

Professional Transitions: The Shift to School Age Children

By Becky Kavanagh

Children equal change. Think about it, the life of a child (or any person for that matter) is not static, but full of adjustments, transformations and transitions. When you work with children daily, caring for their needs, helping them through those transitions, then your work is based on change. Although change is inevitable, it isn't always appreciated or comfortable!

What happens to your role as nanny when children move away from your care and into preschool programs or elementary school? This transition is one of the most difficult in our profession. For some families and nannies this time marks the end of their employment relationship. For others it is a movement into a new role, with a different set of expectations and rewards.

One major key is talking with your employer family about their expectations long before these transitions arise. More than a few questions will come up! You can help guide the conversation with appropriate questions of your own.

When the child starts kindergarten or first grade, what are their expectations for you? Do they expect that you will continue in full time employment to cover non-school or sick days? If so, what other expectations or additional duties do the parents have for you?

Are they considering changing your employment situation to part time hours? This should require entering into a new employment negotiation and agreement.

Sometimes nannies will agree to added duties or moving to part time hours because they have enjoyed the long-term position with the family, and feel strong obligation to them. They may talk about not being emotionally able or ready to leave the children at this time. A word of caution here, be sure that staying is actually in the best interests of everyone (including yourself). Can you financially handle cutting hours? Will you be able to secure other employment to cover that loss? Are you prepared to take on other duties for the family, which may not be related directly to child care? Knowing how you feel about these issues will help you when the time comes to make a decision.

I've known many nannies that have chosen to leave a position when the children enter into preschool or kindergarten years, or when the children reach a particular age as a matter of professional policy. They usually let prospective employers know at the initial interview about this policy, so that future expectations are clear. Many other nannies don't have any specific policy, but they know that they are not interested in working with older children, or making significant changes to their schedule or duties once the school years start. And then there are the nannies that have made the leap and gone with the flow, continuing on not only into elementary school grades, but far into the teen years as well.

What then are some of the options, if you choose to continue with a family into the school age years?

Part Time Option: Fewer hours with the children, usually after school. Part time employment can be set hours each day so that other employment options may be available in the mornings. Clarification about work schedule should be looked at in detail prior to choosing this option. Some families may also offer a split shift of before school

hours plus the after school hours. This can work well if you live close to the family, but makes finding additional employment more challenging.

Part Time/Flexible Option: Some nannies and families agree to go to a part time schedule with the addition of flexible hours for non-school days, holidays and sick days. This means the nanny is usually not in a position to accept additional employment because she needs to be available to step in as needed.

Full Time/Additional Duties Option: This option allows for continued full time employment, but does require that the nanny accept other duties, which usually include more household management. During the school year hours with the children are on their school schedule. The nanny is usually expected to supervise homework and projects and be responsible for transportation to other activities. When the children are in school the nanny may be asked to run errands and provide more house hold support (cleaning, organization, grocery shopping, meal preparation, etc...) as additional daily tasks. The expectations usually change again during school vacations.

Full Time/No Additional Duties Option: This is often agreed upon because the family recognizes their need for flexibility in their nanny through the school year's schedule. Employer families may have expectations that the nanny will be free to volunteer in their child's classroom and participate in other school activities, along with supervising homework and school projects. Sometimes nannies in this employment position offer to do other additional duties to keep themselves busy, even though this is not part of their employment agreement.

Working with older, school age children can be extremely rewarding. Often you see much of the foundation you've laid in their infancy through preschool years blooming. It's an opportunity to have more expansive interaction with a child as they develop into the adult they will become. It's an exciting and rewarding experience that demonstrates transitions and change can have very positive outcomes!

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