



Q&A*Katie Vaughan*

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HER AGENCY HAS BEEN FEATURED ON INSIDE EDITION,
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www.WestSideNannies.com

Q. What are the most common reasons that people want to dump their nanny?

A. The decision to let your nanny go is never easy and there are many different reasons why a family may feel it is necessary to make this change. The most common reason is the simple fact that the family's needs have changed; many times a nanny is hired for a certain period of time, such as infancy or during the toddler years. Some families will no longer need the help of a nanny when their children begin to attend school. Other families will keep a nanny until their children start high school or until they simply do not need a nanny anymore. On the other hand, there are also situations in which the reasons for the change are less desirable. One mother, for example, found that her nanny's personality did not mesh with her own. Another mother said that her nanny refused to follow the schedule she had prepared for the nanny and her children. Before making a change, be sure to assess whether or not the problem is behavioral. Although we might wish it, nannies are not mind readers! If you have particular ways of doing things in your home, let the nanny know. Although you may think that your preferences are common practice, it may have been different in their previous positions. In most cases, an attempt should be made to communicate with the nanny

and to give them an opportunity to correct the behavior. If this is not possible, or if the changes are not made to your satisfaction, it may be time for a change.

Q. *What's the best way to dump a nanny?*

A. The best way to let a nanny go is to be kind and gracious. Sitting down and discussing the reasoning behind the decision is preferred. If the change is due to the natural evolution of the family structure—such as the children starting school or the family having grown out of the need for a nanny—this conversation should be fairly simple. After explaining the situation, express your appreciation for their dedicated service and assure them that they will always be a dear friend to the family and to the children. Many parents will invite former caregivers to family events such as bar mitzvahs or birthday parties. If the nanny was a good employee and caregiver to your children, it is also important to give them a reference letter for future employment. Some families will also provide a severance package to the nanny; a typical severance package is two weeks' pay. Severance pay is not expected for babysitters or part-time nannies. Letting a nanny go when the reason for the change is neither natural nor mutual is often more difficult, and these are the conversations that parents dread the most. The best way to handle these situations is to be honest; if you can't stand their personality, let them know that you feel the long-term personality fit is not the best. If the nanny did not follow your directions, let them know that you were dissatisfied with their ability to take direction and follow through. The nanny will appreciate your honesty and the helpful criticism will be useful in their next position. When firing a nanny, always consult with your attorney to make sure that you are protected from any potential discrimination claims.

Q. What's the most outrageous story you've heard about someone dumping a nanny?

A. Our agency once heard of a celebrity employer letting a nanny go in the middle of the night. All of a sudden, the assistant knocked at the nanny's door and let her know that her services were no longer required. She was told to pack her things and leave at 3:00 a.m.

Q. Is there a wrong way to dump a nanny?

A. Yes. After a nanny has worked for a period of time with a family, there are bonds that have been created—especially with the children. It is important to let the nanny know why the decision has been made and to treat them kindly and with respect. It is also important to involve the children in the process of saying good-bye and to make the parting a happy one.

Q. What's the best way to ask a nanny to stop prancing around the house wearing her Daisy Dukes?

A. As Plato once said, "The beginning is the most important part of the work." One could say the same about hiring a nanny. It is important when hiring a new nanny that the family is very clear in the beginning about the expectations and requirements of the position. Appropriate work attire is a topic that should be addressed, and clear guidelines should be established before the nanny begins working.

Q. How should a parent deal with a nanny if she suspects that the nanny is stealing?

A. A nanny must be an individual of integrity and of high moral character. If a parent strongly suspects and/or is presented with evidence that their nanny is stealing, the family should let the nanny go immediately. This behavior is illegal and is unacceptable. In a situation where an item has been stolen and several staff

members could be responsible, an effort should be made to objectively investigate the situation. However, be careful not to accuse your nanny of stealing if you do not have concrete evidence. One of our clients came home one night to find a valuable necklace missing. She instantly assumed the nanny was responsible and angrily accused the nanny of stealing; the next day, she found the necklace and realized she had simply misplaced it. Unfortunately, by this time the damage had already been done, and the nanny no longer felt comfortable working in the home. The family lost an amazing nanny by jumping to conclusions.

Q. How do you politely ask a nanny to mother less and nanny more?

A. Open communication between the parents and the nanny is crucial in a good family/nanny relationship. It is important that the nanny respect the parents and the way in which they would prefer their children are raised. A professional nanny will listen to the parents and put their wishes into practice with their children in matters such as routine and discipline. If you feel that your nanny is trying to take over and you don't like it, speak up and be direct. Take control of the situation by becoming more involved in the day-to-day decisions. Try creating a schedule for your nanny and children or begin checking in throughout the day. Be open with your nanny if you feel that she is being too overbearing. Remember, you are the parent and the nanny is your employee. Be open to observations and suggestions by your nanny, but always remember that you have the right to dictate exactly how your children are cared for.

Q. Who coined the word "manny"?

A. The first ever mention of the word "manny" was used in an article in the *Washington Post* in 1986. Before that time, TV's classic *Family Affair* featured a male nanny, Mr. French. Recently, mannies have been gaining popularity and attention in the press

due to celebrities such as Britney Spears hiring a nanny for her children.

Q. What do you think is the most common misconception people have about nannies?

A. Unfortunately, the media has portrayed nannies as seductive bombshells looking for their next conquest. This stereotype has not been helped by highly publicized celebrity affairs with nannies such as Jude Law's, whose affair with his own nanny was put on public display. On an episode of *Desperate Housewives*, Lynette decided to fire her nanny because she felt she was too attractive. This is a stereotype that nannies must fight. Nannies are caregivers because working with children is their passion. The idea that there are a large number of nannies that are pining away after their employers is absurd. And most nannies don't look like Scarlett Johansson in the *Nanny Diaries*. To a professional nanny this is their calling, not just a job, and the desirability of the parents is the last thing on their mind.

Q. Who is your favorite TV/film nanny and why?

A. I hate to sound cliché, but *Mary Poppins* is to this day my all-time favorite. A nanny who can clean in a snap, make medicine go down like a spoonful of sugar, and encourage the children to use their imagination is worth her weight in gold.

DUMPIPEDIA

- ▶ Britney Spears dumped her nanny when her son fell out of his highchair.
- ▶ Robin Williams and Ethan Hawke both married their children's nannies.
- ▶ Nanny also means a female goat.
- ▶ Fran Drescher, star of *The Nanny*, had her first break in what movie?
 - A. *Animal House*
 - B. *Saturday Night Fever*
 - C. *This Is Spinal Tap*
 - D. *When Harry Met Sally*
- ▶ Julia Roberts wished her nanny, Marva, a "happy birthday" from the Academy Awards.

*The correct answer is B. Saturday Night Fever.
Fran played the character Connie.*