PLAY MATTERS COLLECTIVE

Children and young people share why play matters

What 1,086 children and young people aged 3 to 17 told us about play in Western Australia

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia, and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located.
The Commissioner recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities of all Aboriginal peoples. Together, the Commissioner and the team also pay their respects to Elders past and present and emerging young leaders. They recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal peoples and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, although similarities do exist.

About this report

The survey results were collated, and this report was written, by Associate Professor Sandra Hesterman, PhD, SFHEA, Will Cayley and Linh Nguyen on behalf of the Play Matters Collective, with the support of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, who published it. The survey was distributed with the support of the Western Australian Department of Education, Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

Thank you

Thank you to every child and young person who shared their views, and to the schools, educators, parents and carers who supported them to take part. Your voices will help shape a State Play Strategy that puts children's right to play first. Thank you also to the McCusker Centre for Citizenship for supporting the placement of Will Cayley and Linh Nguyen, who co-authored this report.

Images and artwork

The images and drawings of Western Australian children and young people featured in this report were submitted as part of the Play Matters Collective survey. Informed consent to publish all images and drawings featured in this report has been obtained.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the Play Matters Collective for the Commissioner for Children and Young People. It is intended to provide the views of the children and young people who participated in the Play Matters Collective survey, which was open from 15 July 2026 to 15 September 2026.

Participation was voluntary, and the findings reflect the views of survey participants only. They should not be read as population-level estimates for all children and young people in Western Australia. Participation was strongest among children and young people aged 9 to 15 years and those living in metropolitan Perth. No responses were received from the Pilbara region.
Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the Play Matters Collective.

A selection of quotations is included in this report on the relevant topics. The quotations are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the child or young person is authentically represented. Editing has only occurred where necessary for clarity, understanding or confidentiality.
Any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (…).

Suggested citation

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Message from the Commissioner



In 2026, the Western Australian Government announced it would develop a Play Strategy – a move welcomed by leaders across the State, including the Play Matters Collective (PMC).

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, I am committed to ensuring children and young people's voices are not only heard, but acted upon, on matter affecting their health and wellbeing – aligning to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) – the Right for children and young people to express their views freely and be provided with the opportunity to be heard. Article 31 of the UN CRC recognises the right of the child to engage in play and recreational activities and adults have a responsibility to create the conditions that make those rights a reality,

As Western Australia progresses the development of the State Play Strategy, my office collaborated with the PMC to develop and distribute surveys for children and young people to have their views heard about what play means to them. We asked about their experiences of play, recreation and the places where they spend time. Their responses were clear and consistent – they told us play is not simply something they enjoy, it is a vital part of their health, wellbeing, happiness, friendships, learning, creativity, identify and sense of belonging. They also told us when opportunity to play are limited, they experience negative impacts.

What stands out most in this report is the strength of the voices of children and young people. They not only identify the challenges but also offer a vision for what they need to thrive: safe, welcoming and inclusive places, access to nature, opportunities for recreation and the freedom, time and resources to play.

The findings from the survey reinforce the need for a coordinated, long-term and whole-of-government approach that recognises play as essential children's wellbeing, participation and healthy development.

Importantly, the findings remind us that the experts on children's play experiences are children themselves. When we listen to their perspectives and act on what they us, we can create communities, schools and public spaces that are more inclusive, child-friendly and connected.

I thank every child and young person who participated in the Survey. Your voices have shaped this report and provide a powerful call to action. I also thank Associate Professor Sandra Hesterman, PhD, SFHEA from the Play Matters Collective for her analysis of the surveys and preparation of this Report.

I encourage policymakers, educators, local governments, community organisations and families to consider the outcomes from this survey and work together to ensure every child has the opportunity to play, connect and thrive.

Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and Young People
WA Patron, Play Matters Collective



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01

Context

1,086 children and young people aged 3 to 17



The Western Australia Play Survey was undertaken to better understand how children and young people experience play across diverse communities throughout the state.

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1,086

children and young people aged 3 to 17 took part.

- 580 youth survey, aged 12 to 17
- 506 child survey, aged 3 to 12

Source: Play Matters surveys

Why a Play Survey?

The Western Australia Play Survey was undertaken to better understand how children and young people experience play across diverse communities throughout the state. The survey explored what children and young people value about play, the opportunities available to them, and the factors that support or constrain participation.

Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood and adolescence, contributing to physical health, mental wellbeing, social connectedness, learning, and overall development.[1] Understanding children's experiences of play provides valuable evidence about the extent to which neighbourhoods, schools, parks, and community environments support opportunities for play.

The survey recognised the importance of listening directly to children and young people. Research indicates that children's perspectives may differ from adult assumptions about their experiences, priorities, and needs, highlighting the importance of seeking their views directly rather than relying solely on adult interpretations. By providing opportunities for children and young people to share their perspectives, the survey generated valuable evidence about contemporary play experiences across Western Australia.[2]

Although responses were received from a range of metropolitan and regional communities, some locations were under-represented. The findings highlight the importance of ongoing state wide engagement to ensure that future planning, policy and investment in play reflect the diverse experiences and needs of children and young people throughout Western Australia.

It is hoped that the information gathered from this survey will serve as a valuable guiding resource for the development of policies, the allocation of resources, and the implementation of practices that support, enrich, and extend play opportunities for children and young people.

Profile of participants

Participation was open to children and young people aged 3 to 17 years residing in Western Australia, with a total of 1,086 participants completing the survey. The sample included a broadly balanced distribution of child and youth participants, with 46.3% aged 11 years or younger and 53.7% aged 12 years or older. This broad age representation enabled the survey to capture perspectives across childhood and adolescence, facilitating an exploration of both shared experiences and age-related differences in play opportunities, preferences, and challenges.

82.4%
of participants were aged 9 to 15

Participants were recruited through schools, stakeholder networks, and online promotion. As participation was voluntary, the survey represents a self-selected sample of children and young people from across Western Australia. Consequently, the findings provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of participating children and young people, while recognising that the sample may not be fully representative of all children and young people in Western Australia.

Age distribution

The age profile of participants was concentrated in the upper primary and lower secondary (middle) school years, with 12-year-olds comprising the largest single age group (n = 202; 18.6%; see Table 2).

Participants aged 3-8 years represented 12.2% of the sample, those aged 9-12 years 52.8%, those aged 13-15 years 29.7%, and those aged 16-17 years 5.4% (see Figure 1).

The largest single age cohort was 9-12 years, accounting for 52.8% of all participants.

