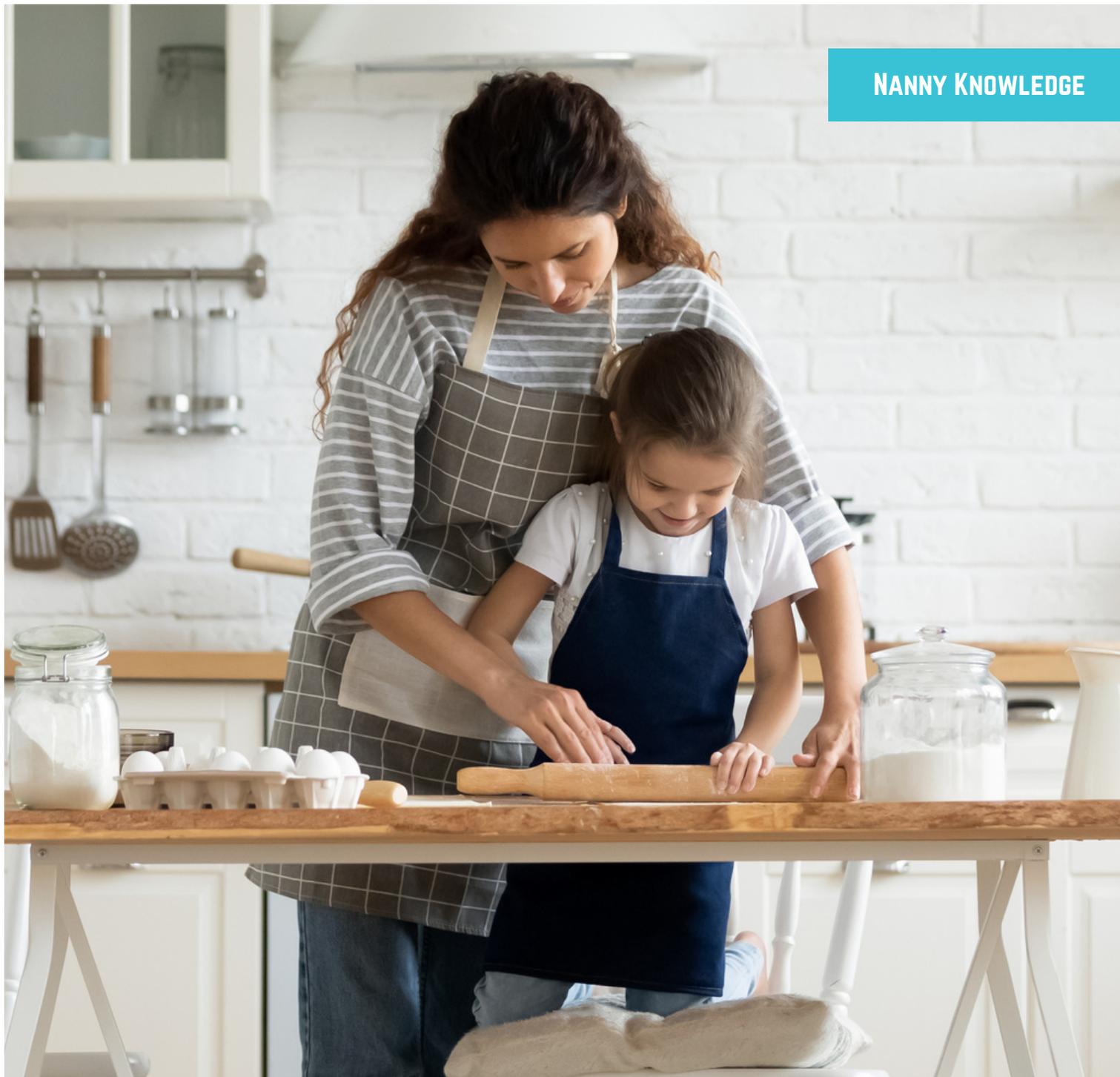
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# ON-THE-JOB MEAL PLANNING AND PREPARATION

BY GIOVANNA BALISTRERI

While Giovanna Balistreri calls Italy home, she has been a nanny in Europe for over 20 years working in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Although she has experience working with children of all ages, her area of expertise is caring for children ages 0-3. Giovanna operates the Facebook Page *Tata Gio. Nanny*, where she shares her childcare philosophy, thoughts, and her day to day projects. She also founded the Facebook Group *Nanny in Europe*, where she shares her experiences working abroad while creating a global community for nannies to connect.

As we know, cooking for children is a significant part of the job when working as a nanny. And while this may not be the most exciting part of a nanny's job, it is most definitely necessary.

At some point, usually around age two, children start to be more aware of what they eat and may begin to refuse certain foods. This can create challenges. But if you have a few tricks up your sleeves, you can overcome them.

Because eating habits are learned like most everything else in life, by imitation, I always strive to ensure that the children are served at least one meal per day with everyone sitting together at the table.

