

# Choosing the right childcarer for you and your children

by Benedicte Speed, The Nanny Agency

**When sitting at a dinner party overheard tales of woe regarding childcare issues, it often strikes me how varied parents' opinions are in their interpretations of the role to be performed by the people they employ to look after their children.**

**One of the most common areas of confusion centres around the differences between Nannies and Au-Pairs. Whilst both can certainly provide a suitable form of childcare for your children, as a parent it is essential to determine what your expectation level is for this role.**

Equally, budget constraints are an important consideration. A Nanny for example, is a considerably more expensive form of childcare than a live-in Au-Pair.

In hiring a Nanny you should be recruiting an experienced childcare professional who in most cases will have had formal childcare training in first aid, child development and psychology courses; and practical work placements.

The Nanny should be someone in whom you have total trust to take sole charge of your children in loco parentis. This is not a mere babysitter, but someone who will nurture and educate your children and in many cases play a central part in your children's lives. Whilst

responsive and answerable to you in relation to your children, the Nanny should not require direction.

Full-time daily Nannies typically work a 10 hour day, 5 days a week. They have full employment rights and employers will need to undertake the usual contractual obligations as for any other working professional. Nannies can also work on a part-time or temporary basis.

An Au-Pair is not an experienced or qualified childcarer. Usually they have babysitting experience. A foreign national, they come over to the UK as a cultural experience to live as part of a family, in exchange for which they will undertake childcare and light housework.



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Au-pairs are considered by the Home Office to be a special form of student therefore they receive "pocket money" from their host family. The average au-pair works 25 hours per week for which they usually receive £55 per week. This makes them a considerably cheaper alternative to even a part-time Nanny.

For the mother at home wanting another pair of hands; or the parent with school age children; an au-pair is often a cost effective form of childcare.

However here is where parental expectations are a crucial case in point. A professional childcare recruitment agency should advise and steer the client

towards the most effective solution for their childcare needs.

The nanny agency should interview all their nannies in person and check references. Equally a good au-pair agency works with established partner agencies abroad who also interview and reference check their candidates.

No reputable agency should accept a client brief where an au-pair would have sole charge of an infant; equally if a parent is really looking for housekeeping duties this would be more the territory of an au-pair than a qualified childcarer whose usual remit is focused on nursery duties

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i.e. those relating to the children only.

Whether you have a nanny, or an au-pair, communication between childcarer and parent is the key. Even when dealing with an au-pair whose command of English is limited it is important to convey (somehow!) how you want your children looked after.

As with any relationship, particularly one based in your home, it's important to set guidelines. Communication and consideration on both sides are very important for a successful working relationship between childcarer and parent.