

# Staying home with the kids <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The debate over daycare is raging again in Ontario. At the same time that the province is rolling out all-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds, a four-year, \$252-million federal daycare subsidy expires April 1, 2010. This has prompted calls for the provincial government to fill in the funding gap in its budget for 2010-2011, which it is delivering tomorrow.

According to daycare proponents, some 7,600 spaces are at risk of disappearing, or seeing their costs rise, without the subsidy. On Monday, Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath unwittingly hit the nail on the head when she asked of Premier Dalton McGuinty, "Will he commit to keeping those child care spaces open or is he telling mothers and fathers across the province to quit their jobs and stay home with their kids?"

Stay home with their kids? What a crazy idea. Much better that these babies and young children be placed in the care of strangers - well-meaning strangers, well-educated strangers, but strangers nonetheless. And strangers who come and go as they change jobs, who are not a constant in the child's life as parents are.

No matter how you dress it up - stimulation for kids, freedom for parents to work - institutional daycare is simply not the best option for very young children. A survey of 450 infant mental health workers in 56 countries, members of the World Association for Infant Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, asked the workers to rate child-care arrangements for children under the age of three-and-a-half. Respondents were asked to indicate what care they considered best for infants, assuming that all kinds of care specified "were of excellent quality by their community's standards, and equally available and affordable to all."

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Certainly, in one-parent families, external child care can become a necessity. But there are many two-parent families who also put their very young children in daycare. These parents may argue that they have no choice but to both work. In some cases, this is true, but in many cases, it stems from other choices the parents have made. Both parents may work to sustain a preferred lifestyle, not because the family would go hungry or be homeless with one breadwinner. Parents may choose to have several children, which can tip the balance between being comfortable on one salary and requiring two. Or a parent may simply prefer to work rather than engage in the demanding and often thankless task of caring for a pre-schooler.

Having children is a choice. Having several children, if one has trouble making ends meet with just one child, is also a choice. Putting one's children in daycare at an early age is another choice. But asking the rest of society to support choices that may not be in children's best interest is difficult to justify. Before asking taxpayers to do that, governments, including that of Ontario, should take a hard look at what is really best for kids - and let that guide their child-care policies.

- reprinted from the National Post

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[3]</sup>

work/life balance <sup>[4]</sup>

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