



Nanny Questions for the Job Interview

Contributed by Dorothy Popovich in cooperation with NannyNetwork.com

So, you are thinking of being a nanny or hiring a nanny? Nannies, you know you love children and want to work with them. Families, you know you want a loving nanny to care for your children and keep them safe. You have found each other, so it seems like the perfect match. It all seems so concrete and simple. The fact is there is much more to a nanny:family relationship than that.

In order for a nanny's relationship with a family to be lasting and rewarding for both parties, there needs to be a clear understanding between nanny and family from the beginning. How the family operates and how the nanny operates needs to be clearly articulated. The more experience nanny and family have in nanny-family relationships, the longer the interviews get, and the more questions are asked. The more questions, and topics covered in the initial interview, the more disagreements, problems, surprises and gray areas are totally avoided later. As a nanny, having questions to take with you during the interview, shows that you have maturity, professionalism and a will to make a nanny-family relationship work.

I have compiled an extensive list of questions for over my last 6 years as a professional nanny. I have tried to organize them by general subject grouping, but some overlap is inevitable. Not all questions apply to all circumstances, but I urge nanny candidates preparing for the interview to review all of the questions first. Consider it a few moments spent on professional development ... you never know what conversation during the interview could trigger a question that you may not have thought of.

Nanny Questions for Background on the Family

A nanny interviewing with a family needs some basic background information about the family to construct a framework within which to consider the specific position. I have found the following list of questions to be particularly helpful.

- How many children do you have?
- What ages are they?
- Do you plan on having more children? When?
- Do you work in the home or out of the home? Some nannies report that working with parents who are home all day can present problems with role confusion for children.
- Why do you want a nanny as opposed to a daycare or after-school program?
- Have you ever had a nanny before? If they have, try to get a sense as to what they liked and what they disliked about their prior experience(s). If they are hiring their first nanny, try to get a sense as to what their expectations are - and whether you think they are realistic. Obtain permission to talk to the prior caregivers.
- What is the children's typical daily and weekly schedule? (Include school, naps, extra curricular activities, sports)
- Are any of the children in school? What grade is each in? What are the hours?
- Does anyone smoke in the household? Do they have any rules about smoking in the household?



- Do you have any pets? (beware if you have allergies)
- Do family members drink alcohol?

Nanny Questions About Family Lifestyle

Understanding the family's lifestyle is important when evaluating a nanny job. Families come in all varieties, from the very formal households where you address your employers as Mr. and Mrs., wear a uniform, and work with the cook, housekeeper, butler, and household manager to the very informal household where you may be the only "staff" and address your employers as John and Mary and begin your day in your slippers. The following questions, as well as your own observations, can help you make these assessments and determine whether this job might be a good match for you.

- Do your careers require you to travel?
- Do you eat on the run or eat as a family? Is nanny welcome to eat with family?
- Do you have relatives that live near by who visit regularly?
- Do you often host business gatherings or have guests over for dinner?
- Are there any issues with divorce, stepparents, parental visitations etc?
- Do you generally keep your children on a schedule?
- Do you have any other household employees working for you part-time or full-time? (e.g. regular cleaning person, landscape artists, chef, housekeeper, estate manager, butler)
- If so, may I speak to that person about your household before accepting an employment offer?

Nanny Questions About the Parent-Child Relationship

When you think about a nanny job, you usually do so in the context of the relationship you would like to develop with a child. That's important. Understand, however, that the parents' relationship with their child and their philosophies on child rearing will be the foundation upon which you build the nanny-child relationship. This is the parents' house, their children, and you must be able to be philosophically comfortable with their styles because those are what you are committing to follow.

- What kinds of things do you and your children do together?
- Do you and your children talk about how you feel and how they feel?
- Are there certain things you would like the nanny NOT to do so you can have that time with them? (reading bed time stories, bath time, eating dinner, watching the movie you rented for them)
- Are you religious? How do you and your child express your spirituality?
- Would you say your relationship with your child is more authoritarian or more democratic? Ask them to explain their answer a bit.



