

# This Toronto mother gets three hours of sleep a night and wants to know why her toddler's daycare was blocked from reopening <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

Melanie is a pink owl. Meeta is a sparkly unicorn.

Three-year-old Ava Carr has been missing her friends from daycare so much, she started naming her stuffies after them. She hasn't seen the real Melanie and Meeta since their daycare closed in mid-March due to the pandemic.

Since March, Ava's mother, Maeve Carr, has worked 12-hour days from home while taking care of her toddler. That often means working until 2 a.m. and then rising at 5:30 a.m. to start the day with Ava.

As Ontario begins to ease coronavirus-related restrictions in June, some daycares have been allowed to reopen. Ava's daycare in Toronto, Deer Park Extended Primary Education Program, was set to reopen on June 22.

Suddenly, Carr could see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Then, at 8:42 p.m. on the Friday before the big day, Carr received an email from the daycare: "It looks like we will not be allowed to open the daycare on Monday," it read.

The email thread revealed the school board had told the daycare four hours earlier that, in fact, no child-care centres in Toronto schools were allowed to open yet.

"Apologies for the delayed response," a school board staff member wrote. "We are diligently working with a number of departments and stakeholders to support reopening, but we must ensure that we have processes in place that prioritize health and safety for all."

Carr, a single parent, was devastated.

Being able to bring Ava back to daycare would have meant a return to some semblance of sanity, she said.

"I have no idea how to live my life right now. I can't prepare. I can't tell my boss when things are going to go back to normal," said Carr, who works in global finance. "I'm the only one with a young child in my department."

In a memo obtained by the Star, the Toronto District School Board informed child-care operators Wednesday that they could reopen as early as July 2.

But Carr questions why the school board waited until the last moment to tell the Deer Park daycare it could not open the following business day.

"I don't blame the daycare at all," said Carr. "I think she was blindsided too."

The Toronto District School Board told the Star it has been working as quickly as possible to reopen daycares in schools.

"While some child cares may have been ready to reopen earlier, we had to take the necessary time to reopen as safely as possible, and we thank everyone for their patience," the statement read.

The school board confirmed that daycares with provincial authorization would be able to reopen starting July 2.

But Carr said she has not received any communication from the daycare or the school board since last week.

"There's been no followup from anybody. There's no update at all."

Meanwhile, child-care advocates have criticized the province for not providing enough support, financial and otherwise, to child-care operators struggling to reopen.

The Ontario government announced that daycares across the province would be allowed to reopen starting June 12, provided they follow public health protocols.

Those protocols include, among other things, drop-off and pickup procedures, frequent cleaning and a COVID-19 response plan if a staff member or child gets sick.

In emails sent to parents last week, Deer Park Extended Primary Education Program outlined the steps it had taken to follow these protocols and announced it would open its doors to a handful of families on June 22.

The daycare declined the Star's interview request but said in a written statement, "The staff worked really hard to prepare for opening and were denied by (the Toronto District School Board)."

The approximately 320 child-care centres on Toronto District School Board property need the board's permission to reopen.

The daycare's statement went on to say, "Parents and child-care staff will need to continue to be patient and wait for an announcement for when we can reopen."

For now, Carr has resigned herself to letting her daughter sit on her lap during her work Zoom meetings. It's far from ideal, she said.

"Sometimes it's just better to avoid the occurrence of a meltdown. And then you become the parent who can't afford to have the noise and the crisis so you give them what they need," she said. "You give them chocolate. It's terrible."

When Ava goes down for her midday nap, Carr will sometimes shut her eyes as well because she gets only a few hours of sleep a night.

Some days, Ava will take her mother on imaginary car rides where they "pick up" her imaginary friends, Virat — embodied by an Elmo stuffy — and Meeta, the unicorn, on the apartment balcony.

"We pretend we are all going to the zoo together," said Carr. "She is so lonely."

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