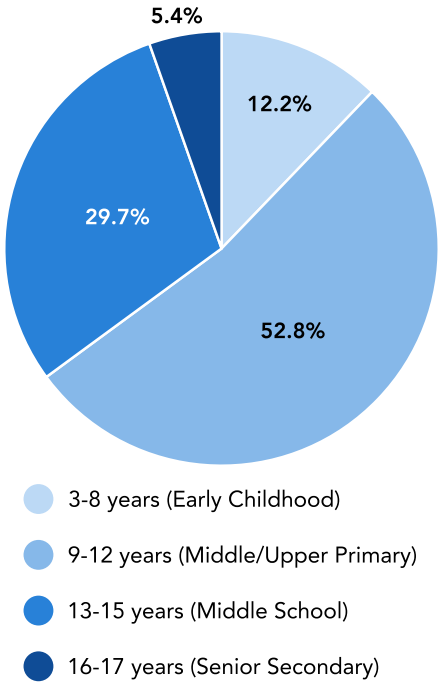


Figure 1. Age distribution of participants

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

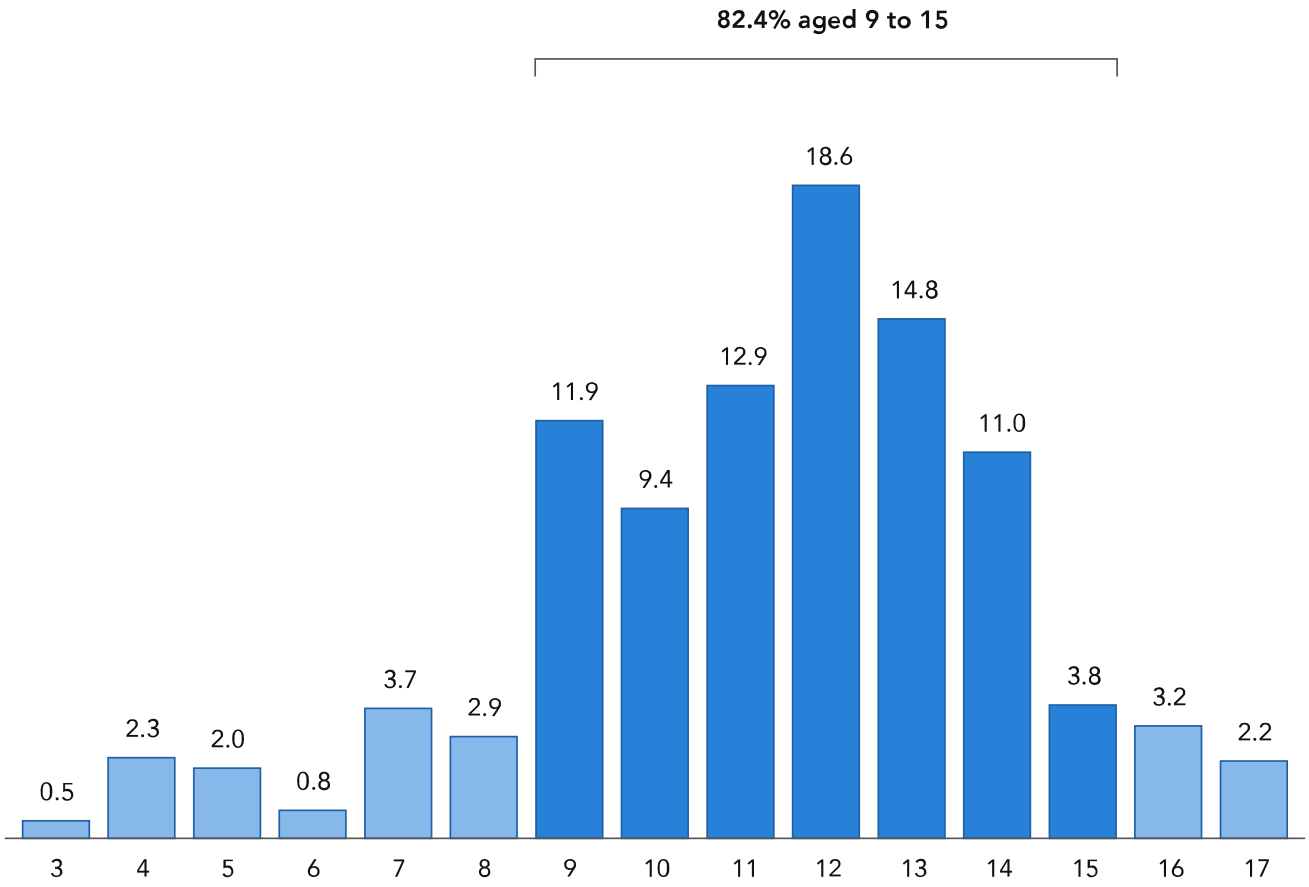


Figure 2. Age distribution of participants

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 1. Participant age cohorts

Participant age cohort	Percentage (%)
3-8 years (Early Childhood)	12.2
9-12 years (Middle/Upper Primary)	52.8
13-15 years (Middle School)	29.7
16-17 years (Senior Secondary)	5.4

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Figure 2 shows the same distribution by single year of age. Overall, more than four-fifths of participants (82.4%) were aged between 9 and 15 years, indicating that the findings are most representative of the experiences and perspectives of children and young people within these age groups (see Table 1).

Table 2. Age distribution of all participants (N = 1,086)

Age (Years)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
3	5	0.5
4	25	2.3
5	22	2.0
6	9	0.8
7	40	3.7
8	31	2.9
9	129	11.9
10	102	9.4
11	140	12.9
12	202	18.6
13	161	14.8
14	120	11.0
15	41	3.8
16	35	3.2
17	24	2.2
Total	**1,086**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 3. Age distribution of youth survey participants aged 12-17 years (N = 580)

Age (Years)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
12	199	34.3
13	161	27.8
14	120	20.7
15	41	7.1
16	35	6.0
17	24	4.1
Total	**580**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages are based on the total number of youth survey participants.

Youth survey participants (aged 12 to 17 years)

The youth survey cohort comprised 580 participants (see Table 3).

Participants aged 12 to 14 years accounted for 82.8% of youth survey responses (n= 480), indicating that the findings are most representative of younger adolescents. Participation declined progressively across the older age groups, with 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds comprising a comparatively small proportion of the sample. As a result, the findings may be less representative of the experiences and perspectives of older adolescents.

Table 4. Age distribution of child survey participants aged 3-12 years (N = 506)

Age (Years)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
3	5	1.0
4	25	4.9
5	22	4.3
6	9	1.8
7	40	7.9
8	31	6.1
9	129	25.5
10	102	20.2
11	140	27.7
12	3	0.6
Total	**506**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages are based on the total number of child survey participants.

Child survey participants (aged 3 to 12 years)

The child survey cohort comprised 506 participants aged 3 to 12 years (see Table 4).

Children aged 9 to 11 years accounted for 73.3% of child survey responses (n = 371). While responses were obtained across all represented age groups, younger children aged 3 to 8 years and children aged 12 years comprised a smaller proportion of participants. Accordingly, the child survey findings are most reflective of the experiences and perspectives of middle/upper primary-school aged children.