Nanny Questions About the Parents' Child Rearing Philosophies

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- On a scale of 1-10, (1 being very unstructured, and 10 being very strict) where would you say your parenting style falls?
- Do you have set rules for your children? What are they? Use this as an opportunity to explain YOUR rules and to explore whether you and the family will be able to comfortably work together. The family has the right to expect the nanny to conform to their philosophies on discipline and child rearing. If you cannot get comfortable within their guidelines, the job will never work out.
- What are your parental views on: video games, getting dirty, eating, TV?
- Do you let your children watch TV? How much? If just certain shows, channels, which ones?
- Do you let your children watch movies? Does the nanny have to ask you before bringing one over?
- Do you give your child food when they are hungry or at set times?
- What do you do when your child misbehaves? Does your child (children) respond to a particular method of discipline?(e.g. negotiation, choices, raising voice, the look, taking away things, ignoring, removing from a situation, time-out, threatening to remove, take away something, bribing with something they like, spanking, sending them to their room etc.) Discuss what discipline method the parents prefer that the nanny use. **WARNING!** No matter what the parent's feelings on the subject, a nanny should never physically punish a child in their care - NO SPANKING!
- What kinds of things do the children do that will result in those actions?
- What types of communication in general work with each child? (e.g. hinting so they figure it out, direct statements/requests, offering choices, open ended questions/statements, close ended questions/statements?)
- Do any of the children throw tantrums? What method of action appears to work best?
- Are you open to me using other methods of treating children's misbehaviors/tantrums etc.?
- Ask some 'for instance' type questions. These have no right or wrong answer, but give the nanny candidate a great deal of insight into the parent's mindset. For example, "If your 3 year old picked out a checkered shirt, and plaid pants to wear to school, how would you react?" Parents may respond that they let the child choose, or they may suggest alternatives, or simply refuse to allow the child to wear the unsightly combination and choose for them.
- Do you buy "girl toys" for girls and "boy toys" for boys? Is it OK if they play with ones that aren't?
- Do you read books at random, at bedtime or do you do both?



Nanny Questions for the Family with an Infants

Families with infants have issues and concerns unique to them. The infant cannot articulate as an older child can, and the nanny needs to rely more on the parents for important information and clues as to that baby's temperament and health. The nanny also needs to learn important information about the parents' habits, feelings and concerns regarding infant care.

- Was the baby pre-mature? (may affect development)
- Was the baby of low birth weight? (may affect development)
- Does the baby have any health issues that I should be aware of? (food allergies, colic, etc.)
- Does the baby have a sleep schedule?
- Does the baby have an eating schedule? Is the baby demand fed?
- Would you object to me putting the baby on a schedule?
- How do you feel about pacifiers? Thumb sucking?
- Do you keep pillows/toys/stuffed animals in the crib? (this can be a liability issue when nanny is home due to SIDS)
- Are they particularly attached to a certain object/blanket/toy? Do you keep it in a consistent place?
- Do you breast feed? If so, do you use frozen milk, or formula to supplement when you aren't here?
- Do you buy or make baby food?
- Do you put bottles and baby-ware in the dishwasher, boil them, or wash them by hand?
- How often would you say your baby's diaper needs changing?
- Does the baby have a regular BM schedule?
- How do you feel about your baby being outdoors? When it is cold?
- Is the baby teething yet? What kind of things relieves your baby's pain?
- Is the baby eating solid foods yet? If so, which ones?
- What is the physical level of your baby? (rolling, grasping, crawling etc.)
- How long do you let your baby cry, if at all, before pacifying him?
- Does your baby have different cries of communication? Describe those.
- What soothes your crying baby? (loud music, soft music, rocking, car rides etc.)
- Do you have a particular routine for sleeping, bathing, or diaper changing you would like the nanny to follow?
- Do you use cloth diapers or disposable? (if cloth, ask if they have a diaper service, or is the nanny expected to clean them?)



Nanny Questions for the Family with Young Children

Young children, starting from about age 2, have begun to develop social skills and behavior patterns that I have found vary greatly between children. You are often not their first caregiver, and the family too has established some patterns for interaction between parent and caregiver that they are comfortable with. Every family is different. Here are some questions that I have found helpful.

- Do the children have chores?
- Do the children clean up their toys and messes? If not, are you opposed to having the children clean up their toys, dinnerware, and clothes?
- Do you let the children pick out their own clothes or lay them out for them?
- Are you children indoorsy or outdoorsy kids?
- Are they talkative or quiet?
- What types of activities do your children enjoy?
- Do they have a favorite game or toy?
- What types of music do your children enjoy?
- What subjects does each child enjoy at school?
- Do your children get along with each other? Do they have sibling rivalry at all?
- Do the children engage in other social relationships?
- Do the children communicate their emotions?
- What does each child typically display anger? Sadness?
- Do the children have any scheduled activities? (Gymnastics, story hour at the library, t-ball, etc.)
- Are there neighborhood or school friends that the children play with? Are there children you prefer that your children do not play with?
- May YOU give the child permission to invite a friend to play? (Parents should not make these play dates without your prior knowledge. You are paid to watch their children, not the neighborhood.)
- Do you prefer the nanny remain strictly at home with the children? What about walks to the park, tennis courts, the creek, the library, etc.? May the nanny drive your children places? What communication methods would you want the nanny to use about these activities? (ask in advance, advise verbally in advance, note it in the nanny log, leave a note in the kitchen)

Nanny Questions about Parent's Personality

Don't underestimate the importance of this information. You may work 50 hours a week with the children, but you report to the parents. You have your own communication styles and personality likes and dislikes. The parents do too. You don't have to be the same, in fact it is probably best if you are not, but you BOTH must understand each other's personalities and communications styles to effectively work together. This requires both mature self-assessment and careful observation of the parents during the interview.

