

# Hiring the Help You Need

**Advice on choosing helpers to  
provide household repairs,  
housekeeping assistance,  
companionship, or personal care  
for older people in their homes**

**Developed and Distributed by  
Broome County Office for Aging  
PO Box 1766  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
(607)778-2411**



*Are you considering hiring someone to assist you or an elderly relative or friend with household chores or personal care? There are several points to consider ahead of time to avoid misunderstandings and problems. This is true whether you hire someone through an agency or through a private arrangement.*

## **1 Before You Begin – Some Considerations**

Whatever kind of work you want done, and whether you hire privately or through an agency, prepare yourself ahead of time.

### **Here are some questions to consider.**

- ✓ What tasks will the worker be expected to do?
- ✓ For household tasks, when and how often are certain chores to be performed?
- ✓ How much are you willing to pay?

### **Personal Care**

- ✓ For personal care jobs: is hands-on care expected?
- ✓ Does the care receiver require constant supervision?  
Make a list that specifies what work is to be done.  
What are the exact hours and days of the job?
- ✓ Will you accept either a male or female, is one gender preferred?
- ✓ Are there special conditions that need to be explained?  
(No smoking allowed, unusual behavior of the care-receiver, etc.)

If you're looking for assistance with companionship or personal care (bathing, dressing, etc.) for an older person, you may want to call Broome County Community Alternative Systems Agency (CASA) program before you call anyone else.

CASA is an agency that can help you decide what kind of care you really need to help yourself or an elderly relative remain at home. CASA can send an experienced nurse to the home to discuss your situation and develop a suggested care plan.

Because there are so many services and programs in our community to

help older people who have limitations, a visit from CASA will ensure that you are not overlooking anything that could help.

In some cases, you may learn that there is financial assistance to help pay for part or all of the home care. But even if you are not entitled to financial assistance, CASA can give you an impartial perspective on the services available and appropriate for you.

There is no charge for this in-home evaluation. You can reach CASA by calling 778-2420.

Once you know what kind of help you need, you can choose to go through an agency or hire privately.

## **② Where to Look for Helpers**

If you are looking for a helper to do yard work, minor repairs, or housekeeping, or to provide personal care or companionship, there are several options open to you.

Some people choose to call home care or cleaning service agencies that employ workers they can assign to you. Such agencies will be listed in the yellow pages, may advertise on television, radio, in newspapers or on the internet. Agencies provide training and supervision for the workers they send out, and you can call the agency if you are not satisfied with the work. However, getting the work done through such an agency may be more expensive than hiring privately.

Individuals who are “private hired” may advertise in the newspapers, supermarkets, internet, local smaller newspapers or newsletters. Their ads may be listed under “Situations Wanted.” You may also hear about such workers by word-of-mouth from a friend, neighbor or other family caregiver.

Sometimes employers who are looking for household workers put their own ad in a daily or weekly newspaper or newsletter “Help Wanted” section.

In our community, a very helpful resource is the Broome County Office for Aging's Program called The Senior Helpers Program.

The Senior Helpers Program can link you with private-pay workers who are interested in a variety of assignments in people's homes. The Senior Helpers Program will have one of the workers registered for your kind of assignment call you. Then you go ahead and negotiate directly with the person registered with The Senior Helpers Program as to salary, hours, etc. As with other private-pay arrangements, you will need to thoroughly check into the references of any person you are considering for employment. The Senior Helpers Program number is 778-2411.

### **Make your Decision: Hire through an agency or private hire**

Hiring through an agency or privately is an individual decision based on each person's situation. Once you decide if you are going to hire through an agency or private hire you can proceed.

If you decide to go through an agency and the first worker they send doesn't meet your needs then call back and ask for someone else. The agency checks references and sets the rates.

If you decide to private hire we have some helpful information for you starting with interviewing.

### **③ Start The Hiring Process:**

Remember that you may hear from people who answer your ad or who have been referred to you that do not strike you as suitable when you speak with them on the phone. Don't feel you have to personally interview everyone who may call you. If instinct tells you this person doesn't seem to fit the bill, save yourself and them some time. Tell them you will keep their name and may call in the future.