This is also why I always introduce children to new foods and try them too. In my own family, for example, we never ate lentils or chickpeas. While we ate other protein-rich legumes, these two were not part of what was served. While working my first live-in nanny job, I learned to cook lentils in tomato sauce, then more recently discovered that they can be used in salads, like chickpeas, which I have come to prefer.

I have also discovered over the years, that children can become overwhelmed when presented with big portions. At the beginning of my career, I would offer foods on separate plates, but I noticed that the children would not eat. I then began to offer smaller amounts of each food on one plate and noticed the children would eat bits of everything, including the vegetables in plain sight. I believe this is a better approach to encouraging healthy eating and camouflaging less-desired food.

To increase the consumption of and interest in new foods, have the children help with food preparation. With the parents' permission, I teach the children to use a plastic knife and give them a task like cutting cucumber or another soft veggie or fruit that will be served with their meal. Most of the time, the children will eat what they are cutting, and we serve this as the appetizer so I have time to finish preparing and serving the main meal.

And speaking of saving time, be sure to use seasonal and local products when cooking, serve finger foods one night a week, and cut down on preparation time to help keep them interested in mealtime. When juggling care for the children and food prep, shortcuts like cooking pasta in the same pot and with the same water used to cook the vegetables can decrease prep time and increase food flavors. Starting meal prep during nap time or downtime can also be a huge time-saver.

It is important to acknowledge that eating habits can vary, depending on the country you are working in and the family you are working for. Growing up in an Italian family has me conditioned to meal plan based on what I am familiar with. I grew up eating pasta and other carbohydrates like rice, barley, orzo, and gnocchi for lunch and a meat or fish dish for dinner. Fruit was usually the dessert because we tried to avoid a sugar rush before nap time or night sleep.

For an afternoon snack, we would have a healthy sweet like yogurt or homemade cookies, cake, or ice cream in the summer, with the thought that children will have enough time to burn it up before the next meal.

But when I worked in Germany, I discovered that the family would serve one hot meal a day. The families I worked with while there were very surprised I would prepare cooked food twice per day.

As I have grown in my career, I have discovered these few things have helped children increase their nutrition, regardless of where I work or who I am working for. These tips have become my modus operandi when cooking for the children in my care, and I hope they help you too.

## Winter Meal Ideas

Vegetable Broth with Noodles  
Vegetable Omelettes  
Lentils and Protein  
Pasta with Protein

## Spring Meal Ideas

Pasta with Tomato Sauce  
Chicken and Salad  
Peas, Burgers, and Mashed Potatoes  
Pasta with Pesto  
Fish and Vegetables

## Summer Meal Ideas

Cold Pasta Dish  
Couscous and Protein with Vegetables  
Rice and Vegetables  
Seafood with Pasta

## Fall Meal Ideas

Barley, Fish, and Salad  
Pasta with Vegetables and Lentils  
Fish and Pasta  
Egg and Protein

## Snack Ideas

Crackers and Jam  
Bread and Olive Oil  
Fresh or Dried Fruit

BY KRISTIN SARMIENTO

# LET'S DROP THE ACT AND HUG

We live in a world where exhaustion is a trophy and play is something left behind in grade school. We are expected to crush our careers, cheer the loudest at every soccer game, kick ass at chores and house management, kill it at the gym, and find time to chill child-free with people our own age—all on our own without breaking a sweat. I'm exhausted just writing it all down, and yet there is so much judgment and shame in the parenting and caregiving community. With endless supposed to, should, and I can't believe they did or didn't, we quietly judge others' food and clothing choices, discipline styles, hygiene practices, school programs, and support systems.

As an educator, professional nanny, enrichment program director, and early childhood education advocate, I have worked with countless families and children facing life's different stages. Although children experience many challenges and celebrations, one that seems to remain constant is the conflict between the adults in the room. In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Dr. Brené Brown describes this phenomenon of comparative and judgmental behavior as a byproduct of our own shame. Our society promotes "hustling to belong"—being one step ahead of everyone around you in every little thing while veiling the bumps along the road. While we let shame drive our lives and interactions with others in hopes of appearing more put together and therefore accepted, we ironically close the door to vulnerability, the root of connection.

When we look in the mirror, what's reflected back is often a collage of others' expectations of us, patched together with clothes we are supposed to wear and masked by emotions we are supposed to feel. Even well into adulthood, we are striving to fit in and be "cool." We skip over the part of the story where we forgot to close the door all the way, leaving us to chase the dog while the toddler climbed into the art cabinet and began experimenting with how many beads they could fit in their nose. We don't share the mental breakdown we had and the poetically cruel string of curse words we said to ourselves when we walked in carrying the thirty-five-pound dog and saw the scene. We compare ourselves to others and wonder how the classroom parent seems to do it all, while we silently fire off attacks their way or shame ourselves for not keeping up.

We are not compassionate to ourselves, so we cannot be truly compassionate to others. When we make a mistake, we're quick to call ourselves stupid or careless. When we see a small misstep from a coworker, we make sweeping assumptions about their work ethic and capabilities. When our kids make a mistake, we can be quick to respond, "What were you thinking?" This drive for perfection, lack of compassion, and shame root out any and all vulnerabilities and affect our relationship with ourselves and every person around us, including our nannies and childcare providers.



