

Parents furious after toddlers found alone in day home basement ^[1]

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Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Nov 2013

EXCERPTS:

A Calgary day home operator caught leaving children unattended in a dark basement is calling it the "biggest mistake of her life."

Parent Megan Hooper first became concerned about the Tuscany home, after her son told her they were being left alone while the other children were driven to school.

"Ashton said outright [other children have] been left alone in the basement," Hooper said. "There was no TV, they were told to sit in the dark."

Wanting to find out the truth for herself, she followed the day home operator to school, and was shocked to see three-year-old daughter Mason was not in the vehicle-though the day home operator's daughter was. Hooper phoned her sister, who went to the house to see for herself.

After no one opened the door despite repeated knocks, Hooper's sister barged into the home. She found her niece along with one other child, a boy named Ryan, alone in a dark bedroom in the basement.

"You leave them by downstairs themselves?" she said, confronting the day home operator when she finally returned to the home.

"I was gone for just a few minutes," the woman said, in an exchange that was recorded on camera.

"It doesn't matter, what if they choke?"

Ryan's father says he's not surprised at the outcome, after hearing similar concerns from his own children.

"He'd wake up from a nap and say nobody was home. The boys were saying, 'we're not allowed out of the basement,'" remembered Jason Montgomery. "Every time we brought it up [at the day home] we'd be reassured. I think we're still stunned.

"I just sat back and thought, 'holy cow, how does this happen?' The thought of those two children sitting in a dark room and not allowed to be scared because if they got scared the other one would get scared, that's what bothers me the most. I can't wrap my head around that piece."

Global News spoke with the day home operator, who said leaving the children unattended was a bad decision, partly brought on by a rough start to the day.

"I had a bad morning with the kids screaming and my daughter not listening, and I made a split decision," she explained, adding that the group usually walks to school. "I was gone for three minutes. I thought 'I'll just go and rush back.' [The children] were downstairs so I knew they wouldn't fall down the stairs or anything.

"I feel terrible, it was a bad decision, I was sick about it," she continued. "I am not that type of person at all, I am a good person."

She maintains that was the first time she'd ever left the children unattended, in her five years of operating the day home.

"This is just a mistake, I have had no other incidents with the law ever."

The response isn't good enough for Hooper.

"I want her charged with child neglect, at the very least," she said. "What if something happened? I want her to think about that every night, because I am sick. I am sick that I put my child at risk.

"I'm really hurt the more I think about what could have happened, and what if one day I lost my child because I put them in the care of somebody else. I don't know who I can trust at this point."

The operator has since shut down her day home, saying she needs to take a break, and is not sure if she will start it up again.

The parents say police were called and now have an open file on the case.

-reprinted from Global News

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