



**Finding Childcare in Toronto and
Vancouver: First-Person Testimonials
from Parents**

[September 2020]

Toronto

Aoibhinn

My family moved to Toronto from Ireland when our baby was almost 8 months old because of my husband's work. At that point I was still on maternity leave so our little girl had not attended daycare in Ireland. We decided to live downtown, because it is close to my husband's work. Before leaving Ireland, I tried to do as much research as I could into neighbourhoods, activities for children and childcare. I searched around the area we were hoping to live in, to see what options were available. I think this is a good way to start trying to find childcare, proximity to home or work is key. One website I found helpful was the [City of Toronto Child Care Locator](#). You can pop in your address and it tells you what licenced daycares are near by. I also found Facebook very helpful and I joined lots of groups and found activities in our area.

Another great resource in Toronto is the local [EarlyON](#) Child and Family Centre. These centres offer programming and support to caregivers of children from birth – 6 years old. They run drop-in circle time classes, movement classes and more - all for free or very little expense. This was a great platform for me to meet other parents in the area and to learn the lie of the land from them in terms of how childcare works here. I signed up to a local music class called Little Rebels (even before I left Ireland) and I began attending it 3 days after we came here. I think the best thing to do when moving to a new place with a young family is to plunge in and immerse yourself in your local community as best you can. From there I made some very good friendships and one year on they are still in my close circle. I also joined some local mom Facebook groups and Whatsapp groups which were a great source of information and support.

In Toronto there are two main types of day cares – public and private. The city run public daycares offer a subsidy for parents who meet the criteria (based upon income) so if you think you qualify this is definitely something worth looking into. Private daycares seem to be slightly easier to get into, possibly because there are more available and they do not offer subsidies. Most day cares only allow for full-time, although a select few offer a part time option.

Overall, for daycare, the general wait list time is at least one year. The demand in downtown Toronto in particular exceeds the supply, so it's a little trickier to find a space here than in the suburbs. Maternity leave is slightly longer in Canada than in Ireland, with a lot of mothers taking one year - 18 months. In Ireland, 6 months is usually standard. Of course, all this depends on what area you are working in and who your employer is. There is also the benefit of sharing your maternity leave with paternity leave here. In Ireland paternity leave has just been extended to one month so it's a relatively new thing. With that in mind, this is why parents can afford to have their names on a wait list for at least one year or more. A lot of my friends here signed up from as early as three months pregnant. Since our baby was almost 8 months when we arrived, we were a little behind in terms of these waitlists. However, we were not under huge pressure as I hadn't found employment yet. We eventually got a place in a private day care. I found that when looking for a spot in a daycare, persistence is valued. I called, emailed and visited a number of times and explained our situation. I think that was what got us the place in the end. However, due to Covid, she didn't get to start unfortunately.

Another thing worth considering when looking for a daycare is the philosophy or methodology that you would like in your daycare. For example, Montessori, Steiner or Forest schools. I am an educator myself so this was important to me. There are few Montessori's in Downtown Toronto which are extremely difficult to get into. There is also a Waldorf school downtown and another Montessori on the Island, as well as a Natural Science School. Attending daycare on the Toronto islands certainly has advantages in terms of exposure to nature etc, however it is important to note that children are not accepted to the Island daycare's until they are 2.5 years old and the day ends at 4:30 pm, earlier than daycares elsewhere in the city.

There are many other forms of childcare to consider aside from day cares. Home Daycares or Nanny Shares are easier to find as well as a full time Nanny option. We looked at Facebook pages like [Moms and Nannies Toronto](#) to see what our options were. It is slightly more expensive to have a full-time nanny but it allows parents who are both working a little more flexibility. Of course, if you have more than one child it works out cheaper to have a nanny. It is also slightly cheaper to go to a home day care or a nanny share. For example, if you want the social experience of day care but at a lower cost and a smaller scale sharing a nanny with another family may work for you.

Overall, childcare in Toronto is pricey, but having lived in Dublin, it's not too different. There are lots of options to suit varying lifestyles and it is important to find the right fit for you and your family. Moving to a new country without any family support nearby is definitely a challenge for a young a family. My experience in Toronto has been very positive. I have found locals to be extremely warm and I also found a lot of support through the Irish community here via organisations like the Irish Canadian Immigration Centre and the Toronto Irish Players. That's a great way to find a casual babysitter also.

Emma

Don't worry guys, you will find a spot somewhere! We have had two different experiences looking for daycares, downtown and in the suburbs.

When you meet parents and they say they put their kid on a daycare list from the moment they found out they were pregnant, don't panic. But, yes, if you can start putting your new little one on lists, although I am not sure it really makes a difference as months down the line, things can change. I was one of those people who just figured we'd find something, don't get me wrong, there were a few hairy moments but there are multiple options available if you are stuck.

Downtown is like daycare extreme, everyone scrambling for a spot, we managed to get a spot by being online at 6am and it was the fastest finger to complete an online form. Turns out we never used this spot as we moved out of the downtown core.

Suburbs was just as hard to find a spot, I started looking when my little one was 7mths old and everywhere was full, eventually I found somewhere which wasn't my first choice, but it was a spot, the carers were loving and kind and that is all that mattered.

From speaking to other parents, I know that Kids and Co are obliged to take you if your company is affiliated with them.