We're working, we're tired, we're only one person, and we can't be everywhere at once. We allow ourselves that truth and in turn start to expand our support systems. That relationship between childcare provider and family is as rewarding as it is prickly. From the nanny's perspective, their boss's home is their office. They occasionally fold their underwear, and maybe they find a surprise when organizing their boss's closet. From the family's perspective, their home is someone's office, a person they met on the internet is a part of raising their child, and they're straddling the fine line between opening up as a family and being professional.

When you invite a nanny into your village (and we all know it takes one, maybe two), you are expected to weave with each of these raw materials, all made of something completely different, into something magical, mutually beneficial, and intimate.

As parents, we want our children to be safe, loved, and engaged. As employers we want our employees to perform, thrive, and stay professional. There is an element of getting our money's worth. As people, we want to feel connected to those around us, especially those in our homes.

As nannies, we want your children to be safe, loved, and engaged. We want to be part of making your lives easier. As employees, we want to be compensated for our expertise and time, to be appreciated and told thank you, and to be respected by you and everyone that comes through your home. As people, we want to feel connected, especially with those with whom we spend the most time. The goals of each party are similar, and yet, as is the case with the parenting community, [JWI] there are times when instead of opening up, we shut down. We let the need to be perceived as a supernanny or a rockstar parent get in the way of vulnerability and truth.

It can be easy to compare, judge, criticize, and micromanage when the stakes are so high (they are your kids after all). The relationship with your nanny probably falls somewhere in the middle of extended family and line item in your taxes. By the same token, it is easy for your nanny to hold your family to the expectations of a previous employer, make silent judgments on your parenting style, or feel superior because they have a better handle on the kids' routine. The balance of power and decisions when it comes to the daily lives of your kids offers a whole lot of opportunities for the "shame gremlins," as Dr. Brown calls them, to rear their ugly heads.

We can feel shame when our nanny remembers to order the

birthday cake before we do, and we can feel shame when a parent reminds us that we don't use time-outs in their home. Instead of embracing vulnerability with "Don't worry about it! I forgot my own mother's birthday a few years back. I was scrambling like you'd never believe" or "I am so tempted to lock them in a box sometimes too. Thanks for working with us to maintain this approach," we ride our shame on our mighty horses and shy away from sharing our own missteps and failures. When we miss that opportunity to connect and instead shield others from our shame, we deflect and blame and push each other away. Language like "I always remember birthdays because I am sure to put it on my calendar" or "From my research, time-out just isn't effective and is out of date. That's why we don't use it" promotes shame and builds resentment. Dr. Brown suggests the only antidote to shame is vulnerability, which in turn leads to connection.

Vulnerability is a big ask and not always easy to initiate. However, those closest to us, like the ones helping to raise our children, are prime contenders for this sweet spot of connection. Instead of micromanaging the way your caregiver folds towels or the language they made up with your kid, allow them to truly be a part of your world. Share and open up about behavior you observe. As you both begin to share and connect (think comments like "I noticed the kids love the carrots you make. I can't get them to touch them! What's your secret?" and "I've been having a really hard time getting the kids to settle down for rest when you pop in during their nap routine. Can we think of a plan together where you can have some time with them that doesn't interrupt that flow?"), you'll find that setting and maintaining boundaries becomes easier and eases tension on all sides. After all, we can't feel connected to someone we feel is wreaking havoc on the life we are trying to build, even if deep down we know we haven't communicated the expectations clearly. Resentment from us begets resentment from them, and we all find ourselves on our own lonely islands.

The truth is, yes, we sometimes crush it, and the other truth is sometimes we don't. Allowing space for silliness and moments of truthful connection, along with compassion for yourself, is a great way to start washing away ideas of perfectionism and shame. Practicing these behaviors and exercising self-love has the added benefit of modeling these behaviors for the children in our lives. When we speak compassionately to ourselves and others, our children learn that a person's character, including their own, is not defined by a mistake. We can teach our children how to genuinely connect with themselves and the people around them simply by giving ourselves the grace of being imperfect.



Kristin is in the process of living her dreams. Each step she takes in her personal life and career carve the path that is her own little epic tale. She is a writer, educator, and nanny with a deep drive for connection, truth, and balance. She is an avid traveler. If asked whether this comes from a childhood of constant uprooting or the influence of her immigrant grandfather who never said no to opportunity, she'd have to say it's both. She values the connections and knowledge she collects from each new experience, near and far. Kristin lives with her partner and countless plants in Raleigh, North Carolina.



# 10 THINGS TO EXPECT WHEN BECOMING A NANNY

By Ashley Zsofka M.S.Ed

Ashley Zsofka grew up in western Massachusetts and graduated from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts with an interdisciplinary studies degree in children, family, and society. She most recently received a graduate degree in early childhood education studies from Capella University. With over eleven years of experience in early education as a classroom teacher, administrator, and more, she has found nannying to be her most rewarding role. Ashley currently works as a nanny and family assistant with a Massachusetts-based family and believes nannies as educators are a key component to the success of the future. She believes understanding our personal growth patterns and the reasons why we do what we do is important to an individual's success and advancement in life and career.

