



the *no-stress* guide to finding great child care

No one can take your place, but pinpointing the perfect day care or sitter will ease the stress of leaving your little one. Take a deep breath—we've got you covered.

When I started poring through recommendations in search of a nanny for my daughter, now 2, I balked when parents effused, "We love Karen so much, she's part of our family!" I could understand trusting, even adoring a caretaker, but in the thick haze of new parenthood, I had a hard time accepting that any mom could feel so bonded with a "glorified babysitter." Basically, I didn't want to accept that my baby was about to be handed off to a relative stranger.

Had I opened my eyes, I would have seen what I now know: There are plenty of loving, gifted caregivers out there who consider watching kids to be their calling—not just a job. Our nanny, Laura, has become an important figure in my daughter's life. And once you strike gold with your own sitter or day care, you'll be amazed at how confident you can feel waving bye-bye to your bub in the morning, too. Here it is: Your step-by-step, all-inclusive handbook for finding child care you (and baby!) will love.

WHAT KIND OF COVERAGE DO YOU NEED?

First things first: Use our comparison chart to gauge what best suits your new family.



vs



nanny

Are your hours erratic, or do you travel frequently? If so, "a nanny who can flex with your needs might be best," says Julie McCaffrey, owner of BabyNav, a maternity concierge company in Westchester County, N.Y., and mom of three.

If your bambino tends to thrive in a familiar setting, bringing someone (with undivided attention) into your home might work better than placing your tot in foreign territory.

Nannies' rates depend on where you live, their level of education and experience and how you find them. According to UrbanSitter, a website that helps care providers and families find each other, average hourly rates for a single kid range from \$10.84 (\$22,464 annually, assuming 40 hours per week) in Denver to \$15.34 (\$31,907 a year) in New York City.

TAKE STOCK OF YOUR SCHEDULE

CONSIDER YOUR KIDDO'S PERSONALITY

CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

day care

If your workday rarely wavers, consider a child care facility. You'll be able to meet the drop-off and pickup times, and with the exception of holidays, a nursery will be open (it won't call in sick)!

Centers give your tot the chance to interact with other children in her age group. Yes, caregivers are typically keeping tabs on one to three babes (or one to four toddlers) at once, but that still tends to be ample supervision.

Full-time day care for an infant costs anywhere from \$4,600 to \$15,000 per year, depending on where you live, according to a report from Child Care Aware of America, an organization that helps families find quality providers. Look a few years ahead, too: Enrolling Baby No. 2 could double the price of a facility.

7 FRESH WAYS TO FIND A SITTER

You've hit up your co-workers for whomever watched their kids and considered stealing your best friend's super-nanny (she'd forgive you eventually, right?), but the perfect caregiver for your mini-me may be waiting where you'd least expect him or her.

1

"Tap the swim coaches or lifeguards at your local pool," says Betsy Lavin, a mom of three in Williamsburg, Va. "They know your kids, CPR and first aid!"



2

Ask a stay-at-home mom. She might be interested in company for her kid and earning some extra cash.

3

Hobnob with nannies at the park. They often have friends or family members who are looking.

4

Inquire with grad students—they're smart, driven and looking for ways to fund their schooling.

5

Ask around at church or temple, where members likely share your values.

6

Contact your school district's PTA to see if a retired teacher is available.

7

Request to join a closed Facebook group for local parents. If the group's leader reaches out, that's a good sign. "Moderators often do a mini-check to make sure you are who you say you are," says Beth O'Keefe, a mom of two in Chicago. That way you know sitter recs are legit, even if they're from strangers. Bonus: You may find a mom up for a nanny share to help save cash.



NANNIES BY THE NUMBERS

90%

live outside the employer's home

72%

get paid for days the employer doesn't need them

64%

get paid vacation

44%

are compensated for their commute to and from work



vet with these smart steps

Exactly how to tell who's worthy of watching your kid

SCHEDULE A PHONE INTERVIEW

Nanny or day care, the first step to filter your prospects is the same: Pick up the phone. Is this person or place available at the right hours? If you'll need kids shuttled, does the nanny have a driver's license? Is he or she experienced with all ages? "I had an amazing baby whisperer, but months later when it came to dealing with a willful little boy, she was not great at setting limits," says Rebecca Parlakian, director of parenting resources at Zero to Three, a nonprofit that supports healthy child development. "We had to find someone else, and it was difficult." Finally, ask about credentials, but don't go crazy: Your candidate needs certification in infant CPR and first aid, not a master's in child psychology or, you know, baby yoga expertise.

GOING WITH A NANNY?

ARRANGE IN-PERSON MEETINGS

Size up the dynamic.

