



# Children and young people's consultation 2021

## Play in a COVID-19 context

Play Scotland and  
Scotland's Play Council  
and Strategy Group

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# 1. Executive Summary

## A return to play, more play and better play

Children want a return to play, more play and better play. This was children and young people's overwhelming response to a consultation on play undertaken by Play Scotland in early 2021. Funding was received from the Scottish Government to support the consultation.

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on children and young people's lives. After the challenges of the last year, they want a return to the play they enjoy. They want to be with their friends and see their extended families. They want more play at school, at clubs and outdoors. Children and young people also want better play – with improvements to parks and play facilities which include everyone.

## Children and young people enjoy rich and diverse play experiences

Over 340 children and young people from 0 to 18 years described rich and diverse play experiences that they enjoyed. Many of the play activities they like take place outdoors, and with their friends.

Children and young people like:

- playing with their friends and family members
- playing in parks and natural environments such as the beach and woods
- participating in a wide range of physical activities such as football, swimming, dancing and cycling
- going to their clubs, including those for children with additional support needs



- imaginative play and games
- playing video games and other online activities.

**'Imaginative play and running around with my friends – park/school/ beach/wood with sticks and stuff like that.'**

## Profound impact of COVID-19 on play

The contrast with what children and young people like doing and the impact on play in the current COVID-19 situation is stark. As one child, reflecting the views of other children and young people, said:

**'It's changed everything in the world.'**

Children and young people say that they have not been able to play in the way they want or choose. They have not been able to meet their friends and other family members in some way or at all. The emergency measures have stopped, changed or inhibited their everyday activities. For children with disabilities or additional support needs, the restrictions have meant that they cannot access the services and the support they need – and in many instances they have not had access to play outside their homes.

**'I can't have playdates or invite my friends round. No rugby, football or judo. No school so can't see my friends. Can't go on holiday.'**

Children and young people identified positive experiences from the last year. Many have enjoyed spending more time with their families at home. They liked having more relaxed approaches to their daily routines and going on walks. Children talked of new opportunities that were available such as school lessons which were fun as well as online play and other new hobbies and activities. A small but significant group of children preferred online learning and not being at school.

**'I really liked the first lockdown because mum had more time. We did more crafts and games and played outside on long walks.'**

## Children and young people's BIG MESSAGES about play

Children and young people had unambiguous messages about what they wanted to happen about play. They wanted to play as they did before COVID-19. They also wanted opportunities for more play. Finally, and crucially, they wanted better play experiences.

The overwhelming majority of children and young people stated that they wanted to see their friends. They wanted activities, such as swimming, football and their clubs to re-open. This was very important for children with additional support needs who also wanted to see significant improvements in outdoor play to meet their needs. Older young people wanted play and leisure opportunities that met their needs and interests.

Most children and young people wanted to go back to school. Some mentioned that they wanted more opportunities to play more at school. Some wanted changes in the way education was delivered after their experiences of the last year.

Finally, the responses show that play is of overwhelming importance to children and young people. They have not been able to participate in the range of play experiences they had before COVID-19. The 'big message' from children and young people is that they want a return to play, more play, and better play. As one young person stated in a challenge to adults:

**'I don't stop being a child, even with coronavirus. Don't forget children.'**



## 2. Consultation with children and young people on play

Over 340 children and young people took part in a consultation organised by Play Scotland in January and early February 2021. The aim was to facilitate children and young people's contribution to the COVID-19 update to the Progress Review on the Play Strategy. The children and young people who took part ranged in age from the youngest children, aged 0-5 years, to older children and young people up to the age of 18.

The consultations were facilitated by eight organisations and networks across Scotland through online surveys, face-to-face online contact or through face-to-face discussion with children of vulnerable families and key workers. Where children needed help to complete the questionnaire, they were supported by parents. All responses were anonymised.

The participants included: children and young people with additional support needs; children from asylum seeking or refugee families from black and ethnic minority communities; children from families identified as vulnerable or essential key workers; and children and young people from play, youth and childcare services. Most of the children and young people were already connected to the organisations who facilitated the consultations.