Switching professional roles in early childhood education from center-based care to private in-home care can be a necessary change of pace for many educators. Especially nowadays, in-home care is more sought out by families than ever before. Like any change, there are many differences for educators to consider when taking on this new role.

### **1. Agency Processes**

Just like schools, nanny agencies have their own individualized hiring processes. Things that an agency considers are a background record check, references, years of experience and education, driving records, and the successful completion of an interview (or two) and other screenings. Once you are on board with an agency, you will then interview with multiple families until a great fit is found for both parties. The process may seem daunting to some at first, and it does take time to find the right fit, but it is absolutely worth it!

### **2. Health and Safety Precautions**

Many families are still very cautious when it comes to COVID-19 and other common illnesses that can affect children. Vaccinations for COVID-19, influenza, MMR, and TDAP will most likely be required, but needs are different for each agency and family. It is also important that caregivers take extra caution when outside of the workplace, including staying aware of health concerns at social group gatherings and following extra safety precautions when traveling.

### **3. Juggling Age Groups**

Unlike in a classroom where children are separated by age group and developmental level, in-home nannies may juggle many age groups at one time. There is a need to be creative and resourceful with interactions and engagement, activities, and time management to meet every child's needs. Always being one step ahead is a skill that transfers from the classroom to the home in this aspect specifically.

### **4. Who's Your Daddy (a.k.a. Boss Structure)?**

As teachers, we become very accustomed to parents and guardians being the "middle man" regarding how we teach the children in our classroom. Of course, parental wants and opinions are always valued, but teachers are managed by the school itself, state regulations, and usually a director.

As a nanny, even when affiliated with an agency, the guardians of the children are our bosses. They're the ones we answer to daily and the ones that pay us. This unique dynamic is one to be considered when switching professional roles.

### **5. Traveling**

This is one difference that most people see as a huge advantage when working as a nanny. Although it is not a requirement for all families, it is very popular for families to seek a nanny that is comfortable with traveling alongside them. This is not the nanny's vacation in any sense—you may end up working more hours than usual (more money!) and be needed in a different capacity than normal—but being able to see the world with little ones that you enjoy spending time with is a top perk to the job!

### **6. Working with Sick Kiddos**

All childcare centers have strict guidelines about children with illness and their attendance in school. When children are sick, they are sent home. As the nanny, you are the one at home! Caring for sick little ones can be managed by following increased health precautions, lots of handwashing, and reducing the spread of germs through other methods. Nannies must be ready and willing to care for sick children so that families can continue to work and function as normally as possible.

### **7. Setting the Bar**

As teachers, we create boundaries, rules, and expectations for our students while they are in our classroom. The opposite is true in-home, where boundaries, rules, and expectations have already been set by guardians and continue to change as a family grows together. While families do value the boundaries of their caregivers as well, we must be able to bend and flow with a family's house boundaries and expectations to meet their needs and bring cohesiveness to the environment when we are present.

### **8. Household Duties**

Some everyday duties that nannies perform are a little different than those performed in a classroom. Each family will have its own set of needs, but child-related, household-related duties, such as tidying, meal preparation and child dishes, laundry, and transportation, may be required along with your nanny duties of preparing activities and making sure a daily routine is followed. Some nannies also take on more family



Ashley Zsofka

assistant or house manager roles, such as grocery shopping, running errands, pet care, and more, especially while older children attend school.

### **9. Salary Increase**

A nanny's salary tends to be significantly more than a teaching salary because families gain many advantages when hiring a nanny, including but not limited to increased one-on-one attention, consistency, travel assistance, household operation assistance, and other types of specialized care. Families tend to be more interested in candidates with prior education and experience with children in the school setting. All of these things are worth more to a family than money can buy, and they are willing to pay more for a more qualified individual, which is great for former teachers!

### **10. Time Commitments**

Family needs vary widely, especially when it comes to schedule, which is very different from the schedule of a school that is only open during typical business operating hours. While some families may be looking for twenty hours a week of care, others are looking for fifty-plus. Some families need care only in the morning hours, with only some evening and weekend hours. Some families would prefer a nanny to live in-home with them, while others are comfortable with a live-out nanny. There are families and nannies available for every schedule need.

All said and done, if you are considering switching professional roles, nanning creates a strong family-like bond between caregivers, littles, parents and guardians, family, and friends. It is a bond that simply cannot be made in a classroom environment and is forever cherished by families and nannies alike.

# 5 TIPS FOR JOB SEEKERS

While the new year brings many new job opportunities for nannies, many job seekers often ask, “Where is the best place to start my job search?”

**BY KELLIE GERES AND SUE DOWNEY**  
**OUR NANNY DIARY**

While community Facebook groups, LISTSERVs, online sites, and word of mouth are popular ways to find a job, working with a reputable agency can provide access to families you might not find on other platforms.

