

Parents desperate for any child care [CA-ON] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

It's enough to make any parent shudder. And even second-guess who's looking after their own kids.

Last week, the Star reported that children at a Vaughan home daycare were seen playing close to an unfenced swimming pool and within reach of chemicals. And a few weeks earlier, Happy Child Care in Toronto was shut down after a toddler was reportedly bitten up to 18 times by another child. Police said they found 26 children in the care of three adults who did not have adequate health and safety training.

Anyone who's never been on wait lists for a child care spot, sweated over caregiving down to the last minute of parental leave, or had to fork over most of their salary to make sure their children are safe and stimulated might wonder how kids end up in these arrangements. How can parents do it?

But many parents and advocates say it's no mystery. "I know exactly how parents can do it," says Martha Friendly, a long-time child care advocate in Toronto. They're desperate, they don't know about the myriad rules and regulations, and they get no assistance with finding solutions.

"Parents are all trying to do the best they can for their children but they're not being helped," says Friendly, co-ordinator of the Childcare Research and Resource Unit in Toronto.

This sentiment is clear in a recent letter to politicians and advocates and signed by 43 Riverdale parents whose kids were at the unlicensed Happy Child, located in a local house.

"We are working hard to provide for our children but the child care burden we are facing makes it almost impossible for some of us," the letter says.

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In Toronto, an estimated 9,000 children are on wait lists. "A spot in a licensed centre is a dream for most people," says Andrea Calver, of the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare. Not to mention costly, starting at about \$55 a day.

She adds it's the middle class & who don't qualify for subsidies but for whom cost is a big factor & that gets squeezed the most. And she says illegal daycares that don't meet regulations will continue to operate as long as there's a demand and parents are left to figure it out on their own.

"I didn't realize what the rules and regulations were," says Angie Clark, a self-employed graphic designer whose daughter was at Happy Child. Most parents don't, and Calver says they shouldn't be expected to. She says the answer is regulation and monitoring, which can happen effectively only in a public system that guarantees a spot for every child.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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