

# 'It's heartbreaking': Should children ever be expelled from daycare? <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** National Post

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 23 Aug 2018

## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Ali Manavi and Naghmeh Heshmati felt like they had hit the jackpot. Three years after putting their son's name on a waiting list for childcare in downtown Vancouver — they signed up almost as soon as he was born — the couple learned last fall they had finally landed a spot.

But now they are scrambling to find another placement for him after their daycare abruptly ended its contract with the family. On two occasions over the past year, their son had accused staff of hitting him, prompting outside investigations that turned up no wrongdoing but left staff feeling “anxious” and “vulnerable,” the parents were told.

After being summoned to the daycare on the afternoon of July 23, Heshmati said, the CEO of the non-profit that operates it handed her a termination letter. She then found her now four-year-old son standing next to his cubbyhole with his belongings already packed up. According to Heshmati, he wasn't allowed to say goodbye to his classmates.

“It was very insulting to me,” she recalled.

The frequency with which Canadian daycares expel children is hard to establish; none of the provinces keep data on the issue. But when the National Post canvassed parents who belong to a large Vancouver-based Facebook group devoted to childcare, several immediately responded with stories of how their lives had been upended when their child was expelled, typically due to behavioural issues or special needs, and how they were offered little or no support after they were given the boot.

Canadian parents — especially those in urban centres — already face stiff competition for limited spots at licensed daycares and rising childcare costs that are outpacing inflation. The Canadian Child Care Federation reports that, as of 2012, there were only enough regulated and licensed daycare spots to accommodate 22.5 per cent of Canadian children aged 0 to 5 years.

A report last December by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that wait lists for child care tend to be “almost universal” in big cities. In some cities, parents even have to pay fees just to be put on a waiting list, though the trend is on the decline. Experts say calculating the length of waiting lists in Canada is difficult as parents often put children on waiting lists at several centres, which can inflate the length of the waitlist for any one centre.

According to the CCPA report, the median monthly fees to care for toddlers and infants ranged from \$1,354 to \$1,758 in Toronto, \$1,292 to \$1,360 in Vancouver and \$1,050 to 1,250 in Calgary. (In Montreal, where the province of Quebec provides operational grants to providers, the fees were much cheaper at \$168 per month for infants and toddlers.) If a family suddenly loses a daycare spot finding a new childcare arrangement can be an expensive scramble.

With such strain on the system, one expert in child and family policy at UBC says there is a need for greater data gathering and regulation.

“I think you’ve uncovered an important issue that’s been ignored for too long,” said Edward Kruk, a professor of social work.

“Governments definitely have an obligation to ensure that there are adequate regulations with respect to children’s rights in daycare settings, including those pertaining to expulsion. There will be extreme circumstances where expulsion is warranted, but limits should be clearly articulated in legislation and policy.”

Manavi and Heshmati say they were blindsided when the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres, a non-profit that operates a number of daycares in downtown Vancouver, including their Yaletown neighbourhood, decided to withdraw services for their son last month. (The Post agreed not to identify by name any children in this story).

**Related link:** National child data strategy: Results of a feasibility study <sup>[3]</sup>

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[4]</sup>

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