- What do you both do for a living? (gives you some insight as to their personalities)



- How would you describe yourselves as people? Would you consider yourselves easy-going, business-like, impulsive, social, family-oriented etc.?
- How do you react when you are angry or disagree with someone? Do you bottle it up until you explode, do you hint at something being wrong, do you ignore the person bothering you, do you walk away? Do you write a letter?
- As my boss, how would you give me direction? Do you direct in broad objectives and leave me discretion as to the details? Do you schedule out a day or a week and want me to follow the schedule? Do you want to know details or just general information?
- It is inevitable, particularly in the beginning, that I would have some questions about your children or how you want your household run. Frequent questions annoy some people; others don't mind quick questions and answers at all. Do you prefer being asked as they come up or do you prefer that I bundle that type of communication up and ask less frequently?

Nanny Questions about the Children's Health and Safety

Don't expect the family you are interviewing with to be just like yours, or like the family you work for now. Children can have an amazing variety of health/medical conditions, from the relatively benign sleepwalking to severe asthma. Families also have different sensitivities to safety concerns. Asking now helps you avoid assumptions that could spell career disaster.

- Do any of the children have any health problems or disability? Are any of the children on medications? If yes, find out what your responsibility will be vis a vis the medications. Make sure you have written permission before you dispense any medications to the children.
- Is the house childproofed, or will you child proof the house? (Outlet covers, table corner guards, fireplace guard) Find out where poisons are stored, and if there are any areas 'off limits' to the children.
- Discuss common safety issues such as seat belts, car seats, bicycle helmets, protective gear for skating or scooter, mini-blind cords, etc. If you are uncomfortable allowing the child to bike without a helmet, this is the time to discuss with the parents. Remember that the child's safety is your highest priority as a nanny.
- May the child play in the back yard? Ride his Big Wheel in the driveway? Are there special rules for outdoor play? (One nanny worked for a family who had a white stripe painted across their driveway about 6' from the road and the children could not cross that line when they played. She was skeptical at first, but could not believe how well they observed that line!)
- Do the children know their phone number? Their address? How do dial 911? May I introduce these subjects when appropriate?
- What foods do your children typically eat? Listen carefully, this is another area where parents and nannies often have disagreement. Again, the parents make these decisions, make sure you can live within them.
- Do the children have any allergies/or medical conditions, special food considerations? (e.g. diabetic, kosher preparations, lactose intolerance, vegetarian, picky eating)
- Can the children tie their shoes? Are they allowed to play barefoot?
- What goals would you like the nanny to focus on with him/her?



- How well do you know your neighbors? Are there homes that the children are allowed in and others that they are not? May I allow a neighbor child into your home to play with your child on occasion?
- What are your rules for dealing with the doorbell? The telephone?
- Do you keep your doors locked during the day? Do you have an alarm system? Will I be shown how to arm and disarm the alarm?

Nanny Questions about Nanny Job Duties

Money is a touchy issue. You don't need to spend a lot of time on this, but a little discussion now will eliminate yet one more area of potential nanny:family conflict.

- How do you handle common grocery and school materials purchases? Is there a household kitty? Does the family want a receipt? Is the nanny expected to buy the milk or poster board and be reimbursed?
- Is there an 'entertainment' allowance, for things like craft supplies, lunch treat at McDonalds, attending events at the library, community center, etc.?
- Am I expected to use my automobile for driving the children? How will mileage be reimbursed? What about additional insurance coverage?
- If I am using your automobile to drive the children, how do we handle gasoline and maintenance?

Nanny Questions about Nanny Job Duties

These questions are an absolute must for any nanny job interview. Be detailed and specific. If the family says "Take care of the bathrooms" make sure you know whether that means pick up towels and wipe toothpaste off the counters or whether they expect floors scrubbed and toilets cleaned. If the family says "Help with dinner" does that mean defrost the roast, or cook the entire meal? Here are some questions that I find helpful.