Geographic distribution of participants

Survey participants resided across nine of Western Australia's ten planning regions and were allocated to regions based on their residential postcode. Responses were received from metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote communities, with participation concentrated in metropolitan Perth and several regional centres (see Figure 3). Although responses were received from a broad range of locations across Western Australia, participation varied substantially between regions. Consequently, Figure 3 should be interpreted as depicting the distribution of survey participants rather than the prevalence of specific experiences, attitudes, or perspectives within individual regions.

Table 5 presents the distribution of survey participants across Western Australia's planning regions. Participation was concentrated within the Perth Metropolitan region, reflecting the concentration of Western Australia's population in metropolitan areas. Participants were also represented across several non-metropolitan regions, including the Wheatbelt, Mid West, Kimberley, Goldfields-Esperance, Peel, Gascoyne, South West and Great Southern regions (see Table 5).

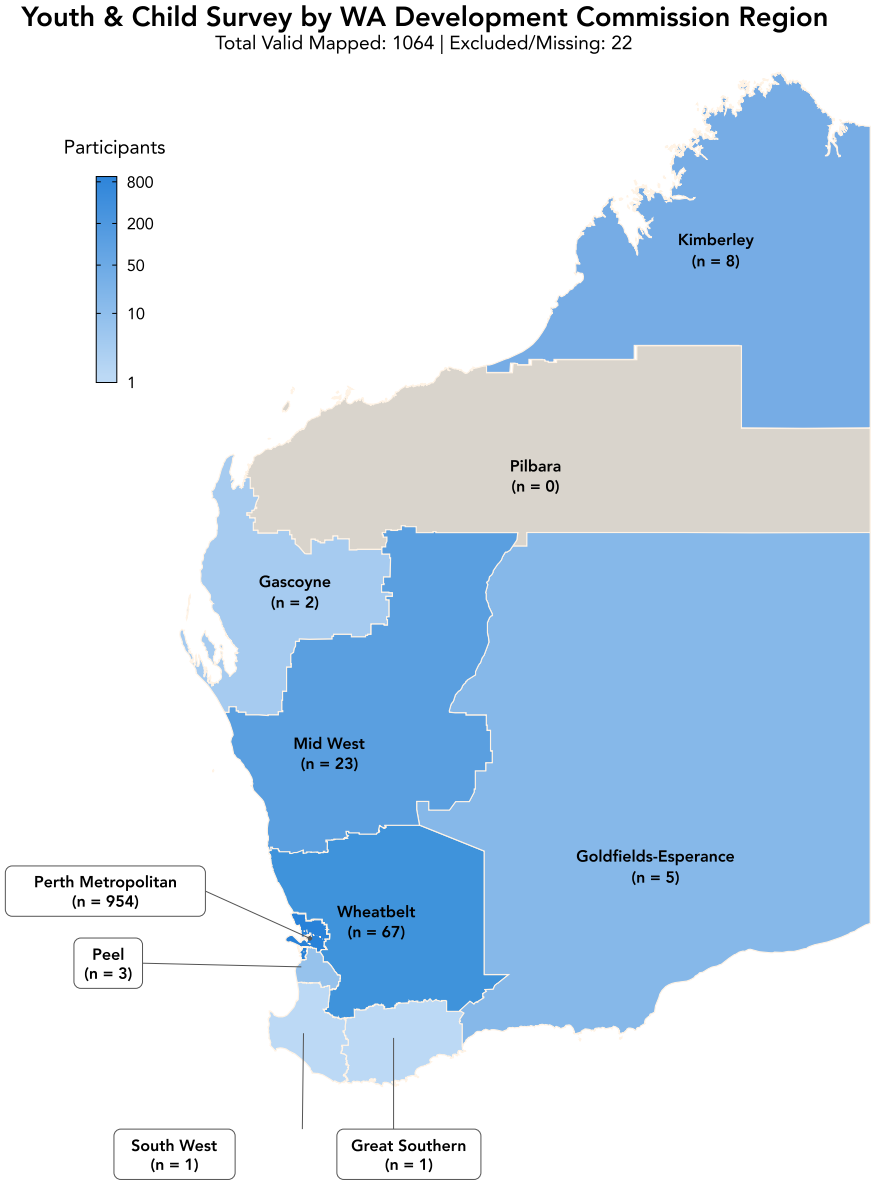


Figure 3. The Geographic Distribution of Survey Participants Across WA

Note. The map illustrates the geographic distribution of survey participants based on reported residential postcodes. It should not be interpreted as representing the geographic distribution of all children and young people in Western Australia.

Table 5. Distribution of survey participants by Western Australian planning region (N = 1,086)

WA region	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Perth Metro	954	87.8
Wheatbelt	67	6.2
Mid West	23	2.1
Kimberley	8	0.7
Goldfields-Esperance	5	0.5
Peel	3	0.3
Gascoyne	2	0.2
Great Southern	1	0.1
South West	1	0.1
Pilbara	0	0
Invalid / NA	22	2.0
Total	**1,086**	**100.0**

Note. Regional classifications were assigned according to participants' reported residential postcodes. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

The level of participation varied across locations, with some regions represented by relatively small numbers of participants. Consequently, findings relating to specific regions should be interpreted with caution. No participants were identified from the Pilbara region based on the postcode data available.

Metropolitan and regional participation

The survey included participants from both metropolitan and regional Western Australia, enabling consideration of play experiences across a range of community contexts. Metropolitan participants were defined as residents of the Perth metropolitan region, while regional participants were identified as residents of eight represented regional locations (see Table 6).

Table 6. Metropolitan and regional participation of survey participants (N = 1,086)

Location category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Perth Metropolitan	954	87.8
Regional Western Australia	110	10.1
Invalid / NA	22	2.0
Total	1,086	100.0

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Differences in participation rates mean that some locations are more strongly represented within the dataset than others. The metropolitan and regional figures should therefore be understood as describing survey participants rather than the distribution of all children and young people across Western Australia.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through an online survey administered through the Commissioner for Children and Young People's website and open for two months (15 July 2026 and 15 September 2026). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of play experiences across Western Australia.

It is imperative to note that children aged 12 years were eligible to complete either the child or youth survey. Consequently, participants aged 12 years were represented in both the child survey (n = 3) and the youth survey (n = 199). This result reflected variation in school settings, as some participating 12-year-olds were enrolled in primary school while others were enrolled in secondary school (middle secondary schooling). Survey distribution was undertaken through the Western Australian Department of Education, Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), enabling three participating sectors/authorities to select the survey most appropriate to their educational context.

Survey open for two months

From 15 July 2026 to 15 September 2026.

