

Drop by a park in any U.S. city these days, and chances are you'll find a few nannies pushing children on the swings. While it used to be that only the very rich had their children tended to by nannies, in recent years, as more moms have taken jobs outside the home, more families have started looking to hire a caregiver.

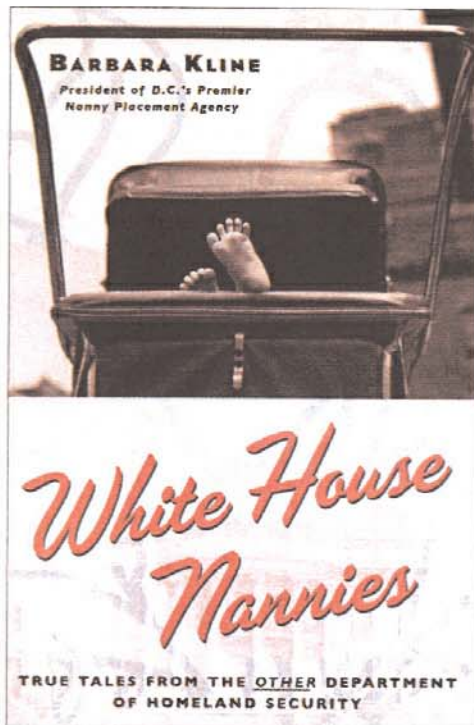
From 2002's bestselling novel *The Nanny Diaries* to this year's reality TV shows *Nanny 911* and *Supernanny*, nannies have become a hot topic. But this month, a new book called *White House Nannies* gives an especially insightful insider's perspective. Written by Barbara Kline, the owner of a well-respected, 20-year-old Washington, DC, nanny agency that caters to the political and media elite, the book dishes the dirt on high-profile clients and their child minders. But Kline, mother of Matt, 22, and Gillian, 18, also addresses more serious questions, from what nannies really think of their employers and their young charges to the tricks to hiring a great caregiver for your family.

TV used to catch nannies beating kids. Now we see them swoop in to save children from clueless parents. Why?

A There's a sense that parents aren't disciplining their kids. One client told me she never uses the word "no" because "it's such a negative concept." Is it that parents are trying to compensate for not spending time with their kids, or is it a parenting philosophy? I don't know. Nannies are often more able to say no because they don't have the same emotional hook to the children.

You place about 100 full-time nannies a year. How do you go about trying to find the right caregiver for a client family?

A Often parents will come to me with a fantasy. They'll say, "I'm looking for an Alice from *The Brady Bunch*." Or they want Mary Poppins. I can't tell you how many call asking for a British nanny. I always tell people, "No matter what country you name, I've seen good, bad, and indifferent." One client said to me, "My last



DIPLOMATIC AIDE Barbara Kline says respect is the key to peaceful coexistence between families and their caregivers.

when a parent gives the nanny responsibility and no authority. And they will take advantage. One client and his wife were busy during his re-election effort, so they hired a temporary nanny. One morning, the nanny gave their son a bowl of cereal with a banana for breakfast. The son wanted chocolate; when the nanny refused, he started howling, waking up his mother, who stormed in, dumped a bag of M&M's into the bowl and said, "Just give him the chocolate!"

You also say that you've turned down clients because you didn't like their attitude. Can you explain?

A It really upsets me that some people underpay their children's caregivers. One client—a human rights activist whose name you would know—actually said to me, "My Bolivian housekeeper thanks God every day that she has this job." Then she tells me that she wants her nanny to work 60-plus-hour weeks "plus flexibility on Saturdays"—and for a meager salary. I told her I didn't have anybody appropriate for her. When parents use the word "flexibility," it often means they don't want to pay overtime. Sometimes they'll complain

nanny was from Ghana and didn't work out. So let's avoid Africa." What I try to do is go beyond the stereotypes and find out what underlying qualities parents are looking for. Everyone wants someone reliable, responsible, and caring, but what else? When you hand off your child to a nanny, you need to feel good about her. White House political consultant Mary Matalin told me that she was looking for a nanny like the one James Carville, her husband and also a political strategist, had as a child. Carville is from the South; he wanted the old-fashioned, warm, nurturing, but no-nonsense model. Mary and James have strong personalities; they needed someone who'd be their match.

You share awful stories of nannies being mistreated. What bugs them most?

