

From Cradle to School

by Benedicte Speed
Managing Director of County Nannies Ltd

When my children's much loved Nanny of 6 years left our family to focus on her own, I wept tears of despair - perhaps a tad ironic given that I own a Nanny agency with a large database of perfectly suitable and capable childcarers to choose from.

But herein lies the point - all mothers (and especially those who work outside of the home) agonise about their choice of childcarer. CVs are scanned, references taken up, opinions of friends and family are sought - but at the end of the day gut judgement (usually correct) wins out.

One of the misconceptions I deal with on a daily basis, is that of an idealised perception of the Nanny as a latterday Mary Poppins whose fountain of knowledge and nurturing skills should embrace all children regardless of age, numbers or temperament.

Mothers believe that their childcarer should be perfect - woe betide the Nanny who expresses any negativity re a previous job; or who expresses a clear preference for newborns, or at the other end of the scale, for school age children.

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Is this not shortsighted? As the rest of us elect to specialize in certain areas of our working life, surely childcarers should be afforded the same privileged?

Equally is it not better to focus one's Nanny search on individuals who are clear on their areas of strength?

Starting with the care of newborns - in my experience the best **Maternity Nurses** are those with a relaxed, nurturing and empathetic approach. These qualities are essential in supporting the exhausted, hormonal new mother; and equally for the nurse's own coping mechanism in dealing with the unrelenting broken nights.

This is a specialist role supporting the mother in establishing the key feeding and sleeping patterns which form the basis of routine for baby.

The Nanny genuinely drawn to **infants and toddlers** usually displays an innate maternal streak - a quality no childcare course can impart. See for yourself how they interact with your little ones at interview.

Too many parents undertake the first interview without the children present, believing that they will get a greater sense of

the childcarer's motivation. However, quality childcarers are not necessarily adept at the thrust and parry of hardnosed interview techniques better left to the corporate office.

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My interview with our own Mary Poppins had my husband and I slumped on the sofa, hollow-eyed with exhaustion, watching in awe at the instinctive and effortless way our prospective Nanny scooped up our howling 6 month old and equally fractious 18 month old, instantly distracting them by transforming a pair of discarded socks into glove puppets.

Emanating warmth and genuine interest in our 2 little ones - this same Nanny was far more reserved in relating to adults. It is often the case that the shyer, more sensitive Nanny is the one who is a real natural with children.

In **preschool Nannies** I also always look for Nannies who have spent time in a Nursery where the focus is on a structured day. This gives them

a diversity of skills in arts and crafts; basic letter and number recognition; and routines such as snacks/meals/rest times etc.

"School Run Nannies" (often the most difficult to source) are childcarers who genuinely want part-time work and who interact well with children of this age. The Nanny turned trainee teacher, or the Nanny with a child of her own are good candidates for such roles. Working with children at the end of the day, the Nanny needs to be upbeat and nurturing to manage the post school grumpiness that comes with tiredness, coaxing children to sit down, do homework, and




generally wind down before bath and bedtime.

Au-pairs can also be a viable option for such roles but parents are well advised to make a real evaluation regarding limited language and driving skills (not so helpful with homework or for those school runs!)

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Whilst we may all be drawn to the loyal Mrs Doubtfire who embraces a family through the years – the reality is that such candidates rarely exist. With the right choice of childcarers your children can benefit positively from exposure to a range of carers.

Having thought we would never recover following the departure of our Nanny, my children have gone on to develop close and loving relationships with 2 other childcarers – one a trainee teacher, the other a university student. And our original Nanny still remains in touch and an integral part of my childrens' life. 

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