

Parents in dark about unlicensed daycare, survey suggests: Marketplace finds parents unsure about first aid, CPR, background checks ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Many parents using unlicensed daycare facilities are in the dark about their provider's qualifications, a CBC Marketplace survey suggests.

As part of a larger investigation into unlicensed daycares, Marketplace gauged parents' knowledge of their unlicensed daycare provider, including qualifications like first aid and criminal-background checks, as well as their knowledge of the industry as a whole.

It revealed many parents are misinformed about the industry as a whole, including the differences between licensed and unlicensed daycares.

"The whole childcare system, licensed and unlicensed childcare, is so confusing, so I suspect that sometimes parents don't understand," said Kim Hiscott, executive director of Andrew Fleck Child Care Services.

"They think the care is licensed, they assume that there are expectations, there are quality standards; they probably have a hope and trust that they're placing their child in a very safe environment."

In licensed daycare, police background checks, CPR and first-aid training are usually required, so the onus is not on the parents to ensure those safety basics are in place. In unlicensed care, it's up to the parents to ask, but they may not realize that since the majority believe all daycares have to follow standards and regulations.

The survey, conducted by Leger Marketing, found 74 per cent of those surveyed said their provider was certified, a result Martha Friendly, head of Canada's Childcare Resource and Research Unit, interprets as parental misunderstanding.

"It isn't possible," she told *Marketplace* co-host Erica Johnson. "There's only enough spaces, including regulated homes, for 20 per cent of children, so that's completely impossible."

That misconception could exist because many parents are unaware of how common unlicensed facilities are. Nearly half the parents surveyed wrongly assumed that Canadian daycares have to meet an established set of standards, and another 29 per cent didn't know if they did.

Parents should always confirm whether their daycare is certified, she says.

"That would be one of the first things [parents] need to say in a home situation, 'Is this a regulated home?'"

However, she says parents sometimes don't know they should ask, and they don't want to be intrusive.

"Parents really do feel vulnerable, because they often are scrambling [to find care]," she said. "It's not that easy, even to find unregulated child care. So they may be less than willing to really ask the probing questions."

Of the parents who knew their daycare was unlicensed, 53 per cent said they would prefer that it were.

Qualification questions

Many parents are also lacking important information about their providers' individual qualifications.

"A police records check, first aid, references, basic training, those

are just a bare minimum for someone being able to operate for high quality childcare that is safe for young children," Hiscott said

Asked if their provider had obtained a criminal background check nearly 70 per cent of parents said no, or they didn't know.

Another common blind spot was in emergency health training

Nearly one-third of parents asked didn't know if their provider had CPR training, and 13 per cent said their provider was untrained. Another 22 per cent didn't know if their provider was certified in first aid.

One provider, when asked if she had CPR or first aid training, said she would simply call "991" in case of emergency.

Hiscott says that people running unlicensed daycares can be good providers, but those certifications and checks are important for children's safety and parents' peace of mind.

"You want to ensure that the person who is providing the care for the children is of the highest quality," she said. "It's a very important job ... and we want to make sure, the care that they are providing is of the highest quality and that they are safe."

Friendly agrees with Hiscott that the daycare industry is too confusing for parents, and says stronger oversight would help them find the best care.

"It would be really good if parents could have child care where they didn't have to know that they should ask these questions," she said. "In regulated child care, whether it's in a centre or a home, these things would be taken care of, and then the parents wouldn't have to become the expert on exactly which questions to ask."

The CBC/Leger Marketing Research survey was conducted Jan. 3-10 and included responses from 1,000 Canadians aged 18 or older, had a child under 13 and who completed the survey in English. A further set of questions was asked specifically of those with a child in a daycare.

There is no margin of error stated for the online survey.

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