Before you set an appointment, it helps to tell the applicant over the phone the kind of work you are offering, approximately how many hours of work there are and how much you will pay.

If special skills are needed, you may want to touch on these over the phone to make sure the person seems interested and capable.

If an applicant seems appropriate, set up a time for a personal interview. You may want to get a trusted friend or family member to sit in on the interview as well. You will later be able to discuss impressions of the potential worker and gain more confidence in any decision you make.

Have ready for the interview, an interview form and a contract or agreement form filled in ahead of time with the information you already know.

Discuss with the applicant the specific list of tasks you have prepared (See Developing a Contract).

### **Interview the Person**

Don't trust a phone call alone. It will help to see the person in the home where they will be working, to see if they are a good "fit." Ask them frank and open questions about areas that concern you, and don't assume they will be willing to do everything unless you spell it out. Are they willing to change adult protective garments, give a bath, or deal with difficult behavior? Are they able to assist with lifting if necessary?

### **Check References**

Some people may know how to present themselves well because they are good salesmen or saleswomen. This doesn't prove they can actually do the job. Ask them for at least three names and phone numbers of people you can call to discuss their work. At least two of these should be people they have worked for, not just personal references.

### **Prepare a contract**

You may not be an attorney but you can still prepare a simple and clearly written agreement that spells out your expectations from the worker and your responsibilities as an employer.

## **④ Items to consider before you offer the job to someone:**

### **Personality / Sensitivity**

- ✓ Will you feel comfortable with having this person work for you?
- ✓ Will you be able to communicate your expectations and correct him or her if the work doesn't meet your expectations?
- ✓ Does he or she show tact, concern and respect? This may be more of an issue when you are seeking a companion for an elderly person, than, for instance, if you are hiring someone to do yard work.
- ✓ If the elder has special needs or problems, such as hearing or memory impairment, does the worker seem to have compassion and an understanding of the challenges of communication?

### **Experience/Competency**

- ✓ Is he or she capable of performing the work?
- ✓ Can the employee do it well enough to suit your needs?
- ✓ How would the person react in an emergency?

### **Reliability**

- ✓ Will the worker show up on time and on the right days?
- ✓ If unable to report to work, will he or she let you know as much in advance as possible?

### **Honesty**

- ✓ Can you trust the helper to perform the work he or she promised to do? This is especially an issue if you can not be present when the work is being done.
- ✓ Can you trust them with your personal possessions? What if the person they will be caring for has poor vision or is memory-impaired? You cannot expect the care receiver to monitor the work of the employee.

### **Willingness/Availability**

- ✓ Are they affordable?
- ✓ Are they available at the time you need them?

## **⑤ Developing a Contract (for private-pay arrangements)**

The Contract or Agreement You and the Employee Will Sign Should List:

- ✓ The specific tasks involved in the job
- ✓ The amount you will pay
- ✓ The hours of work and any behaviors you will find unacceptable that would result in terminating the contract.

You should be very specific about the tasks that are to be done. This is especially important with personal care.

Examples: - “brush dentures; soak 5 minutes in Polident”;

- “Place pan of water on lap each morning with soap, washcloth, towel; she will wash face and hands herself while seated in chair”;

- “Prefers coffee with sugar; likes to put sugar in herself”.

- ✓ By listing and discussing individual tasks, you will learn if the applicant is willing and able to do the work as you wish it done.
- ✓ If you are hiring the worker for a specific length of time, the agreement should give the beginning and ending dates of employment.
- ✓ If the arrangement is to be ongoing (assuming both parties are satisfied), you should agree on the terms of ending the arrangement, i.e., how much notice either one of you must give before termination.
- ✓ There should be a place for both you and the worker to sign, and to indicate the date of signing.
- ✓ If you will be paying Social Security tax for the employee, this should also be noted. (See Section 9: Employment Taxes and Insurance)

The contract will be especially helpful if you are having problems with the employee. You can refer back to the arrangements written in the contract for clarification if needed.

