

What to Do If You Feel You Are Being Exploited at Work

A practical guide for nannies

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Being a nanny is a professional role.

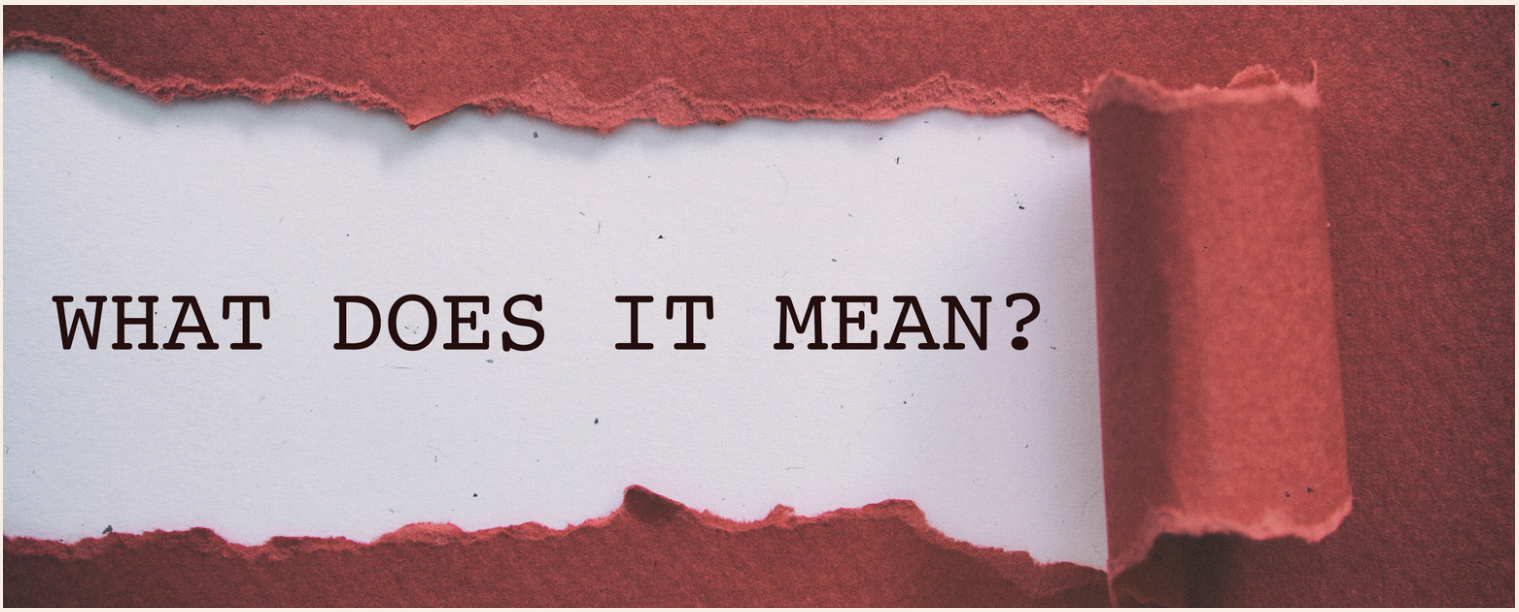
You work closely with families, often in their home, and the relationship you build with an employer can become very personal.
That can be one of the wonderful things about being a Nanny— but it can sometimes make it difficult to know where the professional boundaries lie.

You may find yourself thinking:
“Is this normal?”
“Am I being unreasonable?”
“Does everyone work these extra hours?”
“Should I be paid for this?”
“Can my employer really do that?”
If something about your employment doesn't feel right, it's worth stopping and checking the facts.

This guide is designed to help you recognise some potential warning signs, understand the basics of your employment rights and know where to go for reliable, independent advice.

The National Nanny Association does not provide legal advice or investigate individual employment disputes. This guide is intended as general information and signposting only.

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What does Exploitation Mean?

The word exploitation can sound quite extreme, and it is important to remember that not every difficult employment situation is exploitation.
You may simply have a disagreement with your employer, be unhappy with a decision or feel that your job has changed from what you originally agreed. However, there are situations where a worker may be treated unlawfully or unfairly, and it is important to know the difference.