- Describe for me what you expect from a nanny.
- What are the hours?
- What are my expected child care duties?
- What are my expected housekeeping duties?
- What role do you expect me as a nanny to play in discipline and behavioral development?
- Describe your last nanny's job duties.
- How involved do you need the nanny to be in communications with teachers, therapists, doctors etc.?
- Would there be any overnights or weekends involved for the nanny?
- How would you prefer crisis situations to be handled? (e.g. at discretion of the nanny or call you first for advice)
- Is there a particular parent who is the primary contact for the nanny?
- Is the nanny required to drive the children anywhere?



- Do you expect the children to clean up after themselves, or do you expect the nanny to clean up after the children?
- When you are home and nanny is too, do you expect the nanny to continue as the person in "charge" or do you prefer to be? Do you have any communication 'codes' to hand off these kind of responsibilities?
- Are there other duties you expect the nanny to do besides childcare? (E.g. laundry, housekeeping, errands, pet care, organizing, cooking, teaching certain skills/subject areas?)
- During naptime, is the nanny allowed to: talk on the phone, watch TV, use the computer or do email?

Listen carefully to the responses to these questions. The degree of discretion that parents will allow a nanny varies widely. Some families want the nanny to take charge, use common sense, and communicate (via a nanny log) the big pictures, and don't sweat the details. Other families are very controlling of the nanny's activities, authority, etc. and leave the nanny very little latitude. If you are a take charge individual the latter will never work. If you prefer to know exactly what the family wants done and when, being left in charge without detailed instructions will make you very uncomfortable. This is a very important 'management style' issue that goes to the heart of nanny:parent relationships.

- Would you like me to use a "nanny log", a daily summary of my day with the children?
- Do you consider a nanny a business relationship between nanny and parents or as a part of your family?
- How do you typically resolve (or think you would) disagreements with your nanny?
- Would you like your nanny to go to birthday parties, out to eat with the family and other family events? If so, would the nanny be expected to perform her "job duties" or just be part of the family?
- How would you feel if I approached you with suggestions on approaches to a specific behavior of your child, or observed a developmental area that I felt was a concern? Am I free to discuss these things with you or would you prefer I kept my opinions to myself? How would you like those issues brought up?
- Do you believe that a nanny-parent relationship is more a parental team partnership with give and take and exchange of ideas and opinion, or more of an extra pair of hands to care for your child when you cannot, a person who will carry out your wishes unfailingly?
- Perhaps if I were your children's nanny, there would be some time when I was in disagreement with something you were doing or not doing concerning your children? How would you react if I brought up a subject like that?
- Perhaps you would observe me working with your children in a manner that you do not feel is appropriate or best (not dangerous or abusive). Would you keep your opinion to yourself, take me aside and discuss with me later, or correct me immediately?



Nanny Questions about Prior Nanny Relationships

Has the family you are interviewing with had nannies before? These questions are a wonderful way to gauge their experiences, their frame of reference, and give you an idea of what the family is expecting AND hoping to avoid.

- How many nannies have you had? How long did you have each nanny?
- What were those relationships like?
- Did you have any problems with your last nannies? Like what? (Tell them you want to know, so you know what not to do.)
- What did you like about those nanny relationships?
- What will you do differently (if anything) in your next nanny arrangement?

Nanny Questions about Nanny Living Arrangements

Many nannies live in with their employers. Questions about the living arrangements and physical accommodations are a natural concern. The following questions deal with the live in nanny interview.

- Will the nanny have her own room?
- Is the room furnished? May nanny bring her furniture?
- Will the nanny have her own bathroom?
- Will the nanny have her own phone line? Who pays for installation?
EDITORS NOTE: *There is a recent trend for the family to provide nanny a cell phone in lieu of the "phone in her room." Families find that a cell package plan often includes a fair amount of long distance usage, and the cell phone lets the family get in touch with the nanny when she is out and about with the children. Other advantages of the cell phone are that it gives the nanny her own telephone number and voice mail, and generally meets both parent's and nanny's needs quite nicely. This also frees the nanny of school aged children to run errands or take a class at a nearby college and still be accessible to the school in the event a child becomes ill.*
- If not, will the nanny have certain phone hours that s/he needs to abide by? (Some families restrict incoming calls after a certain hour, say 10 PM, so as not to disturb the family.)
- Is there a cable hook up in the nanny's room? Or satellite?
- Will the nanny have use of the car? How often? Does the car have a curfew? See related questions in Nanny Expenses
- Will the nanny be allowed to have friends over?
- Will the nanny be allowed to have boy/girlfriends over? (On duty, off duty, either?)
- Will the nanny have a curfew?
- Is the nanny to buy her own food?
- Will the nanny have input into grocery list?
- Will the nanny eat with the family? Can the nanny choose to eat with/without family?
- May out of town visitors stay with the nanny in her room?
- Will the nanny's privacy be respected? Can she have a lock on her door?



