

More childcare centres impose fine on parents late to fetch kids

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At least 10% of 1,400 centres here have such policy; penalty can be about \$10 for every five minutes late

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AVAILABILITY

Read/listen online

EXCERPTS

As evening descends and street lights are being switched on, people in office attire walk briskly or even sprint to a void-deck centre decorated in bright colours.

This is not an uncommon sight during closing time at many childcare centres across Singapore.

These adults are rushing to pick up their children as a fine may await even if they are just minutes late.

These fines, which are set by the centres, can be about \$10 for every five minutes that a parent is late. A few parents have paid more than \$100 on occasions when they could not fetch their children on time and were late by around 11/2 hours.

More centres are taking a harder stance against tardy parents, said industry players, as this has become more of a problem in recent years partly because of more frequent train delays and busier roads.

A check online showed that at least one in 10 of some 1,400 childcare centres here have a late-pickup fine policy.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development does not regulate how the centres determine additional charges for late pickups, as these are commercial arrangements between the centres and parents.

WIN-WIN SITUATION

By seeking parents' cooperation to be punctual... both our children and employees can spend more time and bond with their families after being in school for a long day.

MS YVONNE TAN, senior principal of the Learning Vision branch in Nanyang Polytechnic. The chain has been having a penalty system for about 20 years. A fee of \$10 is charged for every 15 minutes after operating hours across its 24 centres.

Most childcare centres close at 7pm on weekdays and 2pm on Saturdays. Centres have the discretion to extend their services beyond standard operating hours, according to the ministry.

Staff at some centres told The Straits Times that late charges were introduced to deal with some parents who were repeatedly late.

The supervisor of a centre in Ang Mo Kio, who declined to be named, said: "We have to be fair to the teachers, who may have plans after work, such as having dinner with their families."

The centre introduced the surcharge last year, as a few parents would deliberately come later, taking advantage of how teachers would still stay around after the official closing time.

GOOD INTENTION, BUT...

Sometimes, my wife and I can't get off work on time. It is also not nice to keep requesting to leave work earlier. The centre's intention is good, but it can be a costly lesson if we turn up minutes late.

A PARENT, who did not give his name, whose child attends a centre that charges a late penalty of \$1 a minute.

"We understand that unexpected delays do happen, but parents still have to make an effort," said the supervisor, adding that a few parents have claimed train faults and traffic delays as reasons for being late.

At some centres, verbal warnings are given before the penalties are enforced; others offer a grace period of five to 10 minutes.

Iyad Perdaus Child Development, which runs three centres - in Choa Chu Kang, Hougang and Jurong East - has been having a fine system for more than 20 years.

Madam Zaiton Mohd Ali, head of the childcare provider, said it gives parents one chance before enforcing the fine from the second time they are late. The centres also offer a five-minute grace period. If parents still do not show up, they are charged \$10 for the next five minutes and \$5 for every subsequent five minutes.

Madam Zaiton said there have been parents who fetched their children more than an hour after the 7pm closing time, and had to pay more than \$100.

The situation has improved over the years, she said. Late pickups now happen only once to thrice a month, and do not exceed 30 minutes.

The Learning Vision chain has been having a penalty system for tardiness for about 20 years. A fee of \$10 is charged for every 15 minutes after operating hours across its 24 centres.

Ms Yvonne Tan, senior principal of the Learning Vision branch in Nanyang Polytechnic, said she once came across a parent who was late for 40 minutes and had to pay \$30. "By seeking parents' cooperation to be punctual... both our children and employees can spend more time and bond with their families after being in school for a long day."

Still, some parents have called for more flexibility, as they are already paying hefty childcare fees. The median fee charged for full-day childcare is \$883 a month.

A parent, who did not give his name, said he is sometimes late because of work. The centre his child attends charges a late penalty of \$1 a minute.

"Sometimes, my wife and I can't get off work on time. It is also not nice to keep requesting to leave work earlier. The centre's intention is good, but it can be a costly lesson if we turn up minutes late," he said.

But not all parents are against the penalties.

Business manager Jody Wong, 35, who has a four-year-old daughter, said the fine system encourages parents to be punctual. "Children look to their parents as role models. Many would be disappointed if they have to wait a long time for their parents to pick them up."

-reprinted from The Straits Times

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