Possible warning signs could include:

-Being paid less than the legal minimum when you are entitled to the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage
-Regularly working hours that you are not paid for
-Being expected to work significantly beyond your agreed hours without appropriate payment
-Unlawful deductions being taken from your wages
-Not receiving payslips
-Not having written employment particulars
-Being denied statutory paid holiday
-Being told you are self-employed when your actual working relationship may indicate otherwise
-Being threatened or intimidated when you raise legitimate concerns
-Being treated unfairly because you have raised a workplace concern
-Being subjected to serious control, coercion or other forms of labour exploitation.

One issue on its own does not necessarily mean that you are being exploited.

Employment rights can depend on your individual circumstances and, importantly, your employment status.
If you are unsure, get independent advice rather than relying on comments or opinions on social media.

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Remember: you are a professional

Nannying involves trust.

Families invite you into their home and entrust you with the care of their children. You may become an important part of family life and, over time, relationships can become very close.
But being trusted does not mean giving up your employment rights.
A nanny who is directly employed by a family will usually have an employer, and the family has legal responsibilities towards their employee.
GOV.UK states that someone who directly employs a nanny will usually be their employer if the nanny is not self-employed or paid through an agency. Employers have responsibilities including providing an employment contract, payslips and paying at least the National Minimum Wage.

Professional warmth and good relationships are important — but so are clear expectations and professional boundaries.

Do you have a written contract?

A written employment agreement should set out the main terms of your job.

This should help you understand things such as:

- your job title and duties
- your employer
- your place of work
- your working hours
- your rate of pay
- how and when you are paid
- your holiday entitlement
- your notice arrangements
- sick pay arrangements
- pension arrangements where applicable
- other important terms and conditions.

GOV.UK guidance confirms that employees and workers have a right to written employment particulars.
If your role has changed significantly since you started, it is worth checking whether your written terms still accurately reflect the job you are actually doing.
A contract is not just paperwork. It protects both the nanny and the employer by making expectations clear.

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Are you being paid for all the time you work?

This is one of the most important areas for nannies to understand.

If you are required to work, that time may need to be treated as working time for minimum wage purposes.

This could include things such as:

- caring for the children
- preparing meals or carrying out agreed nanny duties
- accompanying children to activities
- certain required training
- certain periods when you are required to be available or on standby.

The exact rules depend on the circumstances and the type of working arrangement.
Acas explains that working time for National Minimum Wage purposes can include certain periods such as travelling to training and being on standby, while other types of travel do not count.
If you regularly arrive early, stay late or work through breaks because the family expects you to, keep a record of those hours and check whether you are being paid correctly.



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Check your pay

Workers are generally entitled to at least the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, depending on their age and circumstances.
The legal minimum rates change, so always check the current GOV.UK figures rather than relying on an old figure or something you have seen online.
GOV.UK's current guidance confirms that National Minimum Wage is a legal minimum and employers are responsible for paying the correct rate.
You can also use the GOV.UK and Acas guidance to check whether the hours you work and the way you are paid have been calculated correctly.
Remember: your salary or hourly rate should not be considered in isolation. The hours you actually work matter too.

Are you receiving payslips?

If you are an employee or worker, your employer generally must provide you with a payslip.
A payslip should show your earnings and deductions and, where your pay varies according to the time you work, the number of hours worked. It should be provided on or before payday.

Check your payslip regularly.

Look at:
-Gross pay
-Tax
-National Insurance
-Pension contributions
Other deductions
-Hours worked, where applicable.

If something doesn't look right, ask your employer to explain it.

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Be aware of deductions from your pay

Sometimes deductions are completely legitimate — for example, tax and National Insurance. However, an employer cannot simply deduct money from your wages whenever they choose.

There are rules about when deductions can be made. Acas explains that deductions generally need to be required by law, allowed by the employment contract, connected to an overpayment, or agreed in writing in the relevant circumstances.

If money has been deducted from your pay unexpectedly:
Don't panic. Check first.

Look at your contract and payslip and ask your employer to explain the deduction.
Keep a written record of the conversation.

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What about holiday?

Workers and employees have statutory rights to paid holiday, although the exact entitlement and how holiday pay is calculated can depend on your working pattern and employment status.

Your contract may also provide more holiday than the statutory minimum.

If you are unsure about your entitlement, check your contract and use the current Acas or GOV.UK guidance.

Acas confirms that workers are entitled to statutory paid holiday and provides guidance on calculating holiday pay.

When employment ends, workers are generally entitled to be paid for accrued statutory holiday that they have not taken.

What if you are regularly working extra hours?

Nannying can sometimes involve unexpected changes.

A child is unwell. Parents are delayed. A flight is cancelled. An activity runs late.

Occasional changes are part of many nanny roles.