Gender information was not collected as part of the survey. The focus of the study was to understand children and young people's shared experiences of play rather than to compare experiences across demographic groups. Consistent with the principle of data minimisation, only information necessary to address the research aims was collected. This approach supported participant privacy while enabling an inclusive exploration of play experiences.[3]

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentage distributions, to examine participant characteristics and response patterns. Information relating to age and geographic location was analysed to identify participation patterns across the sample. Additional analyses explored play participation, opportunities, perceived barriers, and levels of play satisfaction.

Qualitative data were analysed using a descriptive thematic approach. Open-ended responses were reviewed and coded to identify recurring perspectives, experiences, and themes related to play. Particular attention was given to preserving the authentic voices of children and young people, including what they valued about play, the challenges they experienced, and their suggestions for improving play opportunities.

R/RStudio, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Power BI, and Microsoft Copilot were used to support data analysis. Microsoft Copilot was accessed through an institutional Microsoft 365 environment and operates within Microsoft's enterprise security, privacy, and compliance framework. Prompts and responses are protected under enterprise data protection arrangements and are not used to train publicly available artificial intelligence models.

Quantitative and qualitative data derived from open- and closed-ended questions were analysed to identify key themes relating to children's and young people's experiences of play. To ensure that participants' perspectives remained central to the interpretation of the findings, representative quotations are presented throughout the report, privileging the voices of children and young people and enriching the analysis through insights drawn from their lived experiences.[4, 5]

Limitations of the sample

While the survey attracted a substantial number of responses from children and young people across Western Australia, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations relating to sample representation. Participation was voluntary and, in many cases, relied on support from schools, educators, parents and carers to access and complete the survey.

As previously stated, participation was strongest among children and young people aged 9 to 15 years and residents of metropolitan Perth. Younger children (aged 3 to 8 years), older adolescents (aged 16 to 17 years), and some regional and remote communities were less well represented. In addition, no responses were received from the Pilbara region.

A further limitation is that the survey did not collect demographic information relating to disability, neurodiversity, additional support needs, cultural and linguistic diversity, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

No responses were received from the Pilbara region.

Future surveys would benefit from targeted engagement strategies to increase participation among under-represented age groups, regions and communities, alongside demographic measures that enable more inclusive analysis of children's and young people's play experiences. Nevertheless, the substantial sample size, inclusion of participants from metropolitan, regional and remote locations, and representation across a broad age range provide a robust evidence base for understanding children's and young people's experiences of play in Western Australia. Findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the views and experiences of survey participants rather than as population-level estimates of all children and young people in Western Australia.[6]

Creating play opportunities for children and young people

The perspectives shared through this survey demonstrate that play is more than a recreational activity. For many participants, play provides opportunities to connect with others, experience enjoyment, overcome challenges, explore personal interests, and develop curiosity and confidence. However, opportunities for free, self-directed play may be constrained by factors such as limited time, safety concerns, restricted access to suitable spaces, and increasing demands on children's daily lives.[7]

Supporting play requires collaborative action across families, schools, communities, service providers, planners, policymakers and governments. Creating safe, inclusive and accessible environments that encourage play contributes not only to individual wellbeing but also to stronger and more connected communities.

Listening to children and young people ensures that decisions regarding public spaces, programmes, services and policies are informed by their needs, preferences and priorities. Investing in play is therefore an investment in children and young people themselves, supporting their wellbeing, participation, development and capacity to thrive both now and into the future.

02

Youth voice

Young people aged 12 to 17



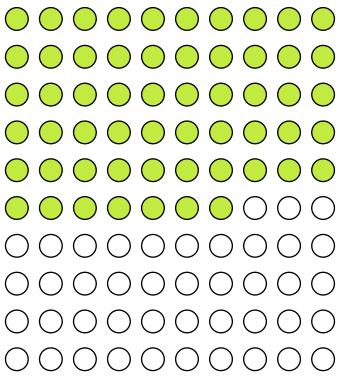
Understanding how young people aged 12-17 years spend their time outside of school provides valuable insight into the activities, interests, relationships, and experiences that contribute to their wellbeing and development.

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57%

of young people said there is not enough time to play at school.



Filled: not enough time.
Hollow: everyone else.

Source: Play Matters youth survey

Youth voice on play matters

Understanding how young people aged 12-17 years spend their time outside of school provides valuable insight into the activities, interests, relationships, and experiences that contribute to their wellbeing and development. The youth voices on Play Matters survey explored young people's participation in hobbies, recreation, and leisure activities, highlighting the diverse ways adolescents engage in sport, creativity, social connection, digital activities, community participation, and personal interests.

To support meaningful analysis of adolescent development, the findings are presented for two age groups: younger adolescents aged 12-15 years and older adolescents aged 16-17 years. This approach enables similarities and differences across age groups to be identified while highlighting how play and recreational participation may evolve as young people become increasingly independent and socially connected.[8]

> "Kids having a smile on their face and looking like they are having fun."
> (Age 12)

Youth question 3: How Do You Explain the Word "Play" or "Playing"?

The overwhelming majority of young people defined play as having fun and doing activities they delight in. Enjoyment was the most common description across responses, with many simply defining play as "having a good time," or "doing something you love."

> "Having fun and forgetting everything in the world."
> (Age 13)

Many young people also viewed play as a social experience, spending time with friends, family, peers, and companion animals. They described play as an opportunity to connect with others, feel accepted, be themselves, and enjoy shared experiences in safe and inclusive environments.

Sport, games and physical activity featured strongly in participants' definitions of play. Young people frequently referred to playing soccer, football, tackle rugby, netball, cricket, tennis, basketball, table tennis, handball, tag, playground games, and other forms of active movement. Many also included board games, card games, and digital gaming as forms of play.



> "[Play is] Doing something you enjoy like games, sport, tag, role-play, etc. Can be done by yourself or with friends/others."
> (Age 15)

> "Play or playing is when…all of your problems go away. Time fly's by because you are having a great time and all you're doing is running around with friends, family or by yourself."
> (Age 12)

Age 16. Playing tag with friends.

Another dominant theme was freedom and choice. Participants often described play as something they chose to do rather than something directed by adults or connected to school work. It was a time to be in the moment, relax, be themselves, take a break from responsibilities, and engage in activities of their own choosing.

Creativity and imagination, describing play as making up games, role-playing, exploring fictional worlds, and using imagination to create new experiences were activities youth identified as playing. Others spoke about play as a way to learn, explore, solve problems, and express themselves.

> "[Play is] Using your imagination to stimulate the mind and create scenarios."
> (Age 16)

Play was also described as a voluntary, joyful, and meaningful experience that supports fun, friendship, creativity, wellbeing, and personal freedom. Whether through sport, games, conversation, imagination, or simply spending time with others, intrinsically motivated play was understood as an integral part of everyday life.

Where do youth spend their time?

Youth question 6: Where Do You Do Your Hobbies and Activities?

