

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> May to 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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"