

# Designing condos for kids <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** National Post

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 4 Nov 2021

## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

For Astrid Meyer, a spot for her three-year-old son in Downtown Montessori's Infinity Place location, just off Bremner Boulevard near Scotiabank Arena, was "definitely worth the wait."

### Article content

Upon moving into the Infinity III condo building in 2020, Meyer and her partner, Tom, put their infant son, Tyler, on the waitlist. Fourteen months later a spot became available and, as Meyer puts it, "our lives changed."

From their CN Tower-facing unit, daycare drop-off and pickup now involves an elevator ride and short stroll. Scoring the spot has enabled Astrid to return to work full-time after a maternity leave that was longer than originally intended while she waited to secure a childcare placement for Tyler. "It was frustrating having to wait and wait, but at least we weren't alone," she says. "Our experience was par for the course, from what I hear."

Like Meyer, 38 per cent of Canadian parents who rely on licensed childcare had difficulties finding it, a 2020 Statistics Canada survey found; 56 per cent of those respondents said they had difficulty finding care in their community, and 43 per cent had difficulty finding affordable care. In Toronto, infant daycare fees are the highest in Canada, averaging \$1,774 per month, according to a 2019 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

### Article content

For some residents of master-planned condo communities in the city, those difficulties are being eased by the recent increase in on-site daycares. Downtown Montessori, for instance, operates out of both its Infinity location and the quartet of Harbour View Estates towers spanning the southeast corner of Concord CityPlace. It offers a second childcare centre in the eight-month-old Canoe Landing Community Recreation Centre on Fort York Boulevard, while other large developments in Humber Bay Shores, the Distillery District and Liberty Village are also home to at least one childcare centre apiece.

More openings are coming soon. At Tridel Corp.'s seven-tower Metrogate neighbourhood near Kennedy and Highway 401, two daycare centres are poised to open, both of which will give residents priority access. A similar centre is going in at Aoyuan International's five-tower M2M project at Yonge and Finch in North York, home to a two-level childcare facility adjacent to a 46,000-square-foot community centre. Another, slated for completion in late 2022 or early 2023, is the Bessarion Community Recreation Centre, part of North York's 20-tower Concord Park Place development, offering daycare as part of a mix of services that includes an Aquatic Centre and a Toronto Public Library location.

### Article content

"With real estate prices all over the city going up and up, we are seeing more families choosing to live in our larger condo units. For these residents, having childcare close at hand just makes sense," says Isaac Chan, vice-president of sales and marketing at Concord Adex Inc. "It's becoming a common model for us to work with municipalities to facilitate daycare."

According to Toronto Children's Services general manager Shanley McNamee, the City can authorize increases in a new building's height and density in return for community benefits such as child care. Once an agreement has been finalized, she explains, City staff work with developers' architects on the design of the childcare facility. Then the City conducts an expression-of-interest process to find a childcare operator within about six months of a centre's completion. Fees for privately run, City-licensed daycares are set by operators based on market conditions.

New condo developments are particularly appealing to daycare operators because they can be built to accommodate provincial requirements, such as the provision of designated spaces for child and staff rest, food prep, storage, staff administration and outdoor play areas, which must account for about a quarter of a facility's total square-footage, with drop-off and pick-up areas made available for parents who drive there. The City's Children Services division, meanwhile, calls for them to be near pedestrian, cycling and transit routes to minimize dependence on vehicles – criteria that new condo developments often meet.

In large master-planned developments, “it makes a lot of sense to have this kind of public amenity,” says Tridel vice-president of marketing Samson Fung, adding that the Aquabella building on the downtown lakefront provides an example of how developers have been working with both the City and province to ensure that condo design meets childcare requirements.

#### Article content

By taking a “bite” out of its second floor, Samson explains, Aquabella’s childcare centre meets both the outdoor square footage and weather protection required by Ontario’s Child Care and Early Years Act and the City of Toronto’s Child Care Design & Technical Guidelines.

Sarah Kaplan, director of the Institute for Gender and the Economy at Toronto’s Rotman School of Management, says new condo-based daycares can play a key role in helping the federal government achieve its goal of adding 250,000 regulated child care spaces by 2026. “Condo developers are putting child care in because they get that it’s one of the most important amenities they can offer to young families. Childcare has become crucial for families to be able to maintain employment in Toronto. Developers used to focus on amenities like swimming pools; now, they’re realizing that daycare is what people really want.”

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** spaces <sup>[4]</sup>

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affordability <sup>[6]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/11/designing-condos-kids> [2] <https://nationalpost.com/life/homes/designing-condos-for-kids>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/infrastructure> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [7]

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