

# Who's watching baby?

YOU *thought* IT WOULD LAST FOREVER, BUT BEFORE YOU KNOW IT YOUR MATERNITY LEAVE IS OVER AND IT'S TIME TO GO BACK TO *work*. MOMS RETURNING TO THEIR JOBS OFTEN EXPERIENCE A RANGE OF *emotions*; IT'S EXCITING TO GO BACK TO WORK. BUT WHO'S GOING TO LOOK AFTER *baby*?

Kathy Buckworth

After spending up to a year at home with baby, dealing with this new chapter in raising a happy and healthy child can be intimidating for even the most confident person. Look at the matter simply—three key factors need to be met to arrive at the best childcare option: financial, emotional, and logistical.

## Weighing the options.

Each solution will weigh differently. A professionally managed daycare in a commercial setting provides confidence and structure, but may seem cold and overwhelming in size. A home-based daycare can be less expensive and does provide the comfort of a residential home, but can be worrisome in terms of meeting regulations and training needs. Thinking of a nanny? They're expensive. Do they live in or live out? What work visa issues will you have to deal with?

Jay and Melissa Algar struggled with finding the best option for baby Ella, and for themselves. "For us, it was first and foremost about feeling as good as possible about where Ella would spend so much time. Location was important too. We needed a place close to home so it wouldn't be too hard for us to split pick-up and drop-off duties." Financial, emotional, and logistical needs? All met.

Robynne Ostry, a Toronto mom, also did research before returning to work. "I investigated both daycare and home daycare options, and while we saw some excellent facilities, and I liked the concept of [professionally managed] daycare—the home daycare option worked best for us. Home daycare provided stimulation for our only child and a smaller environment." While this solution worked best the first time around, when sister Payton came along, Ostry had to consider the needs of both children, as well as the lifestyle of a two-child family. "The second time around we were five years older and didn't think we could manage two different drop-offs. We wanted a more peaceful home life so decided on a live-out nanny."

## So many different choices.

Where to start? Neena Locke, a daycare director and new mother herself, provides parents with a checklist to review. Criteria she recommends include ensuring the centre has an open door policy for parent drop-ins; that there is a stimulating, age-appropriate program in place; that staff are warm and friendly; health and safety codes are met; fees are reasonable; and, if special needs are involved, that they are accommodated. Plus, advises Locke, "Ask if you can talk to one or two parents to see how they like the program." Any reputable nanny agency should also provide you with recommended questions and criteria when considering hiring, as well as give you contact information for former employer references.

A personal reference is important in feeling comfortable. When starting your search, which in busy urban centres can often start even before the baby is born, it's a great idea to talk to other parents who have been through the process. Vancouver mom-to-be Danielle Benn knew just where to begin. "I started my research by reaching out to those who could provide the best, most up-to-date advice—my friends. They were a fantastic source of information—from providing advice on local agencies that could help pull together lists of local group and family daycare operations to the key questions I should ask when doing my interviews. If there is one recommendation I could make to all the soon-to-be moms, it's that the sooner you can lock this down, the better."

As with childbirth, the first time you do something is always harder and scarier than the second or third time around. Mom Marlet Erasmus found she had different needs when searching for a nanny for her three children. She jokes: "The first-time mother would be concerned about stimulation and routine whereas the ancient mother of three would at least just like all of them to still be alive by the time she gets back home."

The answer to choosing your best childcare option is finding what works for you, so you can concentrate on your work. **b**

KATHY BUCKWORTH is the author of *Journey to the Darkside: Supermom Goes Home* (Key Porter, 2007), and appears on Slice Network's *Birth Days*. Her four children have survived every childcare option. [kathybuckworth.com](http://kathybuckworth.com)



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