

# Hiring a Home Care Worker

**Y**our mother really wants to stay in her home, but you know she can't do it alone anymore. You've decided to hire a home care worker to help her remain independent. That's what she wants most.

Before you begin your search for the right person, you need to figure out just what kind of help your parent needs and how often. Home care workers usually provide help with:

- Household chores, such as cleaning, laundry, and preparing meals;
- Non-medical personal care, including bathing, dressing, and moving about the house.

## Starting the Search

After you've determined the kind of help you need, there are several ways to begin your search:

- Ask friends, neighbors, co-workers, or other caregivers you know for references.
- Post a bulletin board ad in your church, synagogue, senior center, adult day center, hospital, library, recreation center, or grocery store.

- Register with a college job-placement center, especially those with nursing or social work programs.
- Look in the phonebook.
- Call a local agency that charges a fee to match home care workers with clients.
- Run an ad in a local newspaper.

Your advertisement should briefly describe the job and include approximate hours and a telephone number where people can reach you. You don't need to include your name or any other personal information.

During the phone conversation, you may want to ask about:

- Their previous work experience;
- Special training for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease;
- How they will get to work.

## Before the Interview

Once people start contacting you about the position, you need to begin a screening and interview process. You don't have to meet with everyone who calls. A brief telephone conversation can help you decide whether or not to schedule an interview.

# Talking About Independent Living

Before you begin interviewing, write a job description you can share with applicants. Include all the tasks you need the person to perform, as well as the required hours and days. Have the job description ready and a list of questions to ask each applicant.

You also should know how much you are able to pay. If you hire someone as an independent contractor, instead of through an agency, you won't be responsible for covering taxes or insurance, such as health care. However, you still must report the person's earnings to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Be very clear about this in the job contract (see below). You may want to check with the IRS for proper forms and instructions.

Ask those who come for an interview to bring a resume or job history and names and telephone numbers for at least two references. If possible, have your parent participate in the interview or at least meet the people you're serious about hiring.

## The Interview

Discuss your parent's needs, health concerns, likes and dislikes, and special circumstances with applicants. Remember to be friendly but professional during the interview. Stick to questions that will help you make the best decision about whether this person is right for the job and for your parent.

Here are some things you'll want to learn about applicants during the interview:

- Their name, address, telephone number, and social security number (you can ask for proof of identity —

if not a social security card, then a driver's license or other photo ID);

- How much experience they've had in home care;
- Whether they have any special training, such as working with clients who have dementia;
- Whether they are willing and able to perform all the duties you've outlined in the job description;
- Why they left their former job;
- Why they are seeking a home care position;
- What their expectations are;
- Whether they drive and/or have a car;
- Whether they have ever been in trouble with the law.

Give applicants a chance to ask you questions about the job and your expectations as well. Give honest answers. Talk about how you will handle vacation and other time off. You don't want there to be misunderstandings about what each party expects.

## Checking References

Always follow up on references, no matter how much you like an applicant. A reference can confirm your feelings about a person or give you important information you would not have gotten otherwise. Ask references why the applicant moved on, whether there were any problems, whether the person is trustworthy and on time, and what the person's responsibilities were. Take notes on each applicant so you can refer to them when making your final decision.

## Background Check

You may want to consider paying for a criminal background check. Contact your local law enforcement agency for information.

## The Hire

Hiring someone to care for a loved one is a big step. Not only are you entrusting a home care worker with your parent's care and well-being, you're allowing that person to come into your parent's home on a regular basis — or even live there if that's the agreed-upon arrangement. That means you want to choose carefully and wisely. It's a good idea to set a one-month trial period to give things a test run.

Once a person accepts your job offer, write out what you both agree to — trial period, job duties, salary, pay schedule, time off, start date, termination policy — and keep copies of this job contract signed by both of you. You might want to be at your parent's house on the first few days to familiarize the new caregiver with the routine and where everything is. Periodically, you may want to drop by unannounced to see how things are going.

## Troubleshooting

When you hire a home care worker, you are the employer and the boss, whether you like it or not. That means the responsibility for keeping everyone happy and ensuring that everything runs smoothly falls squarely on your shoulders.

Keeping the lines of communication open can help you resolve problems before they get out of hand. Have regular conversations with your parent and the home care worker about how things are going. Ask if

they're happy with the arrangement or if something needs to change. If there's a problem, chances are you can work things out once you talk them through and perhaps make some adjustments.

For instance, maybe the home care worker needs a break during the day and isn't getting it, but is afraid to speak up. You want to address the issue before resentment, anger, or burnout sets in.


Or perhaps your parent is unhappy with the meals the home care worker prepares and doesn't want to eat. Find out why. Maybe there isn't enough variety or your parent doesn't have input into choosing the menu. Maybe your parent would like to help and feels shut out of the kitchen. These types of problems usually aren't too hard to fix once you learn what's causing them.

## Terminating an Employee

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, things just don't work out. It's a good idea to have names of some people who can fill in while you're trying to hire someone else: neighbors, family members, or temporary home care workers.

Circumstances requiring immediate termination include theft and abuse. Contact the police as soon as you discover something missing. Also notify police, as well as Adult Protective Services, if a home care worker was abusing your parent. No one wants this person to work in someone else's home again.

Hiring the right person to care for your parent might take some time and persistence. If things don't work out the



first time around, don't give up. Talking with other caregivers or your area agency on aging might be helpful. Learn from your experience and try again. Finding a good caregiver is worth the effort.

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