

Does Nanny know best?

Whether it's a wrench or a relief, child minders always know they can hand their little darlings back at the end of the day. But what happens when a nanny becomes a mummy? Is the advice she gave her employer forgotten as quickly as the first mashed banana hits the floor – or is motherhood just a walk in the park? Gillian Rowe went to find out

Brooke Gentry-Potter, 26, was a full-time nanny and now runs her own agency, Kent Nannies. She lives in Kent and has a daughter, Alexia, two.

It was a shock when I had Alexia. Everyone said it was going to be a breeze because of what I did, but I thought, "I've never had a baby before and they didn't teach us how to breastfeed at college!"

I used to be much more relaxed and tolerant with the children I looked after than I am with my own child. I think it's because I was being paid to do a job. With your own child you definitely do lose it at times. When you're working you don't seem to get as fraught, and you can see a light at the end of the tunnel. The parents are coming home at the end of the day and then you can relax. But when you are a mother, it's 24 hours a day.

At college they teach you to do everything by the book, but you soon learn on the job. For instance, we were taught never to bribe a child, but I soon started doing that with the children I looked after and I couldn't get through life sometimes if I didn't do it with my own daughter.

Now I've had my own baby, I'm much more sympathetic to mums. Before I had Alexia, I used to feel I was closer to the children I worked with than their mothers were. Sometimes I was with them for 12 hours a day – and they can cry so much when you go home.

I remember witnessing a toddler's first steps and not telling the mother, so that when she saw her daughter walking at the weekend,



Brooke Gentry-Potter with two-year-old Alexia, says, "Now I've had my own baby, I'm much more sympathetic to mums"

she thought she was seeing her first steps. I didn't let on. I didn't want her to be disappointed.

I remember another time, getting the three children I was looking after ready for bed, with pyjamas on and teeth brushed. The parents arrived home and I left, but I'd forgotten my mobile phone so I went back in the house and the parents were in the kitchen giving them all sweets. I went home furious, thinking of all the hard work I'd done, but now I can completely see it from the parents' point of view. Even if it was just because they felt guilty, it doesn't matter. They are their children and how they treat them is up to them.

Now that I've had my own child I do get a bit annoyed with some of my nannies who ring up to say that a mum is interfering. One told me she was cross because the baby needed new shoes and the mother had said she would get them for her at the weekend. The nanny said, "She needs them now," and I had to say, "You don't know what an important thing that is for the mother to do, to go with the child and buy them together."

Having said that, you do get some nightmare jobs where the mother doesn't let you get on with it at all. But they tend to be mums that don't work. The ones that do work are usually respectful and grateful for getting the right help.

I now realise how important a mother's relationship is with a child, and you can't train a nanny to understand that.

Charlotte Dyson, 38, trained at the prestigious Norland College for nannies, in Bath. She now lives in Yorkshire and has a daughter, Eve, aged seven.

Without a doubt, my training as a nanny has stood me in good stead with my own child. She wasn't a difficult baby, but I think any problems we had were because I had to carry on working after I had her, and take her to work with me.

When I got pregnant, a lot of the expectant mums I met were paranoid about bringing the baby home. But that didn't worry me at all. All I was paranoid about was getting enough pain relief when I was in labour!

Certain things were second nature to me, like washing her, picking her

Charlotte Dyson with Eve, seven.
"I had to carry on working after I had her and take her to work with me"



up correctly, changing a nappy. I know a lot of first-time mums think you have to be so careful, but I never felt that with Eve. What I found a shock, though, was how constant it is, having your own baby. At the point of the day when, as a nanny, I would say, "Goodbye, I'll see you later," suddenly it was, "Oh, this is mine and it's not going home."

I couldn't believe how tired I got. During the day I had to look after other people's children and then come home and look after Eve. Hence, I got her into a quick routine for bed because otherwise I would

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get ground down. When I got home I wanted to have my time and not have anyone to annoy me, otherwise everyone would end up having a piece of me and I would have nothing else left. So she was sleeping through the night at six weeks, and has done so ever since.

She goes to bed at 7.30pm and, although she may not go to sleep until 8.15pm, she knows she must stay there because I need time to myself. I need that time to step away so that it doesn't constantly become a drain.

I had to take her with me to work