A They don't like it when parents don't back them up. Kids sense

INSIDE REPORTS FROM THE NANNY FRONT

More parents are hiring nannies. But what does that mean for family life? An elite Washington, DC, nanny agent gives answers—and dishes Beltway dirt.

to me that their nanny is sitting down while the baby sleeps. I explain that no one can be reasonably expected to do developmentally appropriate activities with an infant for 10 hours a day without taking a break!

With all the caregivers that you've placed over the years, haven't you seen your share of bad nannies too?

A Sure. A nanny who worked for a U.S. Secretary of Defense kept losing the keys to her employer's house, so she made up a bunch of copies and gave them to all her friends. One of my other clients discovered that her French au pair, not placed by me, had slept with her 16-year-old son. But my favorite story concerned the wife of a prominent insider with the first Bush administration, a neighbor of mine, who had a nanny for a year until she discovered that "she" was actually a "he" in drag. That was a first! I didn't place this nanny!

By the way, so many parents wait way too long before they let go of their nanny. The au pair who had slept with the teenage son? She wasn't fired! I say to the parents, "Get her out of there!" I hear, "But my kids are attached to her." It's so interesting to see these people, who are so highly accomplished in their work, manage so differently at home.

You admit that you've made mistakes in hiring nannies for your own family. What have you learned from them?

A One of the first nannies I hired to care for my family seemed fine, until I came home from work and found her giving herself a facial while my 18-month-old daughter was toddling in front of the staircase leading down to the cellar. I learned that parents should make a habit of dropping in unannounced.

Second, always look at somebody's motives. It sounds so simplistic, but does this person really enjoy children? Always ask, "Why do you want this job?" You'd be surprised by the responses. Some nannies will give a litany of reasons without ever mentioning children.

You also suggest that parents ask nannies about their own upbringing and family life. Why does this matter so much?

A Some people come from dysfunctional backgrounds. If the nanny hated her mother, guess who you become in the house? The hated mother! Listening to caregivers talk about their own children will also give you some insight. One woman I interviewed had four children, whom she was raising successfully while also putting in a 50-hour week taking care of other people's children. That spoke well of her.

I also try to find out if the nannies have a preference for one gender. Some could play with Barbies for hours. For others, that would be equivalent to being kept in purgatory.

Do you have any thoughts or theories about what happens to children who've been raised in part by nannies?

A I haven't seen any studies, but I believe in order to be emotionally connected to your kids, you have to be there physically some of the time. Many caregivers will tell me, "I don't want a job where the mother and father are never there."

They know it's too much work for them and hard on the kids. Some high-powered parents work 70- and 80-hour weeks. They haven't thought about how to integrate parenting into their work life. I'm not saying one parent has to be at home full-time—I've always worked and like working—but one parent has to work reasonable hours. You can't outsource parenting completely. By the way, I also see families where one parent is home full-time but still absentee.

In my case, I always made sure to be home at 6 p.m. for our family dinner. There was a point in time when I'm sure my daughter would have preferred for me to be there after school. But looking back, she says she never felt deprived of my presence. **G**

 For more advice on hiring and employing nannies, including a roundup of tax rules, visit www.child.com/web_links.

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Nanny Negotiations: The Ground Rules

How do you find and keep a good family caregiver? Barbara Kline, author of *White House Nannies*, offers these tips:

- **Hire carefully.** Commission a background check and interview references. Even if you use an agency, call the references again yourself. "Some parents 'forget' to tell an agency things they will share with another parent," Kline notes.
- **Be honest about the hours.** "Tell your caretaker your real schedule, not the one you wish you had," she advises.
- **Hold weekly meetings at first.** "Little misunderstandings sometimes turn into huge resentments because they're pent up for months," Kline says.
- **Don't micro-manage.** It's okay to ask for a log of your baby's sleep schedule, but let the nanny decide whether to go to the park at noon or 12:30 p.m.

- **Give her a raise every year.** "Your nanny will remember the exact date she started, and it will not sit well if she doesn't get a raise," says Kline. How much? "The rule of thumb is it has to be recognizable as an increase, whether it's 10% or \$1 more an hour." For a holiday bonus, the standard is one week's pay for every year on the job.
- **Don't be stingy with paid breaks.** Kline says the standard is two weeks vacation, seven to 10 holidays off, and five sick days a year, especially if you have toddlers: "They bring home everything. If your nanny gets sick, should she be penalized?"
- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Your child's laundry was folded but not put away? Before you start nitpicking, Kline advises, "Repeat this mantra at least once a day: My nanny's job is harder than mine." You may not believe it, she says, but you should.