

Hiring a Home Care Agency

(For when you have no idea what you're supposed to ask)

Most people don't think about what to ask a home care agency until they suddenly need one.

And once you start looking, everyone says they provide "compassionate care." Cool, cool. But what does that mean in real life?

Here's what to ask and what to listen for.

1. The Setup: How Care Actually Starts

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| ☐ How do you match caregivers with families? | ☐ How much input will we have in selecting the caregiver? |
| ☐ Will we meet the caregiver beforehand? | ☐ What happens if it's not the right fit? |
| ☐ How quickly can care typically begin? | ☐ Who is our main point of contact? |
| ☐ What happens after hours or on weekends if there's an issue? | |

✓ Good Signs

Clear process. Thoughtful matching.
Reassurance that it's okay if the first caregiver isn't the perfect fit.

🚩 Red Flags

Answers like "We send whoever's available."

2. The People: Who's Coming Into the Home

- ☐ Do caregivers undergo background checks and drug screening?
- ☐ Do they receive ongoing caregiver education, coaching, or skills development?
- ☐ What level of supervision or oversight do caregivers receive once care begins?
- ☐ What qualifications, onboarding, or safety training do caregivers receive before working with clients?
- ☐ Are caregivers employees of the agency?
- ☐ Are caregivers bonded, insured, and covered by workers' compensation?
- ☐ Do you offer dementia or Alzheimer's-specific training?
- ☐ How do you assess whether a caregiver is actually doing well in the role?
- ☐ Can I speak with other families who've used your services?

✓ Good Signs

Specific answers. Ongoing education. Clear explanations about screening, insurance, oversight, and what protections are in place for both families and caregivers.

🚩 Red Flags

Brush-offs like "We've never had an issue."

3. The Backup Plan: When Real Life Gets Real

- ☐ What happens if a caregiver calls out sick?
- ☐ How do caregivers communicate updates to families?
- ☐ How are emergencies handled?
- ☐ Is backup coverage available?
- ☐ Do caregivers document changes in mood, appetite, mobility, or behavior?
- ☐ How quickly are concerns escalated to family members?

✓ Good Signs

Clear communication systems. Backup plans. Processes that don't rely entirely on you managing everything.

🚩 Red Flags

"We usually figure it out."

4. The Care Plan: What They Can **Actually Help With**

- ☐ What services are included?
- ☐ Are there tasks caregivers are not permitted to do?
- ☐ Can you help with dementia-related behaviors or confusion?
- ☐ Are transportation services available?
- ☐ Can caregivers assist with bathing, toileting, transfers, and mobility support?
- ☐ Are overnight shifts or live-in care options available?

✓ Good Signs

Honest clarity about what they can and cannot provide.

🚩 Red Flags

Overpromising. Making it sound like every caregiver can handle every situation equally well.

5. The Fine Print: Scheduling, Costs & Policies

- ☐ Is there a minimum number of hours required per shift or per week?
- ☐ Is there a long-term contract?
- ☐ How much notice is needed to cancel or change services?
- ☐ Will someone help explain billing and payment options?
- ☐ Are weekends or overnight shifts priced differently?
- ☐ Are there cancellation fees?
- ☐ Does the agency accept long-term care insurance or veterans' benefits?

✓ Good Signs

Transparency. Patience. Willingness to walk you through things slowly.

🚩 Red Flags

Avoiding direct pricing answers. Pressure to commit immediately. Policies that somehow appear after you sign paperwork.

6. The Gut Check: How It Feels to Work With Them

Because this is still someone coming into your home. Pay attention to:

- ☐ Do they speak respectfully about older adults and caregivers?
- ☐ Do they understand that this is emotional — not just logistical?
- ☐ Do they talk *with* you or *at* you?
- ☐ Do they make room for your concerns?
- ☐ Do they seem rushed?

A good agency should make you feel more supported, not more overwhelmed.

Last Thought

Good care is about more than filling a shift. It should feel like a good fit, too. You're trusting people with your home, your routines, and someone you love.

Ask the questions.

Want more tips and tricks about in-home care?

Listen to **Caregiver Chats with Dr. Lakelyn**, wherever you get your podcasts.

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