Even though you “have it in writing” it may still be uncomfortable for you to confront the worker if you are not pleased with the job he or she is doing. A few suggestions may help with this:

- If there are positive aspects to his/her performance, it will “soften the blow” if you pay the person a compliment where praise is due.
- Try to give your criticism as soon as possible after the problem occurs rather than “stew” over it. Make a suggestion that would improve the situation next time. Listen to the worker’s response carefully.
- Show respect and regard for the worker. Do your best to criticize the action, rather than the person. Unless the worker’s behavior is clearly unacceptable, dangerous or dishonest, you may want to give him/her a chance to improve rather than terminating the contract.

## ⑥ Employment Taxes and Insurance Questions

If you are wondering if you need to pay employment taxes, we suggest you contact the Internal Revenue Service for up to date information. Check out Publication 926: Household Employers Tax Guide. That web address is: [www.irs.gov/publications/p926](http://www.irs.gov/publications/p926) or you can call them at 1-800-829-1040. The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance also has available, Publication 27: What You Need to Know if You Hire Household Help. Their web address is: [www.tax.ny.gov/publications](http://www.tax.ny.gov/publications) or you can call them at: 1-518-485-6654 (withholding tax information center).

### Liability

Your present homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policy may cover your liability if your helper was to have an accident while working at your home. You should check with your insurance agent as to whether additional coverage is advisable.

### Other Suggestions

- ✓ Keep a record of payments made to your employee.
- ✓ If paying by cash, use receipts to prove payments.
- ✓ Keep a record of any disciplinary discussions.
- ✓ If your first experience with hiring a household helper is negative, don’t give up.
- ✓ In the case of personal care workers, you may have to try more than once before you make a good match. Older people may be resistant to accepting help from “strangers” and may feel their privacy is being invaded. Sometimes the right personality in a helper will “click” with the older person and things become much easier.

# Sample Interview Form

1. Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Applicant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Appearance of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Was he/she on time for the interview? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What experience does she/he have for the work?:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Personality factors (list positive or negative observations):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Did he or she agree to the terms of the contract? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Other comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Names and telephone number of three references:

| Name | Telephone # | Work or personal reference? |
|------|-------------|-----------------------------|
|------|-------------|-----------------------------|

|       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

I have agreed to notify the applicant of my decision by:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Sample Reference Form

1. Name of applicant: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name and telephone # of reference: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Date I called this reference: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How was the job I am offering described to this reference?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Questions for the reference:
  - a. How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Is this a personal or work reference? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. If work reference, what was the position the applicant held?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. How long did he/she work there? \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Were you the supervisor or co-worker? \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Did he/she work directly with older adults? \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Were you satisfied with his/her work? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - h. If a personal reference, how long have you known him or her and what kind of contact do/did you have? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What are the applicant's strengths? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you feel that the applicant has the skills and experience to do the job I described? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Why or why not: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Can the applicant be trusted to perform without direct supervision?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you recall any problems with the worker? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Was he or she on time for work? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Is there anything else I should know? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Sample Contract Form

1. **Employer's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Employee's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Who is paying the Social Security tax? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Employee's Social Security number: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Title of Job: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Date work is to begin \_\_\_\_\_; to end \_\_\_\_\_

7. Hours of work: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Days and Times: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Salary per hour: \_\_\_\_\_; Fringe benefits, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Salary to be paid every \_\_\_\_\_ by (cash or check) \_\_\_\_\_

12. Specify tasks to be done:

Household Tasks: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Care Tasks for (name of care receiver) \_\_\_\_\_

13. I understand that the following behaviors are unacceptable: (specify)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. I understand that termination without notice will occur for the following reasons: [examples: unacceptable behavior as noted above, evidence of unhealthy, dangerous or illegal practices.]

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



Funded by  
Administration on Aging  
New York State Office for the Aging  
and Broome County