Organisations were provided with a format for the consultation with options to adapt to meet the needs of their group of children and young people. All responses were qualitative. Children and young people were asked to give their responses to four main questions:

- **Where do you play and what kind of play do you like best?**
- **What is different for you because of COVID?**
- **What should adults do to help you play?**
- **Have you a BIG MESSAGE?**

The quotes from children and young people used in this summary are illustrative and have been chosen to reflect common and diverse views. They are a snapshot of the many rich and thoughtful responses that were received.

Play Scotland would like to thank all the children and young people who took part and the parents and carers who supported children in responding to the consultation.

Play Scotland would also like to thank the following organisations for facilitating consultations:

**CALA (Highland)**  
**Can Do Scotland (East Lothian)**  
**Concrete Garden (Glasgow)**  
**LASC (Midlothian)**  
**Licketyspit (Glasgow)**  
**Parent Councils & Support from the Start networks (East Lothian)**  
**SupERkids (East Renfrewshire)**  
**Venturing Out (East Lothian)**

## 3. Where do children and young people play and what kind of play do they like best?

Children and young people identified many places and kinds of activities that they enjoyed with family and friends. They liked being at home, playing inside and outdoors as well as playing with siblings, parents, cousins and their pets. They played by themselves as well as with others.

In terms of activities, children and young people enjoyed a very wide range of play and leisure activities. These included:

- playing with friends and hanging out together
- playing all kinds of games including video games, board games and indoor and outdoor games such as hide and seek and tag
- imaginative play of all kinds, and arts and crafts
- being outdoors and going to parks and natural environments such as beaches and woods
- playing football, running, swimming, going on bikes and scooters, skateboarding, gymnastics and dancing, trampolining, karate and other physical activities
- playing at school, nursery and after school club
- going to children and young people's clubs and places specially for children such as the Yard in Edinburgh
- going to soft play centres, cinema, swimming pools, sports clubs, museums and theatre.

Children and young people, in their own words, said:

**'Play games at youth club.'**

**'I like to play hide and seek, at home with everyone. Everyone has so much fun. I like to play inside my house. I have, we make stuff like party poppers and stuff, crafts.'**

**'I like role playing but also making up stories with my friends.'**

**'Outside on the trampoline or colouring in using pencils and crayons.'**

**'Woods and beach. I love climbing trees and making dens.'**

**'I like to play at soft plays and trampoline centre before the bad bug. Parks and outdoors are also fun, but I miss being able to go on the big slides.'**

**'After school club. Walks outdoors.'**

**'Skateboarding with friends.'**

**'Xbox and Playstation'**

**'Acting from imagination. Rope skipping. Playing chase with my little sister, pretend cooking and playing with Lego.'**

**'Everywhere.'**



## 4. What is different for children and young people because of COVID-19?

The contrast between what play activities children and young people liked doing and what they could do during COVID-19 restrictions was stark. Children and young people stated how much they missed their friends and seeing family members they did not live with. They said that most of their everyday activities had come to a stop.

Children and young people emphasised the impact of the lack of contact with friends, classmates and family members. They missed school and the activities, clubs and services that they usually participated in. They said that they missed having holidays and trips out.

Most participants emphasised how much they missed their friends. Many said that they were sad and disappointed that they could not see them. Older young people over the age of 12 pointed out that the restrictions limited the number of friends they could see to one at a time. A significant number of children and young people said that they were lonely and bored. They wanted their clubs, services and activities to restart and to return to school.

Children and young people, in their own words, said:

**‘Football is cancelled, swimming is cancelled, I can’t play in the street because my friends aren’t allowed out. Can’t go to the park unless it’s with mum. Covid-19 has taken away my freedom to play without supervision.’**

**‘Want to go back to Youth Club.’**

**‘Places all shut, nothing to do.’**

**‘Schools are so different.’**

**‘Can’t get out to play or to clubs. Plays with neighbour but keeps distance. Doesn’t play with any other children like he used to. Just walks past friends if he sees them.’ (quote from parent)**

