

# Province does little to ease parents' child care dilemmas <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

It's one of the biggest challenges a parent ever faces. How do you find safe, reliable, affordable care for your child?

To whom do you turn to look after your baby or toddler or preschooler? And how do you know you can trust that person to care responsibly for your little one - especially if your child is too young to tell you what goes on when you're not there?

It doesn't matter if you rely on a daycare or day home, a nanny or a neighbour, a teenage babysitter or your own mother-in-law. The dilemma is always the same.

Can you trust this person? Can you be sure she or he will provide your child with affection and structure, with the right kind of food, the right kind of discipline?

It isn't easy to give ourselves permission to doubt. Once we've put our faith in our chosen caregivers, we desperately wish to believe that they care for our children well.

Working mothers carry such guilt. Many of us need to work to support our families. Many of us want to work because our work gives us a sense of accomplishment and identity.

Yet going out to work inevitably makes us feel like bad mothers. That's why we need to believe our children are thriving in our absence.

If we start to question, if we let doubts eat away at us, we jeopardize both our ability to do our jobs and our sense of ourselves as good parents.

Which brings us to the sad and ugly case of the Stony Day Care Centre in Stony Plain. This week, Alberta Children and Youth Services ordered the daycare to close its doors by July 28.

Two inspectors, responding to allegations of abuse at the daycare, made three unannounced visits to the daycare, on June 21, 22 and 28, staying there from 9:40 a.m. to 6 p.m. all three days, according to provincial records.

The inspectors' report makes disturbing reading.

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There's a different kind of fear, too, that strikes when your carefully planned childcare arrangements fall apart. Alberta has a dire shortage of daycare spaces, especially in smaller centres like Stony Plain. There's one other daycare in the town, and it's full.

There just aren't a lot of affordable, accessible, acceptable child care options in rural Alberta. For some, the loss of this daycare could mean the loss of their own jobs.

When you don't have child care, you can't work. If you need those wages to buy the groceries and pay rent, the loss of child care isn't an inconvenience. It's a disaster.

That's still no reason to keep an allegedly substandard and physically abusive daycare open. But it underlines a serious flaw in our province's higgledy-piggledy patch work of child care options. Yes, we want vigilant provincial inspectors to be investigating complaints and shutting down dangerous daycares. But it creates a tremendous hardship to families when the province shuts a daycare, and does little to help desperate parents find alternate care.

Our economic system, our market culture, all but demand that women with children work.

But our social policies do little to help mothers balance demands of work and child care, while our society contrives to make us feel guilty and inadequate, no matter what choices we make.

No family should ever be left stranded the way we're stranding the 60 families in Stony Plain who are about to lose their child care. But no child should ever be left in a potentially abusive situation, either.

Children and Youth Services is right to err on the side of caution. But we're also right to ask why our province does so little to help families to access affordable, quality child care.

-reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

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