Youth participants' responses highlight the broad and diverse nature of where and how young people play.

While home was the most frequently mentioned location, play extended across a wide range of settings, including schools, friends' houses, neighbourhoods, parks, beaches, sporting facilities, shopping centres, skate parks, community venues and online environments.

> "Online, at school, at my house, the oval near my house, my friend's house."
> (Age 15)

> "Anywhere we want to."
> (Age 15)

> "Any shopping centre, my back yard (netball), at the park (going on walks)."
> (Age 15)

> "Local park areas, the hills, at a dance studio, at a community scout hall."
> (Age 17)

> "I do cooking and baking at home, netball at Freo netball association, swim at the beach…"
> (Age 12)

> "Hanging out in nature when I'm camping, playing guitar, drawing, skating, practicing my hockey skills."
> (Age 12)

Home was often valued as a space for gaming, reading, creative hobbies, collecting, crafting and spending time with friends. Findings suggest that home was not simply a place where young people played because they had to be there; it was frequently described as a preferred setting because it offered freedom, comfort and access to personal interests.

Alongside home, school was one of the most commonly reported places for play. Participants identified school grounds, courts, ovals and recreational areas as spaces for sport, games, social interaction and informal play with peers. Schools remain commonly-shared environments for physical activity, recreation, clubs and social connection. Notably, many young people explicitly identified school when asked where they played, highlighting its significance as a play environment in their everyday lives.

Friends' houses also featured prominently as settings for play and social connection. These spaces provided opportunities to spend time together, play games, watch movies, pursue shared interests and relax in a familiar environment. For many participants, friends' homes complemented their own homes as settings for both structured and unstructured play.



Age 15. Playing alone outdoors.

Beyond home, school and friends' houses, participants frequently identified parks, beaches, ovals, sporting facilities and shopping centres as places for play. Parks and other outdoor environments supported active recreation, exploration and social interaction, while sporting venues enabled participation in both organised and informal physical activities. Shopping centres and local destinations, town and city destinations and other neighbourhood hubs, were commonly described as places to meet friends, socialise and spend leisure time together.

> "Playing is having fun, whether it's on games or with toys, it's not fun as in hanging out it's fun as in your being creative, roleplaying, using your imagination."
> (Age 15)

Outdoor and community spaces featured strongly in the responses. Young people reported playing at ovals, basketball and netball courts, beaches, rivers, skate parks, playgrounds, pump tracks, youth centres, dance studios, scout halls, sporting clubs and neighbourhood spaces. Compared with younger children, adolescents appeared to make greater use of community and public spaces for leisure, recreation and social connection.

> "If my school added swings I would really appreciate it."
> (Age 15)

The findings also demonstrate that play occurs across both physical and digital environments. Many participants described playing video games online, connecting with friends virtually, and engaging in digital recreation alongside more traditional activities that included playing with toys.

Many young people referred to online environments as significant spaces for participation, highlighting the growing integration of digital and face-to-face experiences throughout adolescence.

Overall, the responses suggest that young people's play is highly flexible and place-responsive. Rather than being confined to designated playgrounds, play takes place wherever young people have opportunities to connect with others, pursue their interests, express themselves, and enjoy meaningful experiences. These findings highlight the importance of recognising homes, schools, community settings, natural environments, commercial venues, and digital spaces as interconnected components of contemporary youth play landscapes.

Although both age groups reported spending time at home, school, and with friends, younger adolescents aged 12-15 years were more likely to participate in school-based activities, organised sport, and recreation close to home. Older adolescents aged 16-17 years reported greater use of community spaces, shopping centres, beaches, gyms, cafés, and other public environments, reflecting increasing independence and mobility.

Key finding

As teenagers grow, their worlds expand.

They move beyond home and school into a wider mix of community, recreational, commercial, and digital spaces where they build independence, friendships, and a sense of identity.

Adolescence is characterised by increasing movement between home, school, community, commercial, recreational, and digital environments. As young people grow older, they access a broader range of spaces that support independence, agency, friendships, and sense of identity. Collectively, these findings highlight the diverse mix of home, school, community and recreational environments that support young people's play experiences across Western Australia, reflecting both traditional and contemporary forms of play.

Activities I do by myself

Youth question 4: What Hobbies or Activities Do You Do by Yourself?

Young people are far from idle when they are on their own. They use their free time to stay active, get creative, learn new skills, unwind, and pursue the things they love.

The most commonly reported activities included sport and fitness, creative pursuits, music, reading, gaming, outdoor recreation, coding, and writing. Young people described using independent activities to relax, build skills, manage stress, and pursue interests.



Age 12. Drawing and writing in a journal.

Digital recreation featured strongly, with solo gaming, engaging in social media, and streaming content.

Many also reported creative activities such as drawing, photography, writing, music, arts and crafts, and design-based hobbies.



Age 16. Playing alone indoors, digital play.

One participant (Age 15) explained, "…I draw/create a lot of things using different materials."

Another (Age 12) said, "By myself, I would say I read, I crochet, I draw, Or I research history."

Some age-related differences were evident. Younger adolescents aged 12-15 years were more likely to describe gaming, sport and entertainment-based hobbies. Older adolescents aged 16-17 years more often identified fitness activities, specialised interests, self-directed learning and social activities that supported personal development, identity exploration and wellbeing.

Key finding

Hobbies and recreational activities are more than just a way to pass the time.

They give young people the freedom to be themselves, explore their interests, develop new skills, and recharge. For many, hobbies are a powerful outlet for creativity, curiosity, and personal growth.

> "Doing reading, drawing, wordsearches."
> (Age 14)



Age 13. Reading alone outdoors.

Activities I do with my friends

Youth question 5: What Hobbies or Activities Do You Do With Friends for Fun?

Nothing mattered more than friendships when it came to adolescent recreation and leisure. Friends motivated participation across almost every activity, from sport and gaming to shopping, creative hobbies, outdoor recreation, and community events.

Soccer, basketball, netball, AFL, beach trips, shopping, dining out, and simply spending time together were among the most popular ways young people connected and stayed involved.



Age 12. Playing netball

> "I play netball during the week with my friends competitively."
> (Age 12)



Age 15. Playing with friends, music and arts.

Many participants also recognised that friendship itself was often the activity. Talking, walking, hanging out, singing, listening to music, messaging, FaceTiming, and simply having time together were frequently described as 'happy' recreational experiences.

> "[We] watch tv, knit, sing, perform (acting), text (usually about Pinterest or music), shopping, watch tv, run our WhatsApp channels, sometimes we play bored games or like one time we did blind twister, picnics."
> (Age 15)

Young people's responses highlight the importance of shared interests and building peer and mentor/ community relationships face-to-face and online during adolescence.

