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Child Care in Sweden: *Another Approach*

Day care is a far more accepted way of life in Sweden than it is in the United States. Although not every parent returns to work after the birth of a child, most do, at least part time. Swedish national child care policy helps make this possible.

When a child is born in Sweden, either parent may stay home from work for nine months and receive ninety percent of his or her pay. After that, either parent may stay at home for the next three months with a guaranteed weekly income of forty Swedish Krona (or about five dollars). This can be extended for a second year if the parent wishes. The parent returns to the job or a similar job at the rate of pay he or she would have received if no work had been lost. Such parents may choose to work fifty, seventy-five or one hundred percent of the normal work week. The choice is theirs and they cannot be denied their position because they want shorter hours.

Any parent working seventy-five or one hundred percent of a work week is entitled to day care in a day care center. This care is more easily available in some areas than in others. The child's name is placed on a list as soon as he or she is born and the centers are filled from the list.

Many day mothers are also available for those who work fewer hours or to anyone else who chooses one. These women have approximately one hundred hours of special training to care for children in their own homes. If three families living in one area have children, they can share a day mother, who would rotate among them, spending a week at each home. Those whose home she is not visiting would take their children to the home where she is located.

The state and federal governments pay most of this child care cost, while parents pay a portion according to their income. Everybody has to pay something, but people who earn very little pay less than those

whose income is greater. The first child in a family is the most expensive, with costs diminishing for each additional child. No child under six months of age is accepted in day care.

In addition, all parents with children under sixteen receive a quarterly check from the government for each child. They receive eight hundred and twenty-five Krona (about one hundred dollars) for each of the first two children, and the rate of payment increases for each additional child. The payments diminish after age sixteen and stop when the child reaches eighteen.

Day care centers are built by the government of the local city or town and its suburbs or spaces in apartment or other buildings are rented. Construction is financed through tax revenues. Standards for physical layout of the structure as well as the training of personnel are set by the Minister of Education. The teachers are college trained.

The day care center in Strömsnäsbruk, a village in south central Sweden, is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. every week day all year round. Each of its large, airy rooms is equipped for a special purpose, one for painting, one for large muscle development, one for small muscle development and still another for stories and resting. One side of the building is designed for children ages one to four years, and accepts twelve children.

The center has an administrative office and a kitchen, and the other half of the building, with an equal number of rooms, is for children ages five to seven and accommodates fifteen children. There are two outside play areas, one for each group with many kinds of climbing equipment, swings and slides as well as picnic tables for outside activities. Most of the children attend from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Working parents are permitted up to sixty days a year as "sick leave" for each child, an amount which has increased considerably in recent years. The time can be taken by either parent, or some days by each. If a parent misses more than one week of work because of a child's illness, a doctor's note is required at his or her place of employment. The parent is paid ninety percent of his or her regular salary for these sick days.

Strömsnäsbruk has a population of about five thousand people. Although there is no police department and only a "call" fire department, this town has a fully-equipped, professionally staffed day care center.

It is clear that Sweden has devoted far more of its national energies and resources to meet the needs of working parents than the United States has.

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