

New York's Upper East Side Megasite

How's My Nanny?

by Christine Chagaris

The idea hit upon Jill Starishevsky, a Manhattan mom of two children (ages 2 ½ and 6 months) and a prosecutor in the sex crimes bureau of a New York City district attorney's office, when she was at the park on her lunch break. It was there that she saw two young children who looked as if they were by themselves with no adult supervision. She watched them closely for about 45 minutes. Occasionally, the kids would run over to a woman who was engrossed in reading a book, but who was otherwise not paying attention to them.



"I then realized that she was their nanny," says Jill. "I really felt that these kids' parents should know that their children could have been in danger, but I couldn't find out who they were to get in touch with them. I thought that there had to be a way to communicate to parents that a nanny is not doing her job."

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Jill's idea turned into reality in October of last year, with the launch of HowsMyNanny.com. The Web site enables parents to get the scoop on whether their child (or children) is in good hands with a nanny.

The way the site works is this: parents go on it to register (the cost for one year is \$50) and then receive a "license plate" with an identifying three-digit number to attach to their child's stroller, as well as a password to access their particular information on the site. (The plates attach with cable ties that make it difficult to remove, so the parents keep the plate on even when they are out with the child.)



Anybody who sees a nanny do something that compromises the child's safety – anything ranging from under dressing the child in bad weather, for example, to falling asleep in the park while supposedly watching the child – can report the incident by jotting down the stroller's license number, then contacting the site and putting in the ID number, date, time and location of the incident. Reports can be filed either anonymously or non-anonymously, and are emailed to the parents, who can access the report by putting in their password. Even though a witness has the option of filing a report anonymously so as not to make his/her identity known to the parents, the site's manager does get the witness' identifying information: name, phone number, home and email address in order to keep accurate track of the reports filed. If an email address is used more than three times to file a report, the report is investigated to make sure it is not baseless.

Conversely, HowsMyNanny.com also benefits nannies that are doing a good job, as folks are also encouraged to contact the site if they see a nanny doing something praiseworthy. "Nannies who are good many times don't get the recognition they deserve, so they love this idea," says Starishevsky. "Also, this can help those nannies who are not doing the greatest job to do better. The whole concept of HowsMy Nanny.com is not based on firing a nanny if she does something wrong," she says. "It's really about opening the lines of communication between the couple and the nanny on how she can improve."

Jill also says that this service acts as a deterrent against "bad nanny" behavior, much like the "How's My Driving?" stickers on trucks have shown to markedly decrease road accidents. The site's message is spreading to other parts of the country, even overseas, as more parents are registering. Starishevsky is also talking to other nanny agencies across the country in the hopes that they will distribute ID plates to parents who choose to get them. She also hopes to start a "nanny of the month" award in conjunction with different magazines.

"I really feel as if I am doing something to protect kids," says Jill. "Also, I believe that it's helpful for parents to know if a nanny is doing a good job, especially before the kids reach toddler age."

For more information, visit HowsMyNanny.com.

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