Also, other options if you need something temporary is a nanny or nanny share. There are Facebook groups that you can search for someone to share a nanny with.

When looking for a daycare, the main thing is that it suits you and your child. There is a list of questions which you can ask, an example being, "how much time do they get outside", "do you prepare meals onsite or is the food catered". Eventually you will come to know what is important to you and ask your necessary questions.

My advice would be not to worry, yes it is the main question you get asked in the park "did you get a spot in a daycare", but most daycares cannot offer you a spot until one to three months before you are due to start them. So just put your name down on a few lists as many as you can when you can and play the waiting game.

Michelle

The City of Toronto website I found very useful.

See [here](#).

Things to do/research/stuff I've found helpful:

1. Find your local drop in Early ON centres. I can't emphasise enough how important and beneficial these services are, newborn to preschool and beyond, especially the support they provide to new parents, immigrants and young children.

(It can also be a way to meet new people and find babysitters and other caregivers in the area through word of mouth and contacts.)

2. Find your mama tribe :)

Join a parent group whether on Facebook or online support group or chat. So helpful to trade stories and advice especially when a lot of us are away from our home country/immediate family, feel less alone, make contacts for childcare/babysitting.

3. Before you even have the baby, put your name on a waitlist for daycares in your area. I know the city run ones take a surname and expected date you will need care. Although never a guarantee. Most daycare (private, licensed and city run like Woodgreen) may only give you a few weeks notice if a daycare spot is available.

There are very few infant spots (6mths-12mths) so it is competitive whichever center you look at, much easier to get a daycare spot once a child hits 16/17/18mths.

My experience is downtown/east end with high demand for spots, pricey and less home (unlicensed) daycares that I know of, but I know a few families that moved further east towards Scarborough and found way more affordable care.

(Side note: We went with a Montessori school in the end as it was the best decision for us as a family, location, small in size etc.)

4. Talk to your family doctor and research the Toronto public health website—lots of help, services and support out there for new parents no matter what the issue, and as always it just can be hard to navigate it.

5. Talk to someone, whether it is family, your spouse, other parents, friends and your neighbours down the street as one thing I've learned: it takes a village to raise a child and no one should do it alone with their thoughts and worries, we're all struggling along together.

Vancouver

Louise

My son was born in April of 2016, I had heard a few horror stories surrounding finding infant childcare, however, that was not my experience. Returning to my previous role was a little uncertain at the time. I was working for a large big box retailer, whose future was hanging in the balance. For this reason I hadn't put my name down anywhere as I didn't know if I would be needing it and at the time, daycares were charging waitlist fees, which has since been made illegal (in BC anyway). I soon found another job and quickly hit the ground running in search of a daycare for Max. We live in North Vancouver, we visited probably 6-7 different places. Most of them were in in-home daycares, some had a license and some were license not required (LNR). They all had infant availability. In the end, we chose one that was a bigger operation, with 2 locations. They provided food and snacks, along with wipes. I only had to pack diapers for Max and that was it. It was a little more expensive than the others but I found there was huge value in everything they provided so I didn't mind paying it. They also had a camera system in place, along with an app, so I could pop in throughout the day & see how he was doing. I was also able to provide the camera details to our families in Ireland. It enabled them to feel part of his daily life too. I enrolled him 2 weeks before I was due to start my new position. The week before, he participated in the gradual entry program. This involved us going to the daycare every morning for 2 hours. On the first day, I stayed the entire time. The 2nd day, I left 15 minutes early and then came back for him, third day was 30 minutes early and so on until the Friday, where he stayed the entire 2 hours on his own with the teachers. I loved his daycare, he learned so much there and loved going every day. Our next big challenge would seem to be after school care. This area already seems far more competitive than daycare ever was, at least in our experience. As I was a first time Mom, I had no idea how far in advance I should put his name down for before and after school care. I heard, in passing, from another mother, that she had her kids name down already (this was in 2018) Max isn't due to start school until Sept 2021, so I foolishly thought I had lots of time. I called them right away and got his name on the list. In 2018, he wasn't guaranteed a spot for Sept 2021. We're hoping that he'll get a spot, if not, we may have to bite the bullet and hire a nanny. We have a 15-month old son too, if we did have to hire a nanny, he would be withdrawn from daycare and stay home with the nanny too.

David

We moved from Toronto to Vancouver in 2013, when our firstborn was about 9 months old.

We quickly realized how bad the daycare situation was when we were told the wait list was up to 2 years to get into some of the local licensed daycares. In the mean-time we found a daycare which was 10km in the opposite direction of our daily commute (it was the only space we could get at the time). So my morning commute went from 25 minutes one way, to 1 hour 35 minutes one way.

After school childcare is also problematic and there are waitlists for children who start Kindergarten and Elementary school. We had to wait 8 months before our daughter was accepted into after school childcare.

At present there is a campaign that's growing in support for a \$10 per day to make childcare more available and more affordable.

The \$10 A Day Child Care Plan is the community's solution to BC's child care crisis. 82% of British Columbians agree that it will be beneficial to parents. The \$10 A Day Plan will make child care affordable by bringing fees down to:

- \$10 a day for full time care
- \$7 a day for part time care
- No parent fees for families with annual incomes under \$45,000

This will make a real difference for all families and is the single biggest step to reduce poverty for families with young children.

To learn more about this campaign please visit this website <https://www.10aday.ca/>

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