But there is a difference between the occasional unexpected late finish and a pattern where you are regularly expected to work significantly beyond your contracted hours.

If this is happening: Keep a record.

Write down: the date, your contracted hours, the hours you actually worked, why the additional time was required, whether you were paid for it, any messages relating to the additional hours. Then discuss the situation with your employer.

What if your job has changed?

Sometimes a nanny accepts a job with one set of responsibilities and gradually finds themselves doing something very different.
For example, you might have been employed primarily as a nanny but increasingly be expected to:
-undertake substantial housekeeping
-work significantly longer hours
-take on responsibilities that were not discussed
-care for additional children
-travel extensively
-carry out personal assistant or household management duties.

There is nothing inherently wrong with a role evolving — many nanny positions develop over time.
The important thing is that both sides understand and agree what the job involves.
If your responsibilities have changed significantly, have an open conversation with your employer and consider whether your written terms, hours and pay should also be reviewed.

What if you are told you are self-employed?

This is an important area.

Simply being told “you're self-employed” does not necessarily determine your legal employment status.
Employment status depends on the reality of the working relationship.
GOV.UK recognises three main employment statuses for employment-rights purposes:

Employee

An employee works under an employment contract and has the widest range of employment rights.

Worker

A worker has some important employment rights, including minimum wage, paid holiday and protection against unlawful deductions.

Self-employed

A genuinely self-employed person is generally running their own business and has significantly more control over how and when they work.

GOV.UK explains that employment status affects the rights and protections someone receives. If you are unsure about your status, seek advice rather than simply accepting the label used by an employer.

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Keep your own records

If you have concerns about your employment, keep copies of your important documents.
This might include:

<u>Employment</u>
-Contract
-Written employment particulars
-Job description
Emails about changes to your role

<u>Pay</u>
Payslips
Bank statements
Records of hours worked
Records of additional hours

<u>Holiday</u>
Holiday requests
Holiday approvals
Records of holiday taken

<u>Communication</u>
-Emails
-Messages
-Written requests
-Responses from your employer.

Keep copies somewhere you can access independently of your workplace.
Good record keeping doesn't mean you are starting a fight.
It simply means you have an accurate record of what has happened.



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Where can you get help?

Acas

Acas provides free, impartial advice on employment rights and workplace problems. They can help you understand your rights and options.
www.acas.org.uk

You can also contact the Acas helpline for advice.

GOV.UK

GOV.UK provides official information about:
Employment status
National Minimum Wage
Holiday entitlement
Payslips
Employment contracts
Workplace rights.

www.gov.uk

Fair Work Agency

The Fair Work Agency (FWA) began operating in April 2026 and replaced the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate.

The FWA has responsibility for enforcing a number of employment rights and can work with other organisations where there are concerns about exploitation.

GOV.UK provides current information about contacting the Fair Work Agency and reporting concerns.

HMRC

If you believe you are being paid less than the National Minimum Wage, there are routes for reporting this to HMRC.

HMRC is responsible for enforcing National Minimum Wage legislation.

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What if you don't feel safe raising the issue?

Your safety comes first.

If you are experiencing threats, intimidation, coercion, violence or serious labour exploitation, you should not feel that you have to confront the situation alone.

Seek appropriate professional advice and support.

In an emergency, contact the emergency services.

For serious concerns about exploitation or modern slavery, use the official government routes for reporting and support.

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The NNA's Role

The National Nanny Association is here to support the development and professionalisation of nannying in the UK.

We are not an employment tribunal, legal service or dispute-resolution organisation. We cannot determine whether an individual has been exploited or whether an employer has broken employment law.

What we can do is:

Inform

help nannies understand the basics of professional employment.

Signpost

point nannies towards reliable and independent sources of advice.

Promote

encourage professional standards and good working relationships between nannies and families.

Support

provide resources that help nannies feel more confident about their professional role.

If something doesn't feel right in your employment, don't simply rely on what someone tells you online.

Check the facts. Keep records. Know your rights. Get proper advice.

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Useful Resources

GOV.UK — Employment status and employment rights
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employment-status-and-employment-rights

GOV.UK — Employing someone to work in your home
https://www.gov.uk/au-pairs-employment-law/nannies

GOV.UK — National Minimum Wage
https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage

Acas — Employment rights and advice
https://www.acas.org.uk/

Acas — National Minimum Wage
https://www.acas.org.uk/national-minimum-wage-entitlement

Fair Work Agency
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/fair-work-agency

