



The true role of the professional nanny

by Benedicte Speed, Managing Director
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Uncertainty over the economy and job market have brought the issue of childcare into the media spotlight as more and more women are looking to return to work following the births of their children. Women who previously might have elected to spend five years or more on a career break, or even not return to work at all, are now facing the stress of devolving the care of their infants to a third party.

Given also that first time mothers are now often in their early to mid-thirties and have had successful and demanding careers, they inevitably have high standards in evaluating the people with whom they work and need reassurance that the childcarer they choose is first class.

"Nanny" - variously dictionary defined as childcarer, nursemaid, and carer of children in their own home.. essentially we are talking about one on one childcare with a focus on care and nurture. The professional career nanny is usually both qualified and experienced and sees her role as one of "in loco parentis". Whilst the children are in her care they are wholly her responsibility and she is accountable for their well being not only in both practical and holistic terms, but also as an educator helping them through the everyday milestones that chart a young child's life.

Whether helping your child to move from a bottle to a training cup, from finger food to cutlery, to tracing and learning letters of the alphabet, to supporting homework...this is not merely a babysitter simply tasked with watching over your child. Or indeed the childminder who is looking after several other children, often including her own in the convenience of her own home.

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Call me old fashioned, but the reinforcement of good manners is also absolutely the province of the professional Nanny. Whether "pleases" and "thank you's" or waiting to take their turn in a game, or sharing toys, these are all the minute details that children learn through repetition and reinforcement from the adults around them.

Top nannies earn good salaries and so they should. They often work long days - eleven to twelve hours is not unusual when working for commuting parents and the responsibility is enormous.

As the owner of a nanny agency and a working mother myself I advise clients that credit crunch or not, if possible, childcare is one area on which not to cut corners. Speaking from personal experience, it is very much easier returning to work in the knowledge your young children are being cared for in familiar surroundings by a trained and caring childcare professional.

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Whilst dispelling the myth we can have it all, the maternal wench can be less raw when your children genuinely love their Nanny and look forward to her coming every day. Equally with a childcare coming to your home, the sheer practicalities of say getting to work on time etc are far simpler. If for example your child has a mild throat virus, unlike



nurseries and childminders who could not accommodate this, you do not have to take an emergency day off work. If one of your older children has a hockey match at school (mine have them every week twice a week!) you can feel a little less guilty knowing that the Nanny will be cheering them on from the sidelines. If this sounds like devolved parenting – well it's not, it's simply a practical and caring solution to the dilemmas all working parents face. What employer is realistically going to be able to accommodate a twice weekly half day for you to watch your children in a match?

One question I often get asked by a mum returning to work, is whether the children might love the Nanny more than her. The answer is categorically a resounding NO! I have never come across such a case. Equally I would actively encourage the formation of a strong bond between your Nanny and your children.

Whilst a latter day Mary Poppins is an analogy at which most nannies cringe –I would argue that a contemporary version does exist. One for whom nurture and assuming the mantle of a good role model are endemic to their role. I had the good fortune to employ such a Nanny for six years and judging from the emotional letters of reference I read from our clients, there are plenty of other such nannies out there too. 🍷