

DISCIPLINE

When Kids Attack

By ANNA KUCHMENT

NANCY PLANT WASN'T SURE how to prevent her daughter's playdates from veering toward disaster. Five-year-old Kate "liked to be in control," says Plant, an attorney from Bainbridge Island, Wash. Kate would tell her friends what to do and, if they decided not to follow her

ranging from sleep training to fussy eating and managing screen time to coping with adult sons and daughters who've moved back into the house.

Why pay a stranger to meddle in your family affairs? Most simply want support and validation. Some are lured by the miracle cures on "Nanny 911." Many live far from close family and friends and feel unsure of where to turn for reliable ad-

vised parents that they cannot trust their children's health, happiness and success to themselves," she writes.

Still, there are times when outside advice can prove helpful. I recently called on Urban Nurture (urbannurture.com), a New York City-based parent-coaching and nanny-referral agency for parents with kids ages 7 and younger. Founder Sally Wilkinson interviewed me, then matched me up with a coach. A few days later, Claire, a friendly, professional British nanny, showed up at our door. Among other issues, I explained that my 2-year-old daughter threw tantrums whenever her father wanted to put her to bed instead of me. Of course, we caved in every time. The coach suggested giving our daughter plenty of warning the next time her dad wanted to do the bedtime routine. Perhaps my husband could take her to the bookstore to pick out some new reading material just for them. Then we should follow through no matter how much she protests. (We have yet to muster the courage to try this.) In addition, Claire offered helpful advice on nutritious snacks, suggested we shorten naps so our daughter would turn in earlier at night and complimented us on our array of educational toys. That small amount of validation made the visit worthwhile.

Different coaches offer different approaches. Urban Nurture's style is more in the vein of "Supernanny": a coach comes to your home, assesses the situation and offers advice in as little as two hours, though parents can book as many sessions as they'd like. Kidder Davis and most other PCI grads prefer to work with parents on a longer-term basis. Her approach fuses that of therapist and educator: she helps clients arrive at their own solutions over a series of four to 12 one-hour consultations, which she does in her office or over the phone. Cathy Adams of Chicago's Intentional Parent (intentionalparent.net), another PCI grad, operates exclusively by phone so she can stay home with her three daughters. Both supply clients with a range of educational literature, including books on child rearing and development (see soundparent.com/recommended_reading.shtml).

When choosing a coach, look for one with relevant experience. Those with PCI certification have backgrounds in fields related to child development. Kidder Davis holds a master's in education; Adams is a licensed social worker. Urban Nurture's coaches are all professional British nannies with a minimum of 15 years' experience. If they can't help with your problems, you might really be in trouble.



instructions, she "would get mad and not want to play with them." Tears ensued. After trying several strategies that seemed only to make matters worse, Plant and her husband, George Jarecke, turned to a parent coach. For \$75 an hour (\$100 for an introductory session), Sally Kidder Davis of Sound Parent (soundparent.com) met with Plant and Jarecke to talk through potential solutions. One was to talk to Kate about the importance of being a responsible hostess. If she couldn't help her guests enjoy themselves, she couldn't have them over. The strategy worked.

Parents like Plant are turning to coaches to help them puzzle out the daily dilemmas of child rearing. The Parent Coaching Institute (parentcoachinginstitute.com), based in Bellevue, Wash., certifies 40 new coaches per year, up from its first class of just eight students in 2001. Coaches advise parents with kids of all ages on issues

vice. Plant found comfort in talking to Kidder Davis precisely because she was an outsider. "There's a limit to what your friends can do for you," says Plant. "Sometimes with parents there's a hint of competition that makes it hard to ask, 'What the heck am I doing wrong?'" Other parents find that coaches help them filter out conflicting advice they hear on talk shows and read in books and magazines. Pamela Paul, author of "Parenting, Inc." (*Times Books*, \$25), sees coaching as a sign of something more insidious: the professionalization of parenthood. "The parenting industry has con-

Coaches give advice on fussy eating, sleeping and TV time.