

P.E.I. government 'putting the economy before the health of our children'^[1]

It's hard for young children to understand pandemic restrictions, says Green MLA

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EXCERPTS

P.E.I.'s Opposition Green Party questioned government again Wednesday regarding social distancing rules in the province's daycares during Phase 3 of ease back of pandemic restrictions.

Green lifelong learning critic Karla Bernard said the restrictions have the potential to harm the mental health and development of children. Guidelines for child care include physical distancing, and so avoiding close contact such as hugs, both between children and between children and care providers.

Bernard said it is difficult for young children to understand the restrictions.

"The long-term psychological effects on a child from what will be perceived as punishment and rejection are real," she said.

"I'm going to ask the minister once again, in light of restaurant protocols, do we need to enforce social distancing among young children at the risk of causing harm to their development and mental health?"

Lifelong Learning Minister Brad Trivers did not accept the comparison.

"I think comparing restaurants to early child care is comparing apples and oranges, as the member probably should realize, being a self-proclaimed expert in the area," said Trivers.

"Although social distancing is encouraged. We understand that cannot happen all the time with children and probably shouldn't happen all the time."

"Apples and oranges? No! That is insulting," Bernard shot back.

"This is putting the economy before the health of our children."

Last week, Bernard brought forward a story from a constituent about one centre that she said required children to stay inside squares marked on the floor with tape.

During Wednesday's exchange, Trivers said children aren't supposed to be isolated in that way, and that practice has been stopped.

Children are still supposed to maintain physical distancing in child-care centres, but there is more interaction being allowed among small groups at each centre, he said.

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