**‘So lonely.’**

**‘Nowhere to play that’s safe.’**

**‘It makes me angry and sad because I don’t get to go places and see my friends.’**

## 5. Evidence on the impact of COVID-19

**‘It has changed my relationships. I am no longer as close to my friends as I can’t see them as much. My routine is very different too – a lot of the same everyday.’**

**‘No, I like going out to play and don’t like Zoom. I like chatting on the phone with people I know.’**

**‘I miss freedom, not seeing my friends and not being able to play with them’**

**‘I wish I could back to my football training.’**

**‘My stepsister and brother can’t come over to my house and I can only Facetime them.’**

Although many children identified the negative impacts of COVID-19, a significant number of children and young people said that they had had positive experiences, in spite of not seeing friends and going where they wanted. They had enjoyed different aspects of lockdown such as spending time with their families, going for walks and playing games. Many children and young people liked the more relaxed daily schedule and getting up later. Others mentioned that they enjoyed learning new things such as baking, board games and playing outdoors with their parents, siblings and pets.

**‘I like COVID because I don’t have to go to school and I am safe at home.’**

**‘I like playing cricket and basketball with my Dad.’**

**‘I have loved more time at home and get to play video games.’**

**‘Invented new games to play.’**

**‘Mum and dad are our teachers which is nice.’**

**‘For me, online videogaming is an invaluable resource because lots of my friends can be in an online ‘party’ at one time where we can all talk but not meet up in person (we had 14 people one time!).’**



A smaller number of children said that they liked online learning and preferred not going to school. They enjoyed not having a rigorous timetable and learning at their own speed.

**'I read on the computer and do Zooms with my sister and playing with her and doing my homework it's fun and that's what I like.'**

**'I miss seeing friends, but I find schoolwork easier to concentrate on at home as there is only me and mum. I have autism so suffer with pretty bad anxiety when at school.'**

**'More time with my family, get to relax more and don't have to stress about getting to classes on time.'**

Children who were able to go to school talked about the changes to school routine, mentioning social distancing, impact on year groups, changes to school breaks and always washing hands.



**'So, I wanted to say of the lockdown, it's hard to not go outside in school, it's hard to not touch anything, try not holding your friend's hand and try not playing with your teachers.'**

Children and young people with disabilities and additional support needs said that they were not getting access to the services they needed with their families having to meet their complex needs. This was of significant concern to them and their families.

**'There is nothing suitable for me as I have complex needs and can't walk or talk. I have been forgotten about.'**

**'Not going to the Café every Friday with Carer.'**

**'I can't see my friends because I need them to be able to come into my house of my anxiety. I don't see anyone now. Also, my horse riding has stopped. It's hard to stay regulated and know what is going on when we have nothing to do.'**

**'Can't go where we want. ASN club has stopped.'**

## 6. What should adults do to help children and young people play?

Children and young people had clear and straightforward ideas about what adults could do to help children play. Children wanted more play opportunities and their activities to reopen. They wanted to see their friends in the ways they did before COVID-19 restrictions. Many children wanted to see a lifting of restrictions that impacted on them whilst many recognised the challenges in easing back on emergency measures.

**'Find a way to still have activities on rather than cancelled.'**

A significant number of young people over 12 years of age wanted more opportunities to meet more friends at a time.

Children and young people had ideas about what could change. They wanted more opportunities to play and, as described in some responses, better play facilities.

Some children wanted changes to the way they learned, such as smaller groups. Others wanted to get back to their school and to the routine of prior to COVID-19.

All children and young people wanted their clubs to open as soon as possible. This was particularly emphasised by children with disabilities and additional support needs and their families.

## 7. Children and young people's BIG MESSAGES

Children and young people were asked for their 'big messages'. A number of children didn't answer this question or stated that they did not want to answer. Overall children wanted to see their friends and be able to play with them. They wanted to see family members they had not been able to see during lockdown. Crucially, most wanted to go back to school and to their clubs and activities.

Children and young people's messages, where they gave them, were emphatic:

**'We need more play.'**

**'Less rules.'**

**'I want to be able to see my Grandparents and go into my friend's house.'**

**'Let's have fun.'**

**'I feel judged when out and about with a friend - as if adults think we should be at home and not enjoying anything at all. Adults seem to think teenagers are all irresponsible and selfish, which obviously not true. But this affects how much I can enjoy even my basic leisure time outdoors.'**

**'We want Youth Club back. Everything will be ok. Get the jag and see you soon.'**

However, many children and young people wanted everyone to be safe, restrictions to be lifted when it was right, and highlighted that they were pleased that parks and some other limited places had stayed open.

