

PLEY Survey: Preliminary Findings

Play and Learning in the Early Years Survey - Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Children

About the PLEY Survey

- *Sample:* 512 parents of children aged between 1 and 10 participated in survey
- *Method:* Data collected online from 21st May to 3rd June 2020
- *Questions:* Includes questions about children's school work, reading, screen time, outdoor play, their neighbourhood, playing with games and toys, the impact of the restrictions on play and relationships, socio-emotional development, attentional focusing and parental attitudes to play and learning
- *Researchers:* Led by Dr Suzanne Egan (Suzanne.Egan@mic.ul.ie) in the Department of Psychology at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, and researchers in the Cognition, Development and Learning Lab Ms. Chloe Beatty and Ms. Clara Hoyne

Key Findings

- *Social distancing* – Parents indicated that nearly all children aged 6 and over, and three quarters of children aged 4-5, understand the restrictions and social distancing
- *School* – Most children miss school and most parents agree it is important to continue school work at home, but it is a source of conflict in over half of the families surveyed
- *Childcare* – Two thirds of children aged 1-5 years miss childcare
- *Social relationships* – Most children miss family, friends and playing with other children
- *Play* – Play has changed for many children with increases in screen time and outdoor play, and a third of children bringing information about the virus or restrictions into their play

Additional Information:

Understanding the Restrictions and Social Distancing

- 97%-98% of parents of 6-10 year olds agree their child is aware of the restrictions, understands the restrictions and understands social distancing
- 88% of parents of 6-10 year olds agree their child has practised social distancing (e.g., in the park, with family members)
- 96% of parents of 4-5 year olds agree their child is aware of the restrictions, 81% understand the restrictions, 73% understand social distancing and 71% have practised social distancing
- 53% of parents of 1-3 year olds agree their child is aware of the restrictions, 34% understand the restrictions and 25% understand social distancing, with 54% having practised social distancing

Relationships Beyond the Family Unit

- 87% of children miss family and 90% miss friends
- 80% miss school
- 55% miss childcare (67% of 1-5 year olds and 46% of 6-10 year olds)
- 51% have not played with children at all from another household outdoors with social distancing
- 27% have played with children from another household outdoors with social distancing at least once a week

School

- 85% of 6 -10 year olds do school work at home multiple days per week; 5% never or hardly ever do school work at home
- School work at home has been a source of conflict between parents and children for 60% of families
- 71% of 6-10 years spending less time on school work than before the lockdown
- 42% of 6-7 year olds spend less than an hour per day on school work, 46% spend 1 to 2 hours and 12% spend more than 2 hours.
- 31% of 8-10 years olds spend less than an hour per day on school work, 44% spend 1 to 2 hours and 25% spend more than 2 hours

Access to Public Spaces

- 20% of parents (1 in 5) disagree there are good parks, playgrounds and play spaces within 5km of their home. 34% of parents (1 in 3) disagree for within 2km of their home.
- 41% have never or hardly ever gone to the park during lockdown while 27% have gone at least 3 times per week
- During lockdown 52% of children have not played out on the street at all, while 23% have played out at least three times a week
- 75% go for a walk at least three times per week in their neighbourhood
- 24% travel by car at least once a week to go for a walk

Play

- 87% miss playing with other children
- 73% of children prefer playing with other children than alone
- 72% report that play has been affected by the restrictions
- 78% of children spend more time on screens than before the crisis
- 35% of children have brought information about the virus or restrictions into their play

Outdoor Play

- 74% of children spend more time on outdoor play than before the crisis
- 80% play outside every day, with the remainder playing outside multiple times a week
- 90% of children have done sports or physical activities at least 3 times a week
- 52% of children spend more than 2 hours per day playing outdoors, 36% spend 1-2 hours and 12% spend less than an hour

Parent Descriptions:

Parents descriptions of the virus and restrictions in children's play

- "Drawing of the virus and discussions about going back in time to tell the person who ate the bat to not eat it" (Age 7)
- "He builds stadiums from lego and the 'match' goes on behind closed doors due to the coronavirus!" (Age 8)
- "Her Sims world features social distancing and extra hygiene equipment!" (Age 10)
- "Her Sylvannian and lego family had to block off the entrances into their villages to keep out the virus. They tested people before letting them into their village" (Age 9)
- "Doll has mask. Plays nurse or Doctor to make dolls or pets better. Washing dolls hands" (Age 4)
- "She pretends that she's going to the park with her friends but that the playground is closed" (Age 2)

Biggest change to their child's play and activities as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Some parents described a positive change:

- "He now plays with lego and toys. He never used to before"
- "My child has gotten much better at self-directed free play. She is getting more time to do chores and we are spending lots of time outside."
- "More reading. Time spent reading has quadrupled. Playing outdoors has increased. Similar to summer holiday. No organised sports"
- "Playing more outside, more imaginative play, more drawing and creative play, more hands on activities: gardening, baking. Goes on a long walk each day"
- "Used to fight ALL the time with his twin sister. Now they are best of friends. They've even sleep in the same bed again most nights. It's amazing."

Biggest change to their child's play and activities as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Some parents described a negative change:

- "A lot more screen time. Less socialising"
- "He has become very moody and lazy"
- "His routine - my son is autistic and is finding every change so hard and schoolwork is a huge challenge."
- "Lack of energy all the down time has brought her interest and mood down"
- "Missing friends and school so tantrums are regular and bed time is disrupted"
- "Become very introvert, whereas she was the complete opposite. Becoming quiet shy. Not as active as she used be."
- "Interaction with other children is sorely missed"
- "She seems more subdued and wants to go to bed often"