

# How can Canadian parents ever expect child care, when politicians still don't get it [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

When I gave birth to my daughter nearly 19 years ago this spring, I entered a world every Canadian parent does. I immediately fell in love with my child and knew I could never leave her to return to work. That was quickly followed by the realization that, as the only wage earner (my husband, at the time, was starting his own business), staying at home was out of the question. Soon after that came the sound of my own screaming when I discovered how much day care cost & if I could even find a space. At that time, it wasn't even a blip on the political landscape.

Nineteen years later, the issue of day care is tossed about more than a ball in a kid's playground, but some politicians, like Conservative Leader Stephen Harper, still aren't getting it. As a result, Canadian parents are in the same position I was 19 years ago.

Take Harper's suggestion that families receive \$1,200 a year to spend as they wish on child care.

As of 2004, there were approximately 4.8 million children from newborn to age 12. There were 745,000 day-care spaces. Of those spaces, 322,000 were in Quebec.

"Quebec has a solid family policy," says Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association. "They put their money where their mouth is. They actually value parenting."

For the rest of Canadian parents, it's a different story. Lysack says that because so few people have access to child care, they don't know what they're missing, "Many parents don't realize what good child care provides. There is a difference between child care and child minding."

Lysack remembers working for the Saskatchewan government and dealing with the over-enrolment problem in day cares. "People would report neighbours taking in too many children," she says. "I would go to homes with one caregiver and 18 children. What kind of supervision can you give to 18 children in your house? There were babies in diapers sitting on a concrete floor in the basement with a tiny window. Parents would tell me, 'I have to think this is OK, otherwise I can't go to work. I have no other choice'."

And that is the key point for the Conservatives. Giving families \$100 a month more to find a better day care is no help, if one doesn't exist.

Ever wonder what people who work shifts are doing? Martha Friendly, a social policy researcher at the University of Toronto, jokingly calls it "weird hours day care." She explains: "It's similar to what you need to put together in rural and remote communities. It's more expensive because of the way you have to staff it. In reality, even if you had a perfect child-care system, you could never have one that meets everyone's needs."

Right now, though, we're not even hitting the basics and if the Conservatives are elected we will have even less. Harper was quoted in the Toronto Star on Dec. 6 as saying he would honour the child-care agreements Ottawa signed with the provinces over the past 18 months & but only for the first year.

Because so many people have trouble with the idea of child care and day care, the solution, as I see it, is to back into it. As Friendly says: "Parents employment is one of the major reasons you have child care, but the other reason is for children."

So if you believe five year olds should go to kindergarten, then why not ensure that all four year olds across the country have a crack at it. Then go with the three year olds, two year olds, etc.

As with education, if you choose to home school, that's fine. Stay home with your kids or rather keep your kids home. No one is going to be wrestling them out of your arms. That's your choice. But let the people who desperately need day care in this country actually have an option they can exercise.

- reprinted from CBC News

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