> "[We play] Dungeons and Dragons, Group Board Games (e.g. blood on the clocktower), planning events and games."
> (Age 17)

> "..do a biking club where you can bring your own bike and they take you to trails."
> (Age 14)

For most, relationships were considered imperative across both age groups. Younger adolescents aged 12-15 years often described participation through organised sport, gaming, and group recreation.

Older adolescents aged 16-17 years placed greater emphasis on socialising, whether through games, shopping, dining out, or visiting community spaces with friends regardless of the specific activity. This suggests that social connection itself becomes an increasingly focal interest as young people move through adolescence.

Key finding

The findings suggest that young people's playful recreational experiences are strongly shaped by friendships.

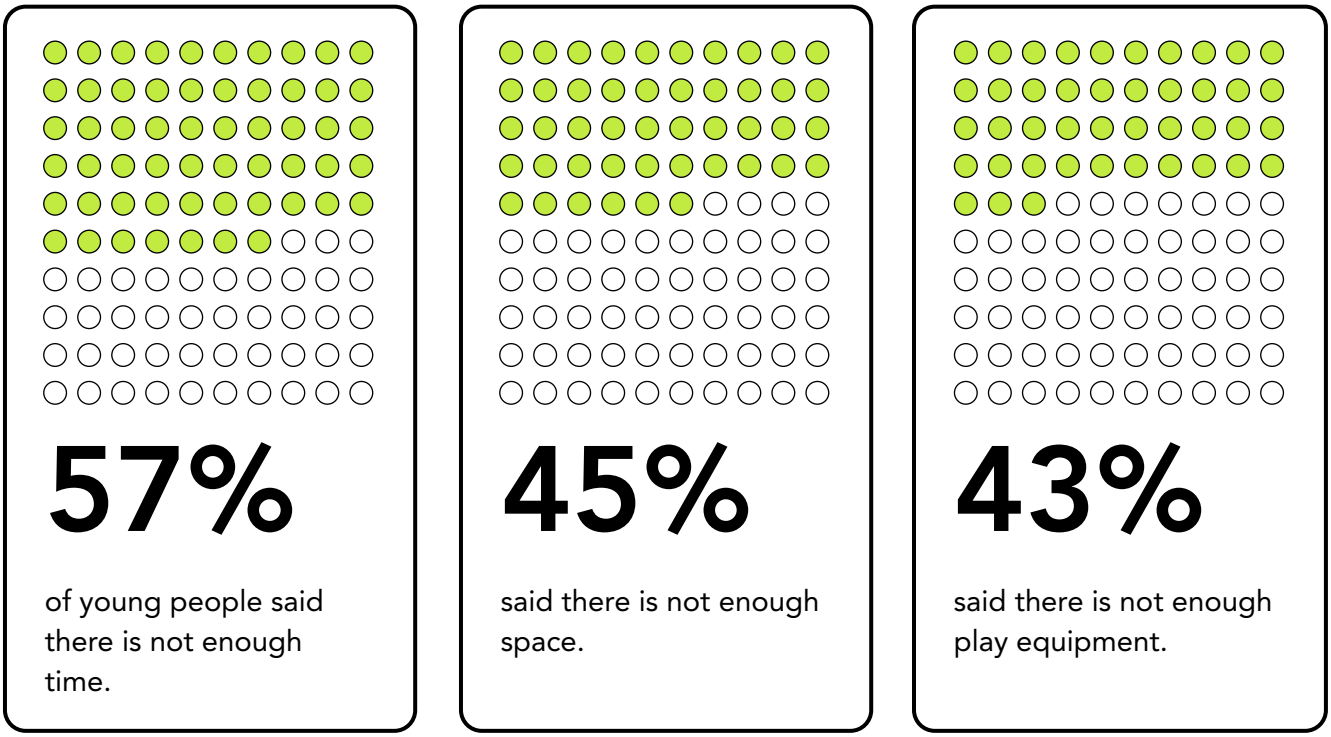
While activities vary, opportunities for belonging, connection, exploration, enjoyment, and taking time to be together appear to be central motivations for participation.

Time, space and equipment to play

Youth question 7, 8 & 9: Do you have enough time to do these hobbies/space/ equipment to do your hobbies or activities at school?

Survey questions 7, 8 and 9 focus on whether young people have adequate time, space and equipment to engage in play-related activities at school.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 illustrate their perceptions of access to these key enablers. The findings highlight the importance of providing not only opportunities for participation but also the resources and environments needed to support engagement in preferred play activities.



Figures 4, 5 & 6. Time, space and equipment to play at school
Youth survey, ages 12 to 17

The survey findings suggest that opportunities for hobbies and recreation at school are influenced by practical factors such as time, space and equipment. Responses indicated that access to these resources was not experienced consistently across participants.

Time

While 43% reported having enough time to engage in hobbies or activities at school, a substantial proportion (57%) indicated that they did not, suggesting that time-related barriers affect many young people.

> [I play] On the weekends as there is not much time to do it at school."
> (Age 17)

Space

Responses regarding space were similarly divided, with 55% reporting adequate space for hobbies and activities and 45% indicating that they did not have enough space. As one young person commented, "We need more space." (Age 13)

Equipment

Access to equipment was viewed most favourably. Even so, 43% of participants reported that they did not have enough equipment to support their hobbies or interests at school, while 57% felt that available resources were sufficient. One young person asked for "[more] goals, more balls, more space we are allowed in, excursions for beach volleyball, surf lessons, beach sessions." (Age 14)

School as a place for play

School environments were identified as essential settings for recreation, sport and the cultivation of shared interests, in both competitive and leisure-oriented ways. Young people referred to handball courts, sporting grounds, libraries, ovals and other recreational facilities as places that support participation, social interaction and connection with friends. While most participants described positive and meaningful hobbies, limited time, space and equipment drew attention to limitations in school play facilities. One participant noted:

> "Maybe make more space for people to do their hobbies at school. Currently, I try to do dances and play volleyball with my friends, but at school in the yard there is not much space to do it. Also, sometimes we don't get a volleyball and we can't play which is really upsetting, ad we just end up doing nothing for the rest of lunch. I guess what I am recommending is that all schools have all resources and spaces where students can express themselves and do their hobbies."
> (Age 12)

The significance of balancing recreation with wellbeing was emphasised in the following feedback:

> "[We need] longer lunchtime and recess and a four-day school week to better our mental health and emotional state of wellbeing."
> (Age 12)

> [I play] On the weekends as there is not much time to do it at school."
> (Age 17)

Differences were evident across the youth age cohorts. Younger adolescents were more likely to focus on access to playgrounds, courts, sporting facilities and equipment, whereas older adolescents more frequently referred to wanting flexible spaces, social environments and facilities that supported their preferred recreational interests. Across both groups, access to adequate time, space and equipment/resources remained a key influence on participation.

Key finding

Young people's opportunities for school recreation and leisure are shaped by the availability of time, equipment and space.

