



Finding, meeting and interviewing care providers and helpers can be a daunting task.

The LaChris Connection has attempted to 'Lighten the Load' for you in this area by recruiting and supporting care providers in the S.F. Bay Area and making them available to your family via our "Meet the Parents" events, individual referrals and the use of care.com's website. However, the task of meeting and/or interviewing prospective care providers will occur and we've got some tips!

If you've read about or attended our "Meet the Parents" event model you'll know that the main 'flavor' of this event is to have a casual setting where families and care providers can meet and mingle in a relaxed setting. The result being an opportunity to see who "connects" with one another. You can incorporate this model into your interviewing approach.

Most of us parents realize that the trick to this type of interview, which has such a personal twist, is striking a balance between the interview being professional yet natural. It is important to establish an employer / employee rapport, yet it is crucial to get a sense of how this care provider might "fit in" with your family and/or your child's needs.

That balance can be struck by being very well prepared yet create a relaxed atmosphere. Have a clear format for your meeting time yet, conduct the interview at a park or in the toy area of your home were your child can be present and comfortable ... structured yet friendly!

Also, scheduling an interview which will provide both alone time with the person *and* time with your child is a great approach. For example, with a slightly older child you might begin the interview ¼ hour before your child arrives home on the bus so your time together overlaps with a chance to meet your child. Otherwise, if you don't have family help, well, then you're in that ironic quandary of needing a sitter so you can interview a sitter! Not funny, but ironic.

If possible, allow time for the applicant to interact while your child engages in their favorite game or activity or listens to their favorite music. This is, of course, easier said than done as many children can "act out" in various ways around new folks. However, even seeing a care provider's reaction to that behavior can be very telling. Also, if your child is physically handicapped and/or their cognitive ability is masked this can be an opportunity for this your child's gifts to shine. Observe whether or not the care provider picks up on these abilities that are so familiar to you!

So, let's get to the meat of this interview! The above mentioned "format" could be as follows:

1. Have an interview form for the interviewee to fill out. (Borrow *TLC's care giver application*). Not only is this a professional approach but it allows each of you to have a bit of settling in time. Try not to "hover" while the person is writing. Step aside to review any resume they might have brought and/or review the questions you'll be asking them. Also, during this time, if your child is present **enjoy some positive loving, complimentary time with your child to "set the stage" for respect.**

2. Begin by reviewing their completed application and/or anything that 'jumps out at you' about their resume.
3. Be prepared with your list of questions. This not only helps you to be able to conduct the interview professionally, but also allows you to compare more easily various interviewees. If you don't take many notes while chatting, be sure to jot down your impressions immediately upon their leaving.
4. Establish in your own mind if your family is a "private" or "grand central station" type family and ask question accordingly. For instance:
Do you see yourself working in the background or becoming like family?
Give me an example of a private "family situation" and how you would respond?
5. **Here are some interview inquiry ideas (see below what ideas you're digging for)**
 - a. If you've worked with or known anyone with special needs, can you tell me about one admirable characteristic or gift that person had?
 - b. What are examples of how you might show respect to a differently abled person?
 - c. Do you have some ideas on how you might change the direction of a "power struggle", like a yes/no, yes/no, argument between yourself and our child?
 - d. How would you handle us as parents having different ideas about discipline?
 - e. Since children with special needs cognitive abilities are often masked, what are some tricks to learning what the child understands or "gets"?
 - f. At your last job with a family (or co-workers) what is an example of a difficult situation you encountered and how did you get through it.
 - g. What type of support system do you have outside of your work?

The above questions are pretty difficult for "on the spot" and a person may naturally have the ability to interact well, yet not be able to put it into words. So, if you delve into such questions you may want to get them started on some answers and ask them to "take it away"!

6. **The ideas, techniques and attitudes you're looking for in the above set of questions are:**
 - a. Your listening for excitement about the "hidden treasures" of those with special needs.
 - b. Answers like: asking many questions which acknowledge that they have druthers and opinions. Getting to their physical level (stooping down, etc.). Allowing the child lots of time to respond or 'process' before answering, not fearing pauses. Having a sense of humor and, very important, not having pity, etc.
 - c. Behavior management questions reveal if the provider has tools. In a power struggle, they might know to offer a choice of two alternatives i.e. instead of a yes/no debate about going inside, asking "which door should we use?".
 - d. Looking for healthy communication skills and sensitivities.
 - e. You want to hear that a caregiver will give the 'benefit of the doubt', assume intelligence and adjust accordingly. Again a chance to communicate respect, like answer b, above.
 - f. Several observations can come from their dialogue about prior positions. If they say 'nothing' was wrong, ask if they would have liked to address a problem and didn't. Listen for blame statements or "all them" scenarios. Listen for "owning" of their own 'stuff'. Also their respectfulness toward all involved. These can be very telling answers.
 - g. You're trying to confirm that the applicant does not NEED you family relationships to fill a huge void for them

These questions and suggested tones of answers to “look out for” are meant to help you set the flavor of an interview even more than offer specifics. It’s hoped that these hints will help your interview progress into “meatier” conversations and avoid those rote sounding interactions and eliminate awkward pauses!

Your intuition is, of course, your best bet. Your own wisdom and intelligence and familiarity with your child’s needs are more important than any advice this article might give. Know that the wonderful, loving proud understanding you have of your child is o.k. to seek in a care provider’s attitude. Of course that can be balanced by you sensing the old “willingness to learn” that we all seek in employees in both domestic and business settings.

It’s important to methodically and consistently replenish our pool of caregivers, who can meet different needs at different times. Try to not be too focused on or overjoyed at the possible discovery of the “perfect nanny.” Sentiments such as, “Oh my gosh, he/she sounds so great, our dreams have come true,” often result from that first phone conversation with a new caregiver. That excitement is likely a bubble waiting to be burst ☺. In reality, caregivers come and go over the years, each with their wonderful gifts and shortcomings, just like each of us! **Together**, with the primary caregiver, **a variety** of respite providers will ensure that our loved ones enjoy **balanced** care, friendship, assistance and the independence that they need and deserve.

Our final comment here is that we hope you have the opportunity to actually be selective in your respite provider interviewing process. We realize that getting past the practical obstacles of finding folks who are comfy with special needs, affordable hourly wage requests, coordinating schedules, gender, language and needed skills, doesn’t always leave a lot of room for being selective! TLC’s mission is to make that pool to select from greater than you might have hoped. Our partnering with [care.com/TLC](https://www.care.com/TLC), creating services that cater to “Special Needs”, will help with that goal locally and nationally! So, here’s to lots and lots of interviews and finding a few great care providers!