Agencies also offer support during your job search by providing resume-building and interview assistance, negotiating your contract and benefits, and continuing support after you’ve been placed in a position.

We’ve put together five tips to get you started on the path to a successful placement when working with an agency.

## **Tip 1. Ask for Agency Recommendations in Your Community**

You can ask for recommendations in online Facebook groups, by referring to INA or APNA member directories, or by doing a Google search with your city and nanny agency, then reading reviews. Working with an agency takes time and organization on your part.

## **Tip 2. Initiate Contact**

Your initial contact may be completing a contact form on their website, sending an email, or making a phone call. Once you’ve established contact with the agency, note with whom you have connected and find out if they will be your point of contact moving forward. This is especially important if you’re reaching out to multiple agencies. While it may be tedious, be sure to completely fill out the forms and

applications required. Agencies are specific in what they are looking for and the format they want that information, as this helps them gather what they need to present to families.

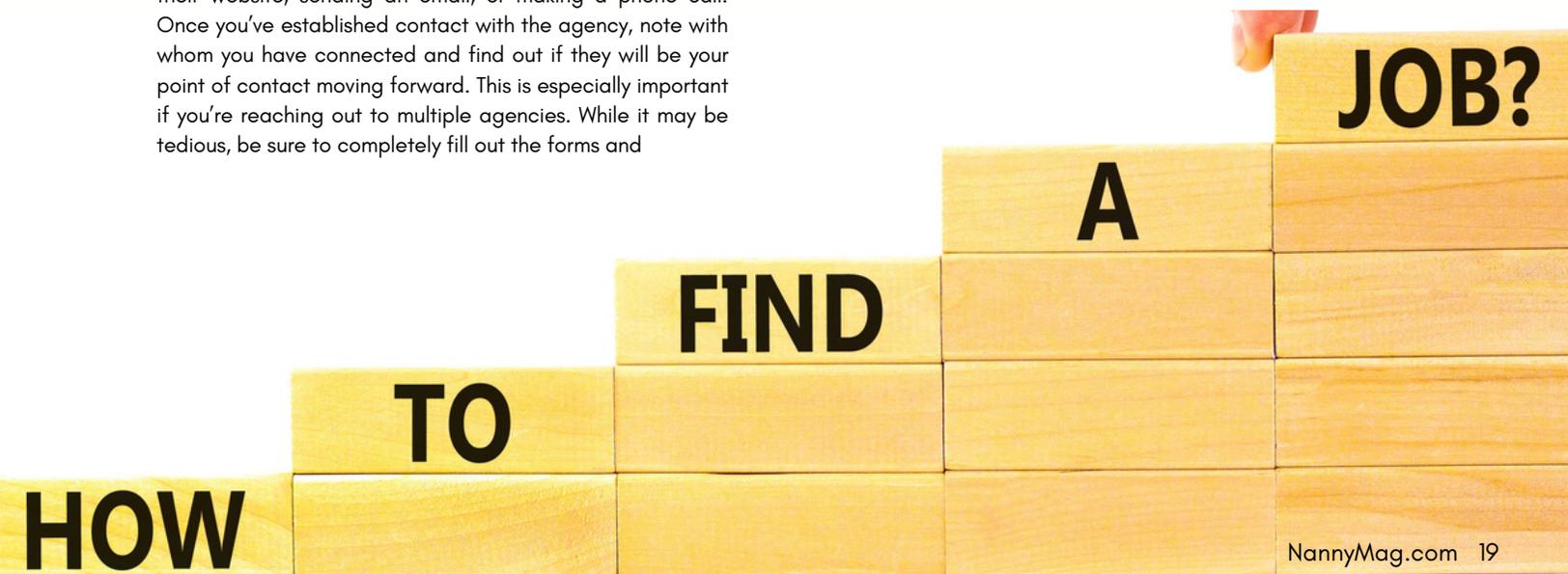
## **Tip 3. Have All Your Items Ready to Go**

Most agencies require that you have most of the following items available:

- A resume with a complete work history
- A portfolio
- Copies of your driver’s license, car insurance, and CPR/First Aid certificates, if current
- Documents that demonstrate you are legally able to work in the United States
- References and current contact information
- Trustline Certification (for California residents only)
- Proof of training or conference attendance
- Educational history

## **Tip 4. Interview the Agency and Evaluate Whether the Agency Is a Good Match for You**

Ask questions, and remember that a good agency will be a partner and advocate for you.



Questions to ask an agency include

- What is the current hourly rate for the nannies you place?
- Which companies do you refer nannies and families to for legal pay?
- What sets you apart from other agencies in your community?
- What support do you offer nannies once placed?
- What additional supports, such as nanny groups or educational opportunities, do you provide to nannies?
- Are there any fees charged to nannies to work with the agency?

**Tip 5. Stay in Touch, but Don't Be a Pest**

Agencies field hundreds of calls and emails each day. They will not usually contact you unless they have a good match for you or feedback from an interview. Check in via email occasionally to stay on their radar, but be mindful that it takes time to find a good fit.