Survey findings indicate that barriers are experienced by a substantial proportion of participants, with 57% reporting insufficient time, 45% reporting insufficient space and 43% reporting insufficient equipment. Qualitative responses further highlighted the impact of competing demands, limited facilities and restricted access to resources. Together, these findings suggest that participation in playful activities is influenced not only by individual interests and motivation, but also by practical and environmental factors within school and community settings.

Restricted play participation

Youth question 10: How Do You Feel When You Can't Participate in Your Favourite Activities?

Young people frequently described strong emotional reactions when they were unable to participate in playful activities they enjoyed.

Common responses included feeling "sad", "empty", "anxious", "disappointed", "stressed", "frustrated", "bored", "angry", "left out", "not engaged", "unmotivated", and "lonely."

Some participants also described feeling "upset", "terrible", and "devastated" as though they had not achieved what they wanted to do.

One participant stated:

> "I feel bored because these are the things that make me feel happy."
> (Age 12)

> "I feel empty or like there's a part of me missing."
> (Age 16)

Others explained:

> "I feel really upset because those hobbies are what make me myself. They are part of my personality, so when I can't do them, it is like taking a chunk of me away."
> (Age 12)

> "I feel sad, disappointed, and un-included."
> (Age 17)

> "[I feel] A bit drained from all of the other work I have to do."
> (Age 16)

Many young people described hobbies and activities as vital sources of enjoyment, relaxation, contentment, stress relief, friendship, agency and identity, but a range of barriers were identified.

> "[I feel] Frustrated. Especially because the powerful kids take over."
> (Age 12)

At the same time, considerable resilience was evident. Some respondents described finding alternatives, maintaining perspective, and recognising that they would have future opportunities to participate.

One participant (Age 17) noted, "There will always be more time in the future."

Others commented, "I don't mind, I just adapt." (Age12) and "I'll find a way like drawing in my math book as I do work." (Age 12)

Both age groups reported disappointment when unable to engage in activities they enjoyed. Younger adolescents more frequently described missing specific activities or opportunities to participate with friends, while older adolescents were more likely to connect these experiences to wellbeing, stress relief, identity, and emotional regulation.

Key finding

The findings suggest that playful hobbies and recreation contribute significantly to young people's wellbeing, identity, belonging, and emotional regulation.

When access is restricted, many young people experience disappointment, although some shared how they demonstrate positive coping strategies and resilience.

Ideas for increasing participation

Youth question 11: Is There Anything That Would Help You Get More Involved?

Young people identified a range of factors that they believed would support greater involvement in hobbies, recreation, and leisure activities.

Their responses highlighted the importance of having sufficient time, access to appropriate facilities and equipment, a greater variety of activity options, inclusive opportunities, and environments that foster social connection and a sense of belonging.

Many responses focused on the need for better access to suitable spaces and equipment. As one participant explained:

> "Sometimes we don't get a volleyball and we can't play, which is really upsetting"
> (Age 12)

Others emphasised the importance of environments that support both recreation and wellbeing. One participant noted the need for:

> "More spaces that are private and more greenery."
> (Age 16)

Resource limitations were also evident in responses relating to community facilities. For example, one participant commented:

> "There is a park really close to me that I wish had soccer goals, but they don't, so I just kick the ball against the wall."
> (Age 13)

These responses suggest that even when recreational spaces are available, limitations in community infrastructure and equipment can limit engagement and reduce opportunities to participate in preferred activities.

Participants also highlighted the value of informal outdoor environments in supporting recreation and play. The words “trees” and “street” featured prominently in the data, reflecting the importance of neighbourhood and natural spaces in their everyday experiences. Participants described activities such as: “build dirt jumps and build tree houses in the bush” (Age 12); and “ride around my street” (Age 13).

These examples suggest that recreation extends beyond organised sport and structured programmes, encompassing opportunities for self-directed play and social connection. Many participants valued opportunities to build and maintain relationships with significant others within their immediate environments, including at home, school, and in the community.

Key finding

Young people were clear about what would help them participate more.

They identified the need for more time, better facilities and equipment, greater choice, inclusive environments, stronger opportunities for social connection, and access to appealing outdoor spaces. Their responses suggest that increasing participation depends not only on providing activities, but also on creating environments that support play for its own sake.

Key themes across adolescence

- Social connection and belonging
- Physical activity and recreation
- Choice, autonomy and independence
- Digital participation
- Access and inclusion

For adolescents, playful recreation was closely linked to personal development and social connection.

Whether kicking a ball, going to the beach, gaming online, or eating out with friends, opportunities to develop skills, build a sense of self, and forge and sustain friendships were key reasons that young people became involved in, and remained engaged with, playful activities.

Across both age groups (12-15 years and 16-17 years), young people's accounts consistently converged around five key themes that reflected the ways recreation and leisure contributed to their lives.

1 Social connection and belonging

Play was a powerful vehicle for friendship, belonging, and identity development. Through sport, gaming, social outings, and everyday interactions, young people used play to interact with others, build a sense of self, and strengthen ties to their communities.

Across adolescence, maintaining friendships and social connections emerged as one of the strongest motivations for participation. As one young person explained, "Playing is something you do with your friends, or with something, or just your imagination, that is fun" (Age 12). Similarly, another participant highlighted the value of friendships in facilitating exploration and independence, stating: "[I] go on buses with my friends and go random places in Perth" (Age 15).

The social nature of recreation was also reflected in an older adolescent's description of play as "having fun and engaging with friends, usually doing things that you both have a mutual interest in." (Age 17) These accounts demonstrate the crucial role of friendships in shaping recreational experiences, fostering social connectedness, and supporting young people's sense of belonging, independence, and autonomy.

2 Physical activity and recreation

Based on the survey responses, play was deeply intertwined with recreation and physical activity, but young people described it in ways that extended far beyond organised sport. For many adolescents, play was the mechanism through which recreation became meaningful. It provided opportunities to be active, have fun, develop skills, build friendships, and create a sense of belonging. As one young person explained, "I go shopping, op shopping, have sleepovers, go to parks, go for walks, call with friends, play games, we go swimming, we play soccer, and we go surfing together" (Age 14). Another simply described play as "tag, and little games like maybe online but mostly outdoors having fun" (Age 12). These responses highlight the fluid and diverse nature of play across both physical and social settings.

Noteworthy, young people rarely separated physical activity from social connection. Recreation and play were often experienced collectively, whether competing in sport, exploring their community, or creating imaginative games together. Many activities blended movement, friendship, and creativity. Together, these accounts demonstrate that play is not simply a form of entertainment or exercise. Rather, it is a vital pathway through which adolescents engage in physical activity and recreation.

