

NANNY- FAMILY COMMUNICATION

A GUIDE TO BUILDING STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

A good family-nanny relationship does not merely exist, it must be worked on every day just like relationships with family members and co-workers.

As in any job, communicating expectations, concerns, changes and progress on a regular basis between employer and employee are crucial to success. In any work environment, employees can expect to have daily contact with their direct supervisors and regularly scheduled meetings to discuss progress, expectations, and challenges. Your level of communication with your nanny should be no different.

In fact, in the nanny-family relationship, communication needs are stronger because the nanny will become such an integral part of your household and you will be spending a lot of time together.

MEET REGULARLY FROM THE BEGINNING

These meetings work much better when both parties know there is a set time and place, on a regular basis, to discuss anything and everything related to the working relationship. Knowing you are both there to support one another and act proactively as a team creates a more open environment than the dreaded, out of the blue, "we have to talk".

These meetings are intended to create a regular opportunity for each party to raise any concerns, discuss changes in the child's development or needs, and to ensure parents and nanny are operating with consistency as they tradeoff care for the children. Plan on having these meetings when the children are not within hearing distance and are preferably otherwise occupied, after bedtime is a common choice.

These meetings should be held often, weekly for at least the first month and then biweekly over time if you agree to connect as things come up in between. They must be often enough that they become a relaxed method of communication with a friendly team atmosphere. Scheduling one more thing after a hectic day with the children may seem overwhelming, but it is by far worth the effort to avoid disaster down the road.

BE RECEPTIVE TO FEEDBACK

It is common to feel nervous when discussing work performance. Anxiety and defensiveness are heightened by the nature of the work being so closely tied to family, especially making nanny feedback to parents seem personal. Keeping an open mind to what is being said is a solid foundation to your communication.

As with any profession, employees who have the opportunity to give and receive feedback regularly feel more confident in their position.

PLANNING YOUR MEETINGS

1. Share a calendar and block out one hour every week at the same time. Prioritize this meeting and do not reschedule or cancel even when you feel you don't have much to say.
2. Start by reviewing the past week. What was expected, what was done, any challenges, how challenges were approached and how to improve the next week.
3. Discuss the coming week's schedule. Go over the plan and what is expected, identifying potential challenges, changes and how to approach them based on the previous week. This allows you to check in on how to support one another, adapt approaches to activities and challenges as needs change, and prepare for coming events.

As you get used to this process and it becomes routine, the meetings may take less time, but it is essential to know the hour is available and prioritized by all caretakers, every week. It may feel overwhelming in already hectic times, or silly when you feel like there is nothing to talk about, but you will find it saves you a lot of time and stress over time by creating the culture and expectation of transparency, communication and teamwork.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

A GUIDE TO RESOLVING CONFLICTS AND MISCOMMUNICATION

We have all faced difficult conversations in our personal and private lives. We have all also faced situations where it was easier to not have a conversation than face the challenging confrontation ahead. However difficult, the best thing to do is to tackle the conversation in a way that will create better outcomes for all parties. Please feel free to reach out to your placement counselor for advice on navigating any difficult conversations. We are always happy to hear from you.

Here are some steps to ensure your conversation has the best possible outcome:

IDENTIFY ISSUES AND WRITE THEM DOWN

Rather than scripting your intro or discussion, jot down some notes about what is really bothering you. If you write down issues vaguely like “you’re always late” or “you never follow the schedule”, the other party will immediately jump on the defensive with examples of every time your statement was false. Instead write down how it makes you feel and how it affects you or the nanny-family relationship.

Example: Your nanny is regularly 20 minutes late. Does it bother you because you feel your time is not valued? Because your other commitments are being compromised? Be as specific as you can.

ASK YOURSELF SEVERAL QUESTIONS

- a. What is the purpose of this conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What is your ideal outcome? If your answers are punitive, consider reevaluating. The conversation is more likely to be a success if you are seeking to support and improve.
- b. What assumptions are you making about the other person? Challenge these assumptions.
- c. Are you being triggered by the situation? Is there a backstory or something that is causing you to make the situation seem more dire or stressful than necessary based on past experiences and fear?
- d. How might you be contributing to the problem? This will help with empathy and approaching the issue as a team.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

If you are faced with a “difficult conversation” you have already created the mindset it will be difficult making you more nervous and potentially causing you to dig your heels into a position. Take a step back and re-frame the conversation in your mind as an exciting opportunity for you to work together as a team to solve a problem and improve your working relationship. So often we need to be reminded that perspective is everything.

Example: As you get angry over their tardiness you start thinking “they are disrespectful, they don't care about their job like I do.”

Stepping back to an open helpful mindset is reframing to the original problem “something must be in their way preventing them from being on time.”

SET A TIME AND AGREE TO TALK IN PERSON

Never start these conversations any way other than face to face. There is too much room for misinterpretation, defensiveness or avoidance. You may think an email list of concerns sounds like a good idea, but tone is everything when trying to create a feeling of teamwork rather than blame.

BREATHE

Take regular pauses and focused breaths to ensure that your emotions are not ruling your speech or preventing you from listening to what the other person has to say. Emotional statements often come out more harsh or final than intended and more often than not, take the conversation in a defensive, positional direction.

TAKE BREAKS

If breathing isn't doing the trick and you feel you or the other person is losing their cool, don't be afraid to take a break. 10 minutes or even two days may give all parties involved the space they need to approach the conversation in the best way possible. Take a drink of water, a short walk, or if you are looking at solutions, a break to do some research.

LISTEN

Don't prepare your counter argument or get defensive while the other person is talking. Truly listen to what the other person is saying and where they are coming from so you can understand their needs as equal barriers to your joint success. If you catch yourself thinking "that's not true", or wanting to roll your eyes, check your thoughts and just listen. If you need more information, ask questions in an open, honest manner. Your goal should be to learn more about the other person's perspective. Wait until they are finished before sharing your perspective.

Example: "I didn't change the schedule so where is the stress coming from?" makes the other person feel you are not listening or trying to understand. "You said it adds stress to your day trying to get to the house by a certain time, can you elaborate on that?" asks for information about the stress and shows a desire to understand.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Make sure they know you are listening and you heard them. No qualifiers (but, however...) or problem-solving, just hearing what they have to say. Often in these situations we, or those we are talking with, repeat themselves over and over. This is a sign that we do not feel heard or understood. This often happens when jumping to solutions or demanding solutions before providing acknowledgement.

Example: Don't say "I hear you want me to be on time but I have no control over traffic."; do say, "I see that my being late has made you feel unappreciated."

PROBLEM SOLVE

Recap all the issues brought up on both sides and brainstorm solutions that address them. Make it fun - no solution is stupid! Work from there to find a set of measurable solutions that address all the issues. It is important they are measurable so you can check in at regular intervals to see if they are working.

Example: "try to be on time more often" is not measurable. Keeping a log of hours and reasons for tardiness and then agreeing to reduce changes to the schedule/ tardiness by a certain percent over a set period of time is measurable and provides documentation to reference.

FOLLOW UP

Schedule regular check-ins to make sure the solutions are working, discuss possible adjustments and generally see how the other person is doing. Creating the space for these conversations means there is no build up or dread assuming any "talk" is negative. The space is reliably there, at regular time increments, for this exact purpose. Even if everything is going well, make sure to talk to strengthen your relationship and trust.

Another reason to follow up is maybe the issue was not solved in one conversation, or some personalities involved require time to think on their own before being ready to fully process and problem solve. It is ok not to fix everything in one hour-long talk. Don't hold yourself to an arbitrary expectation of solving a problem in a first go, especially if communication has been spotty beforehand.