*Our Nanny Diary has taken the hassle out of organization and keeping your information handy. Check out our Job Seekers Kit, created especially for those looking for new employment. It contains 15 pages of tips, resources, worksheets, and interview questions to make your next job search successful with agencies and parents. As a special for Nanny Magazine readers, you can save 20% on the purchase of this digital download. It is an editable PDF, with 15 pages you can print at home, and use as often as you need. Use coupon code NannyMag20.*



# WHAT NANNY AGENCIES LOOK FOR IN APPLICANTS

*"A love for children."*  
LaDawn White-Swan, Labor of Love Nanny Agency

*"A true passion for childcare."*  
Katie Provinziano, Westside Nannies

*"A commitment to professional excellence."*  
Michelle LaRowe, Morningside Nannies

## COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

# THE POWER OF THE PERSONAL REFERENCE

BY MICHELLE LAROWE

Catherine Hull, a Houston-based career nanny for over twenty years, has always found nanny jobs on her own. “I found my current job twelve and a half years ago from a Mother’s Day Out program,” she shared. “I was with another family, and the dad lost his job and was moving out of state.” Moms from her local library story time group and music classes recommend her on their Mother’s Day Out web page, which ultimately scored her the interview with her current family.

Though she did an interview with an agency once, she never took a job through one, as she was not sure if the agency would take money out of her check each week as a fee for finding her a job.

But even on her own and without the guidance of an agency, she is proud to have negotiated a written contract that includes paid time off and guaranteed wages, as well as health insurance. She encourages all nannies to always have a written work agreement. “Don’t get railroaded,” she cautioned. “Make sure you have a contract, and get everything in writing.”

But not all nannies heed her advice. Tammy Hartzog, a Houston-based nanny and household manager, does not work with a contract. “I personally do not have a formal work agreement. I am a mature adult, with strong work ethics. I can look around and see what needs to be done. This may not work for everyone, but it has worked thus far for me.”

And it has worked for her for the past several years. Hartzog, who has found all her jobs through word of mouth, did not even know online sites where people refer nannies like Hull existed—or that written work agreements were a thing.

When her marriage ended, Tammy, a housewife and homemaker for over thirty years, found herself with an obsolete skill set in the modern working world and needed financial support.



With one teenager at home and two children who were much younger, I realized that I would have to create a job for myself.”

And so, she did.

“I loved the years that I was an at-home mom. Raising children and running a large household is a huge responsibility. I decided that becoming a nanny/household manager was the perfect job for me.”

Her first position was a short-term position caring for twins that came by way of personal recommendation. “After working several short-term positions, which other nannies usually will not consider doing, as they are looking for long-term work, my name was out there.” She still relies on word of mouth alone to secure new work and feels using an agency is unnecessary because she has “built a reputation that superseded anything an agency could provide.”

And her employer agrees. Stephanie Carpenter, a parent from Houston who hired Hartzog to care for her triplets, did so by word-of-mouth referral after spending hours on nanny sites and interviewing people who only ended up staying for a few weeks. “People can hide behind the sites,” Carpenter said. “They work for someone once or twice and get a good review.” Carpenter shared her firsthand experience of hiring a nanny who hid her legal blindness, which was problematic as she was not able to navigate the home in the dim lighting while caring for her triplets. “A real mom telling me who cared for her kids is far superior to the inflated ratings found on nanny sites,” she said.

Carpenter encourages other mothers to join a mom’s group on social media for the best word-of-mouth referrals. “Good nannies always have a mom trying to find them a good home when they move on from them.” And she also cautions parents to always remember that “you get what you pay for.”



Michelle LaRowe has more than 25 years of nanny industry experience. As an International Nanny Association credentialed nanny and Nanny of the Year™ award recipient, Michelle has authored several parenting books including *Nanny to the Rescue!*, *Nanny to the Rescue Again!* and *Working Mom’s 411*. Michelle has served as executive director of the International Nanny Association and currently serves as the executive director of Morningside Nannies, an award-winning nanny agency and serves as managing partner at Longhorn Leads, LLC, where she manages a portfolio of nanny related websites and businesses. To educate the next generation of nannies, Michelle launched *NannyTraining.com* where she serves as lead educator. Her formative course offered exclusively in partnership with *NannyStella, Inc.*, is the only US Based CACHE Endorsed Customized Qualification for nannies. Michelle is also the publisher and editor of the industry’s premiere trade publication, *Nanny Magazine*. Learn more about Michelle at [MichelleLaRowe.com](http://MichelleLaRowe.com).