**'Thank you for keeping us safe.'**

**'Everyone is doing well. Keep it up.'**

**'Thank you cause I can still go to the park and play.'**

**'GET THE CASE NUMBERS DOWN AND THE VACCINE DISTRIBUTED so we can go back to "normal".'**

Others wanted restrictions to be lifted as soon as possible and were frustrated at the level of current restrictions.

**'Why did you have to shut everything?'**

Many children and young people wanted improvements to parks and outside spaces. They wanted more equipment and resources in play parks for children and young people of all ages and which were inclusive for children with additional support needs.

Children and young people also wanted more interesting things to do when they were in parks and public spaces. Older young people said emphatically they wanted to meet in larger groups and to have better play and activity spaces that met their needs and interests.

The following illustrate children and young people's BIG MESSAGES:

### **More play opportunities**

**'We need lots more play.'**

**'More playing stuff in local parks.'**

**'Have things outside for kids to do when we are on our walks.'**

**'Make sure the public places we are allowed to visit are maintained.'**

### **Be able to see friends**

**'Like to have more fun with friends'**

**'Please let us see our friends and let them come inside'**

**'Fewer restrictions for 12-17-year olds maybe being allowed to meet 6 people outdoors again.'**

### **Have more play for children with disabilities and additional support needs**

**'Please make there be more places for additional needs children. It is a big message that outdoor parks reopened in the summer 2020 but sadly the disabled children were forgotten.'**

**'Please allow for ASN clubs to continue.'**

### **Ensure young people have places to play and hangout**

**'More parks for older kids, pump track, The space (indoor skate ramps/mini cinema/arcade/coffee bar.'**

**'Safe places for teenagers to meet friends outside.'**

### **Return to school**

**'To the government, find a way for us to get to school or our sports clubs because I know far too many happy people who are never happy anymore who are falling through the cracks purely because the govt are ignoring our age group.'**

**'Give us more play time at school and make learning more fun.'**

**'Please please open the schools to everyone because I'm missing my friends. Also I'm bored of not having football and just going walks everyday.'**

### **Open up clubs and sports facilities**

**'Outdoor sports should go back as long as you distance.'**

**'Please open up the leisure centres, this is helpful for all ages for both health and well-being.'**

**'We want Youth Club back.'**





## 8. Conclusion

Children and young people's contributions to the consultation were informed, generous and insightful, demonstrating how essential it is for children and young people to be engaged in discussions about play during COVID-19 restrictions and in the post-COVID-19 recovery phases – in line with commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children and young people's 'big messages' were delivered with clarity: children and young people want to return to the fullest and richest of play opportunities – when they can, with their friends, at school and in their communities.

The consultation with children and young people was undertaken in a short period between mid-January and February 2021. Initially it was anticipated that the sample size of the consultation would be small because of the timescale and limited resources available. However, Play Scotland was overwhelmed by the support for the consultation from eight organisations and networks. In addition, organisations who worked with children and young people with additional support needs, and an organisation who works with families who are asylum seekers or refugees from black and ethnic minority communities were able to participate. After the initial sample, it was felt that there was a need to get further information from children and young people from a more rural area away from the central belt and therefore a group in Highland was approached.

At least 10% of the children and young people who responded had an identified additional support need. In view of the ethical issues around online and face consultations, children and young people were not asked about their socio-economic circumstances. However, children who attend three of these groups are from communities high on the SIMD (22% of respondents). The data is not available for other participants.

Overall the age range was split into three age categories with a breakdown of ages as follows 0-5, 6-11, 12-18 and prefer not to answer. Of the 314 respondents that answered the age question, 11% were 0-5, 44% were 6-11 and 45% were 12-18. Responses have not been weighted according to the numbers of responses received in each age group.

### Committed to PLAY



### Taic do Chluiche



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