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## We're still wary of men working in childcare



Some parents are still struggling to accept men looking after their children in child care.



This story first appeared on [news.com.au](http://news.com.au), by Emma Reynolds

Would you trust a man looking after your child at daycare?

If the answer's no, you're not alone.

Australian parents have been taking to online forums to express their mistrust of male childcare workers.

A Reddit post asking parents how they felt about men caring for their kids revealed widespread suspicion.

One commenter said "given the choice between a male and a female, all other things being equal, I'd pick the female carer", while another wrote "women seem to have more of a motherly instinct".

Another parent said that having heard of sexual abuse involving men in two local daycare centres, they “would have concerns” and might have a quiet word with the head of the centre to check on a man’s credentials.

Others said parents had to “put all political correctness aside, and look for what’s statistically the safest environment for your kids.”

The vast majority of child sexual abuse was perpetrated by males, [according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#), although the figures were more even for emotional abuse.

But most abusers of children under 15 were family friends or relatives.

All childcare workers are made to undergo a background check for previous misconduct or criminal history, and they face ongoing monitoring.

Liam McNicholas, an area manager for nine centres in the ACT who has worked in the industry for more than ten years, said questions from families were common.

“I was young when I started, about 18, and a few families were concerned, especially with infants,” he told [news.com.au](#).

“Luckily, I had a very supportive team and they would explain that I’d been through the same checks and induction, and the director would come and talk to me.

“Some centres will try to meet the requests of families, but I think it’s important to try to normalise men working in childcare.

“[Suspicion] can be devastating. I’ve worked with others who have been put off. People feel stressed and don’t want to go on working with people who don’t want them to be there.”

Men who have worked in the industry said they had been placed under “additional scrutiny” compared with female colleagues, and felt they had to be “more careful”.

One applicant for a marketing role at a network of childcare centres said he was told directly they did not hire men in childcare roles, while male childcare workers on other forums said they were not permitted to do some tasks, such as changing nappies.

“There were some very specific rules regarding being alone with kids and stuff like that,” said one ex-childcare worker. “They were never really enforced for the female staff members but were for the males. Not because the boss didn’t trust us, but mainly for our own protection.”

Very few men work in the profession, with women accounting for around [95 per cent of childcare workers](#).

“They stand out,” said one parent on Reddit. “It’s weird. I get nervous when strangers acting weirdly are in intimate contact with my baby daughter. How is that wrong?”

Mr McNicholas said without on-the-ground support, it could be “a vicious circle” and men weren’t likely to pursue the career.

“Where one unfounded accusation or rumour can destroy your career, you can’t blame guys for avoiding it,” said a man who had considered the profession.

But many parents said they were happy with men caring for their children and would love to see more, providing children with strong male role models.

“We need to try to destigmatise the role,” said Mr McNicholas, who emphasised that early development could have the most impact on a child’s life. “It’s quite low-paid, and part of the reason is it’s seen as ‘women’s work’, getting mothers back into the workplace, often as volunteers.”

Mr McNicholas believed Australian childcare groups should be encouraging men to enter the profession.

“We need to have a discussion with families and address issues on an individual basis,” he added. “We need to specify that men are welcome to work here. We want people to positively apply for these roles.”

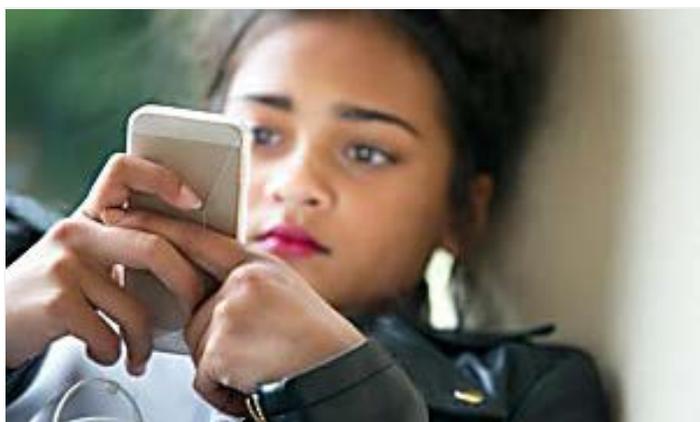
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