*People Profile*

Brooke Weglarz

### **How did you get involved in the nanny industry, and what is your current role?**

Like many others, I started out babysitting at a young age and eventually got my first true nanny position at the age of nineteen. I continued to nanny throughout college, and then once I realized, "Hey wait, I can make a legit career out of this," I moved to Los Angeles and accepted my first professional-level nanny position with a UHNW family. After ten years of working as a nanny, I decided to start a nanny advice blog, detailing the many issues nannies face with the goal of helping nannies learn their rights and encouraging them to advocate for themselves. The blog then organically evolved into what Nanny Counsel is today. My current role is founder and owner of Nanny Counsel, which is a nationwide placement and consulting agency. We offer professional nanny placements, free resources on our website, a large Facebook support group, and nanny coaching. For the coaching sessions, I personally work one-on-one with nannies, offering guidance when they are dealing with a difficult issue at work, need help prepping for an interview, want to negotiate a raise, and more!

### **How has the industry changed since you became involved?**

I think with the popularity of nanny Facebook groups, the industry has become more legitimized. It's a double-edged sword. On one hand, Facebook groups can highlight a lot of unprofessionalism and the "entitled nanny" mindset in the industry. On the other hand, many nannies who are unaware of their legal rights and industry standards only learn about these things from the groups. Social media has really helped spread the word that nanning is a professional career, and nannies are entitled to overtime, benefits, a contract, and so on.

### **How did you get to where you are today?**

I dropped out of my ECE major after the first day of classes because I quickly realized that being a teacher wasn't what I thought it was going to be. I also quit my part-time college job at the YMCA after-school care program due to the director's gross negligence and putting the workers and children at risk. I knew I wanted to work with children, and at that point, I was desperate for a job, so I started looking at nanny jobs as something to do in the meantime while finding something more "legitimate." I quickly realized these nanny jobs paid significantly more than centers like the YMCA, and I was able to work one-on-one with a child rather than managing twenty-plus kindergartners on my own. Even when I went to grad school and planned to ultimately leave the nanny profession to work as a marriage and family therapist, I kept getting pulled back into nanning. I look back and wonder what would have happened had I continued down the teacher path or never quit my job at the YMCA or left the nanny industry to work in the mental health field, but I can't even imagine what life would be like today had I not stuck with nanning. I love that I was able to combine nanning with my therapy background when working with families and nannies.

### **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

I plan to continue advocating for nannies and working to create more understanding and respect within the employer-employee relationship. I'm focused on bringing on even more clients and growing my team. Nanny Counsel wants to grow, and nannies need the resources we offer, so I am facilitating the growth in the best way I know how. I have some incredible coaches and partners, and I am putting in the hard work so I can evolve with the company over time! I'm committed to being an agency that nannies actually trust and, in return, are loyal to Nanny Counsel. This enables us to bring a special candidate base to our clientele—and many other agencies don't have access to the nannies that we do. Clients come to us knowing who we are and what they can expect from us, and our candidates and nannies know the same.

### **What is your best advice for nannies?**

I always tell nannies to have clear and open communication, and I personally believe that the foundation of solid communication is having a solid contract. It is dangerous to assume that a kind family is automatically going to do what is right (and legally required)—many parents do not even understand the importance of guaranteed hours or the need for sick days. It is unfortunate that so many families are clueless and have no idea what it means to be an employer. This means that it falls on the nannies to break it down and explain the laws and industry standards to them, so it is imperative that nannies are well-versed on these topics. As a nanny, you are your own HR department, so if this is the career path you've chosen, even if just temporarily, you need to educate yourself on what you're entitled to and learn how to negotiate and set boundaries effectively.

*"No family or job is perfect, and many nannies get disappointed when they think they've found their "unicorn" family, and then are let down when something negative happens. No matter how nice a family is, they will always put their own family first, and at the end of the day, a nanny will always be an employee.."*

*-Brooke Weglarz*



**What is the most controversial topic that you've seen in your group?**

Where to start? There have been quite a few, but it is any of the posts or comments that are racist, homophobic, discriminatory, or anti-science. I can't believe that it's 2022 and there are still people who are openly bigots in an online Facebook group with thousands of strangers. They always get called out in Nanny Counsel group, hence why the post usually stirs up lots of drama and "controversy."

**What is one thing you see nannies share over and over again, regardless of how many times it is addressed?**

Things that could have been avoided with a thorough contract. There are constantly posts about nannies getting a 1099, or the parents not honoring the guaranteed hours that were verbally agreed upon, or the nanny being expected to travel for no extra pay (or in some cases, no pay at all because the family views the work trip as a "vacation" for the nanny). All these things and more can be avoided with a clear and comprehensive contract. The immediate comments on posts like this are "What's in your contract?" or "Do you have a contract?" Without a contract, the nanny has zero leverage, and it's unfortunately a hard lesson learned.

**What is your educational background?**

In 2008 I obtained my bachelor of science in psychology from Florida State University, and in 2014 I completed my master of arts in clinical psychology with an emphasis on marriage and family therapy from Pepperdine University.

**How do you give back to the nanny community?**

I am a huge nanny advocate, so I give back in numerous ways. For one, I consider the Nanny Counsel website a top free resource for many nannies. I also spend a lot of time moderating the Nanny Counsel Facebook group (this is no small thing!) as well as offering feedback and advice to posters in various nanny-related Facebook groups. I help plan and host our local International Nanny Training Day here in Nashville, and I donate to important organizations such as Nanny Relief Fund and Nannypalooza. I cannot wait to add more to that list as Nanny Counsel continues to grow!

