

# Globe Life

## Invasion of the nanny snatchers

They'll offer more money, yoga lessons, a cellphone, even a car. Some parents will go to any length in the quest for their child's perfect caregiver - and won't blink an eye at poaching yours

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Greg Kehm and his wife started looking for a nanny when their second son, Sebastien, was almost a year old.

They went through two short-lived caregivers before they found "the one." She seemed smart, reliable and good with the kids.

But after only a few weeks she quit, saying that she'd found another job. In fact, another job had found her.

"We'd been poached," says Mr. Kehm, a manager at Ecotrust, a non-profit environmental organization in Vancouver.

A shocked Mr. Kehm learned that his nanny had been offered more money and, in true West Coast fashion, free yoga classes. "It was so sudden, so shocking," he says. "We were frustrated and bewildered."

Long a problem in such cities as New York and London, nanny-poaching is now hitting neighbourhoods across Canada. Desperate parents, some of whom can't get scarce spots at day-care centres, are looking for the perfect caregiver at the local playground.

There, they can see which nannies interact and play with the kids and which ones ignore them while they talk on their cellphones or gossip with other nannies.

Despite the ethical implications, some parents find this an effective and fast way to find a nanny.

"People try to steal our nannies at the park all the [time](#)," says Michelle Kelsey, owner of the Vancouver agency Nannies On Call.

"They ask them how much they're getting paid and offer more. And it's not just money. It's cellphones and cars and time off."

Vancouver mother Nicole Hunter has four kids and two nannies, and has been on both sides of the poaching fence. She says she has friends who have tried to poach her nannies, and admits to having been a poacher herself. "But not to people I know," she says.

To keep her nannies happy, and prevent them from being lured away, Ms. Hunter gives anniversary bonuses.

For one nanny, she bought camping gear because she knew the caregiver was going on a big trip. For another, she paid for driving lessons. "Usually a nanny is poachable because they're not happy," Ms. Hunter says. In the

case of the nannies she has poached, "they were also being treated badly."

But poaching is far from risk-free, even for parents who score a great nanny. In addition to earning the ire of other parents, it gives more power in the relationship to the nanny.

"They can ask for more money, say no to special requests," Ms. Hunter says. "It puts the employer-employee relationship out of whack when it seems as though you, the employer, need them more than they need you."

Indeed, in Mr. Kehm's case, his nanny may already have been unhappy with her job when she was tempted away by the offer of free yoga.

"She told me she wasn't happy taking the bus so far," says Erin Northcott, who owns Not Just Nannies, the agency through which the Kehms hired their nanny. "The family she left for lived closer to her. It was more than just yoga classes and more money."

Ms. Northcott says nannies are most susceptible to a poacher's advances in the first month or two, before they get too close to the children.

Before starting her agency, she worked as a nanny in [Los Angeles](#), and remembers being approached by many mothers who tried to lure her away. "I never ended up taking any offers because I had already gotten quite attached to the people I worked for," she says.

The willingness of so many mothers to steal other people's nannies reflects a desperation to find the perfect person, says Lucy Kaylin, author of *The Perfect Stranger: The Truth about Mothers and Nannies*.

"People with money will stop at nothing to get the best for their kids, even at the expense of their friends," she says. "We're so anxious and desperate and agitated because we have this guilt and ambivalence around our decision to go back to work."

Ms. Kaylin says she has faced the threat of poaching with her own nanny of 10 years, whom she said has received multiple offers of jobs for better money. Her nanny has never taken any of those offers and has told Ms. Kaylin, the executive editor of Marie Claire magazine in New York, that "money isn't all."

Mr. Kehm is still looking for a replacement nanny. He says he's not willing to become a poacher, but he is trolling the local park hoping to find someone through "word of mouth."

He has at least one promising lead. The other day, he talked to a woman at the park who used to run a group daycare but recently closed it down to become a nanny.

"It was just luck that we met her in the park and I asked her," he says. "Now, we have to act fast."