- Is the nanny expected to be showered and dressed in the AM before her day starts or can she wait until the kids are on the bus, or children are sleeping?
- How do you feel about the nanny sleeping during children's nap times?
- How far is the nearest college town? (For social life)
- Is there a nanny-support group nearby that you know of? Or nannies in your neighborhood?

After the Job Interview...

Everyone puts their best foot forward during an interview. You would expect the parents to check your references if everything was sounding positive. You need to do the same thing. Prior nannies are your best first reference to check. Ask for names and numbers of friends, relatives and previous caregivers. Do they have a caregiver who will provide them a reference? Do the answers the parents give you match up to the ones the relatives and previous caregivers give you? How do others perceive the parent's relationship with their children or what the children are like? Beware if parents have completely opposite perspectives than their friends, relatives and caregivers do of their child-rearing practices, philosophies and ways of resolving conflict.

After you have checked their references, and presuming you are optimistic that this may be a good match, set up a time where you can REALLY meet the children. This should be several continuous hours in their company, a whole day if possible, where you OBSERVE (not baby-sit) the children. Let the parents know you are not there to nanny, but to observe to see what their family is like. The day is not for them to see how you interact with their children, but for you to see how they interact as a family. (The trial period is when you interact with their children.) Small children cannot stay on best behavior for more than a short while. This affords you the opportunity to assess manners, discipline styles, the degree of independence of the children, the degree to which the children are catered to, and their over-all personalities.

You need to be as self-aware and objective as you can be. The nanny job is like no other job in childcare! The hours are long, many of us live in our work place and we don't always have a lot of adult interaction in our day. Speaking in generalities, nannies are nurturers and we have much more in common with 'stay at home Moms' than with our employers who spend a large part of their day working with schedules and deadlines and often have product or results to show for their efforts. Now I ask you, just how long will the toys stay in the toy box or Susie's braids stay neat and straight? And how important is a deadline when your charge is in tears because they scraped their knee on the patio or really, really, *really* want to figure out how to tie their shoe today? These inherent differences between nannies and their employers are often the root of communication problems, misunderstanding and job/performance dissatisfaction. Many nannies report it is easy to fall in love with the children but the parents can be intolerable (or maybe the nanny just doesn't understand them?). Others express amazement that such nice parents have such mean-spirited children (or maybe the children have just never been taught and need firm, consistent and loving guidance?). While you will have some control over how the children are when you are with them, you cannot change the parents and have no control over how the parents and the



children interact with each other. You **MUST** be truly comfortable that your style and the family's style are compatible - it takes great maturity to realize what you cannot change and to move on to the next opportunity.

When you accept a nanny job, make sure you get the terms of your employment agreement in writing! There are sample work agreements at this site which cover the highlights of a nanny contract. This should be done before you start work, and you should review this document with your employer during your orientation period. There is no such thing as too much detail in a work agreement [at least in my opinion].

The work agreement, at a minimum, should address the following:

- A. Work Schedule: Days and Hours
- B. Compensation: Salary in gross terms, understanding on payroll taxes, and overtime compensation. How frequently will you be paid?
- C. Holiday and Vacation Schedules: Nannies typically receive 2 weeks paid vacation, understanding that it often will be timed to coincide with family vacation schedules, and paid holidays. Sick day arrangements vary. Get them in writing!
- D. Childcare Duties: Be specific!
- E. Housekeeping Duties: Be specific **and** realistic!

Live in nannies should also have a written agreement regarding the living arrangements. Items such as curfew [a touchy subject], phone bills, overnight guests, out of town guests, and privacy expectations [of both parties] should be articulated. If the family advanced the nanny airfare, a repayment or debt forgiveness schedule should be included.

Organize all paperwork before you start work. This includes an necessary 'permission slips' to pick up the children at school, obtain emergency medical treatment, a contact list for emergencies, and authorization to *and* instructions on how to administer any medications.

If the nanny interviews the parents as carefully as the families interview the nanny, the nanny will be much better informed. When the nanny agrees to work for the family after all the information has been presented to him/her from the interview and reference checks, then the nanny's decision to work for a family will be a much more permanent one. The key to keeping a nanny-family relationship a happy and long term one, is to have a clear initial understanding of what is expected of the nanny, and what is expected of the family, and honest and open communication later as issues arise.