Your prospective caregiver should want to hold your kiddo and get involved. "During one interview, the candidate didn't try to connect with my child at all," says Carla Rogers, a mom of two in Portland, Ore. "Not wanting to pick up or play with my son

showed that she wasn't making an effort to bond with him." Primo applicants look at home with your baby (making eye contact, not handling him like delicate china). "To feel safe, every baby needs to be able to attach to their caregiver in a meaningful way," Parlakian adds.

Ask the right questions.

Broad questions like,

"How lucky do you consider yourself?" uncover his or her attitude toward life. (You want someone who feels fortunate, since that's a perspective that attracts positivity.) Inquire about the nanny's philosophy on feeding, sleeping and discipline, too. "It's best for her to be in a middle ground—nothing rigid or extreme," McCaffrey says. Don't be afraid to give a

little pop quiz (e.g., "How do you know when a baby is hungry?") "That will reveal how skilled the person is at reading babies' cues," Parlakian says.

Observe her in action.

If possible, try to get a peek at your prospective nanny watching other kids. "When I visited home-based day cares, I could tell if the people who ran them enjoyed providing care, or if it was just what they did because they needed the job," says Kristina Slaney, a mom of two in Bothell, Wash. If you suspect your choice is more psyched about a paycheck than playtime, it's time to hit the "skip" button and move on.

baby basics

DECIDED ON DAY CARE?

GO FOR TOURS

Obey your gut. Day care settings can vary from a multi-room facility to a small group of tots in the provider's house. Assuming the spot is state-licensed, it really comes down to personal preference. "The minute I got pregnant, I called to get on the waitlist for the highly recommended day care on-site where I worked," Slaney says. It took a year, but the staff called her with a spot for her 3-month-old right as her maternity leave was ending. Then she went for a visit. "Something in my soul said it wasn't right," she recalls. She scrambled to tour several other



options and ended up choosing a warm, loving home-based day care that she found on Craigslist (and fully vetted, of course!). "You feel like you're going to an auntie's house with a bunch of your friends," she says.

Ask the right questions. When a day care is giving

you a "yes" vibe, ask if their policy is to assign one person on staff as the primary caregiver for each child; this set-up facilitates the attachment that's so important. Also inquire about how employees handle sleeping and feeding. Until your baby is 6 to 9 months, you'll want the

care provider to bend to your bub's needs, rather than sticking to an ironclad facility-wide schedule. Also, ask how sitters communicate with parents about what's happening (Rogers loves the Tumblr her day care updates throughout the day), especially if the staff turns over before you pick up in the evening.

Do a safety check. Go with your husband, partner or a friend, as an extra pair of eyes: "One place had an electrical outlet at kid level that was missing its cover," O'Keefe says. "I'm not talking about baby-proof plug covers—I mean the regular cover that screws into the wall!" Pass.

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LOOK OUT FOR THESE RED FLAGS

When you're speaking to a day care staffer or potential nanny, certain phrases and attitudes should inspire an automatic "Next!" and send you dashing to a better candidate. Here are the warning signs to watch for when you're vetting contenders.

► A VAGUE RECOMMENDATION LETTER

If the letter's author doesn't explain why the nanny is available, she could just be trying to off-load a not-so-great care provider. "I generally want to see, 'We're moving,' or 'I now need only two days a week,'" BabyNav's

McCaffrey says. If you're looking at a day care, note if and how the venue responds to negative comments (say, on Yelp); staffers should be pleasant and show concern in addressing a critique.

► DISCOMFORT WITH YOU DROPPING BY

"Ask a candidate, 'Is it cool if I work from home some days?'" McCaffrey suggests. "She should say, 'Yes, absolutely.' You want to make sure the nanny is doing her job well whether you're there or not." For centers, ask if they'd mind if a parent had to stop by midday.

► AN AVERSION TO THE "S" WORD

"Avoid caretakers who talk about not wanting to 'spoil' babies," says Zero to Three's Parlakian. "You can't spoil an infant. If he or she is

crying, there's a need that's not being met."

► SKIRTING Q'S ABOUT PAST EMPLOYERS

Nannies who can't tell you stories about families they've worked for, or who won't open up about some of the challenges they've faced in past jobs, might be hiding something.

► AN OVERLY SUNNY VIEW

"I had one client whose nanny would say every day that it had been a *great* day," McCaffrey says. After some digging, the parents realized the sitter wasn't giving them an honest take. Ask candidates to characterize the ups and downs of life with a little one. "When you have a small baby, not every day is perfect," McCaffrey says. "You want someone who's going to give you the real story."

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