**Biggest nanny industry myth?**

That there are unicorn families. No family or job is perfect, and many nannies get disappointed when they think they've found their "unicorn" family, and then are let down when something negative happens. No matter how nice a family is, they will always put their own family first, and at the end of the day, a nanny will always be an employee.

**What is the one thing you would like parents who employ nannies to know?**

Being a nanny is a very challenging job that not everyone is cut out for. You truly do get what you pay for in this industry. Suppose you want a professional, quality caregiver. In that case, you will have to pay for it, not only with a competitive hourly wage, but legal pay, PTO, guaranteed hours, a health insurance stipend, and more. I think society in general tends to view childcare work as somewhat unskilled, easy labor, and it's not at all. Not everyone has the patience and knowledge to care for children effectively. In the first five years of a child's life, their brains develop connections faster than at any other time in their lives. This is when the foundations for learning, emotional intelligence, and mental, physical, and social well-being are created. Please don't downplay how important those early years are and how vital it is to invest in them with a qualified and knowledgeable nanny. I often see families more than willing to spend big bucks on private school education for their children but scoff at paying a nanny a professional compensation package. Hiring a nanny is essentially investing in private school for the earlier, more formative years of a child's life.

**Anything else you want us to know?**

It's been such a privilege to be a part of this community. I absolutely love what I do and am so grateful to have created a business that helps advocate for nannies!



# BREAKING BOREDOM WHEN CARING FOR INFANTS

BY KRISTY JANE RUSCOE

I have the gift of gab! And if you work with infants, I hope that you do too.

When caring for infants, the most important thing to expose the child to is language. This is critical for development, as these interactions help to strengthen the nanny-child bond. For this reason, I am sure to fill each day with chatter. I label things, tell stories, and describe what's happening next. I use language like "Now I am going to put your clean diaper on," "My dog ate my breakfast this morning," and "This is a red ball." While this can be exhausting, filling the day with words supports growth and development and ensures that I am never bored since I am constantly chatting away!

After language, the next best thing for supporting development is a blanket. No need to pull out those fancy saucers, bouncy seats, swings, and other pieces of baby gear. Simply throw down a blanket, gather a few materials, and bring your imagination to the floor. It's a sure recipe to beat boredom.

If you're struggling to fill those awake windows with some boredom-free activities that support growth and development, here are my top five to try.

**1. Ditch the stroller!** Lay a blanket under a shady tree, and take time to explore nature with your infant. Talk about the sounds you hear, the scents you smell, and the things you see. Let the infant have sensory experiences by kicking the grass, crumbling a leaf, and holding a stick. Use tummy time to watch the cars go by. Enjoy the fresh air.

**2. Spruce up tummy time with sensory bags.** Our two favorite sensory bags are filled with jingle bells and hair gel. Fill the bags, secure the closure, and tape the bags to the floor in front of the infant.

Watch the exploration happen as the infant slaps, squishes, and squeezes the bags. Sensory activities help infants learn about the world around them, and they provide lots of fun!

**3. Pull out the puppets!** And I'm not talking about some fancy store-bought puppets either. Bring back the sock and felt puppets of years past! Be theatrical, make up stories, and use the puppets to read books. Let your infant feel the puppets, squeeze them, and put them in their mouth (of course, being wary of any small parts). You can even make animal puppets and voice animal sounds.

**4. Kick those little feet!** Whether it's a pillow, your leg, or a stuffed toy, get those legs and feet moving! Encourage lots of leg movement with bicycle circles, jumping motions, and open and close gestures. But you know what else is fun to do with an infant's feet? Get a shallow dish of water, and let them splash with their feet. Or hold a balloon on a string in front of the infant, and watch him kick away.

**5. Sing your heart out!** If you have work-from-home parents, now is the time they should bring out their headphones! Sing songs and recite rhymes like "Patty Cake," "Wheels on the Bus," and "Five Little Monkeys," which are three of my favorites. Make sure to use the infant's hands as you're singing, helping them make the hand movements that go along with the songs. Be silly. Remember, interaction is key! You'll get lots of smiles out of your infant, even if you can't carry a tune, so sing loud and sing proud!

Being interactive with the infant in your care is a great way to support growth and development. You don't need fancy tools or the best voice, just a passion for providing opportunities for positive interactions between you and the infant you care for.



Kristy Jane Ruscoe

Kristy Jane Ruscoe was born and raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where she received nanny and ECE teaching experience and directed a large childcare program for fifteen years. Then, to escape the brutal Northeast winters, Kristy moved her family to Fayetteville, North Carolina, in December 2013. For nearly nine years, Kristy has created a name for herself in the nanny community, especially among military families. She has cared for infant to school-age children, multiples, and special-needs children and participated in nanny shares and overnight care. Kristy is now a certified infant sleep specialist, which has allowed her to open a successful side business. Kristy takes her love for children, her passion for enriching their environment, and her endless knowledge to provide the best experience for the children in her care.



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