3 Choice, autonomy and independence

As young people moved through adolescence, recreation became increasingly self-directed and closely connected to personal interests, identity, and autonomy. Older adolescents were more likely to describe making active choices about how and where they spent their leisure time. Their recreational experiences extended beyond organised activities to include social outings, gym attendance, gaming, beach visits, exploring local areas, shopping, dining out, creative pursuits, and independently travelling with friends. Activities such as "go on buses with my friends and go random places in Perth" (Age 15), "going out into the city or going into Fremantle" (Age 17), and "hanging out in the shops, talking, watching movies" (Age 15) reflected growing independence and a desire to exercise greater control over leisure experiences.

Furthermore, young people commented that choice was central to meaningful participation. They valued having opportunities that aligned with their interests, abilities, and social preferences with playful engagements, rather than being directed toward predetermined activities. This emphasis on choice and agency was reflected in one participant's suggestion: "Not to force anyone, but give them choices and also choices about who they do it with" (Age 12). The findings suggest that recreation is most engaging when young people are able to exercise autonomy, pursue activities that matter to them, and share experiences with people they choose.

4 Digital participation

Gaming, social media, online communication, and digital communities formed a central part of contemporary adolescent recreation and often complemented face-to-face interactions.

> "We play online games such as Minecraft & Roblox. and we play sports like volleyball or a game of tag."
> (Age 13)

> "I play video games when I call my friends, I play sport with them and I go to the park to play with them."
> (Age 12)

Noteworthy, digital environments provided opportunities for social connection, entertainment, creativity, and participation beyond physical spaces. Rather than replacing in-person friendships, digital participation often extended and strengthened social connections beyond school, sport, and neighbourhood settings. Young people described playing online games together, staying connected through calls and messaging, sharing interests, and participating in virtual communities that provided opportunities for friendship, collaboration, and enjoyment. Popular platforms and activities included Minecraft, Roblox, Fortnite, Rocket League, online multiplayer gaming, and group chats.

Many young people moved fluidly between online and offline play, maintaining friendships across both environments. Digital spaces supported creativity, shared interests, and social interaction, particularly when physical co-presence was not possible.

5 Access and inclusion

Young people highlighted the importance of having access to welcoming spaces, appropriate facilities, equipment, and opportunities that support participation across a wide range of interests and abilities. Access was not limited to organised sport; it also included being able to spend time at parks, beaches, skate parks, shopping centres, community spaces, recreation centres, and online environments where they could connect with friends and engage in activities they enjoyed. As one young person suggested, "Maybe making bigger spaces to be able to do the activities so that more people could participate" (Age 13).

The survey responses demonstrated that young people participate in diverse forms of recreation, from soccer, netball, basketball, swimming, dance, and mountain biking to gaming, fishing, photography, board games, arts and crafts, and role-playing games. Many described simple opportunities to be with friends, such as "playing at the park and playing with each other at lunch at school", "ride bikes and scooters together", and "going to the beach, Adventure World or just hanging out."

Young people's responses suggest that access and inclusion are closely linked to friendship, belonging, and wellbeing. Young people valued affordable, accessible, and inclusive opportunities that enabled them to participate in ways that reflected their personal interests, abilities, and social preferences.

Youth survey findings

The findings demonstrate that recreation, leisure, and hobby participation remain vital aspects of young people's lives throughout adolescence, contributing to a myriad of personal benefits and motivations for engagement.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 illustrate their perceptions of access to these key enablers. The findings highlight the importance of providing not only opportunities for participation but also the resources and environments needed to support engagement in preferred play activities.

Across both age groups, young people consistently valued opportunities to pursue personal interests, connect with friends, engage in physical and creative activities, and participate in experiences that were meaningful, enjoyable, and personally rewarding.

While younger adolescents aged 12-15 years were more likely to participate through organised activities, sport, gaming, and friendship groups, older adolescents aged 16-17 years increasingly sought opportunities that supported independence, self-expression, identity development, and personal choice. Despite these differences, themes of friendship, belonging, enjoyment, wellbeing, and participation remained evident across adolescence.

Collectively, young people identified homes, schools, sporting facilities, community spaces, beaches, shopping centres, neighbourhood environments, and online spaces as essential settings for recreation and leisure. The diversity of these settings conveys a clear message: communities should be designed to foster connection, participation, and belonging. By prioritising accessible recreational, community, and green spaces, communities can create opportunities for sport, creativity, learning, play, social connection, and healthy development. Such environments enable young people to pursue their interests, build relationships, and actively engage in community life.

Overall, the Youth Survey findings highlight the vital importance of governments, schools, and local communities providing young people with diverse, inclusive, and accessible opportunities for participation in play. Supporting youth recreation requires environments that foster social connection, physical activity, creativity, independence, and personal growth, while recognising the evolving interests and developmental needs that emerge throughout adolescence. Ensuring that young people have access to meaningful opportunities for play, recreation, and leisure can support their social, emotional, physical, and psychological wellbeing, while strengthening their sense of belonging, identity, agency, and connection to community. Investing in these opportunities not only benefits young people in the present but also contributes to positive developmental outcomes that extend into adulthood.[9]

Young people's art



Age 14. Crocheting at home.



Age 12. Painting a butterfly.



Age 12. Surfing a wave.



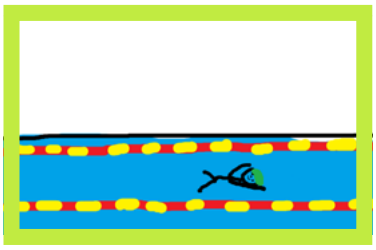
Age 13. Playing the guitar.



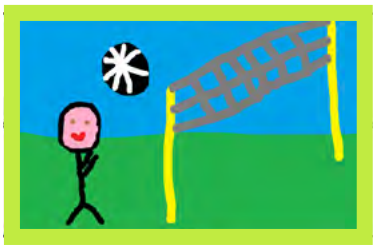
Age 13. Favourite hobbies: painting, reading and baking.



Age 13. Gymnastics, art and cooking.



Age 13. Swimming laps in the pool.



Age 12. Playing volleyball outdoors.



Age 14. Shopping with friends.



Age 14. Playing volleyball with friends.

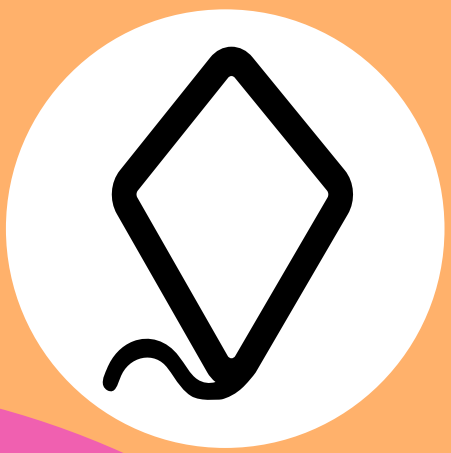


Age 16. Art, music and baking.

03

Child voice

Children aged 3 to 12



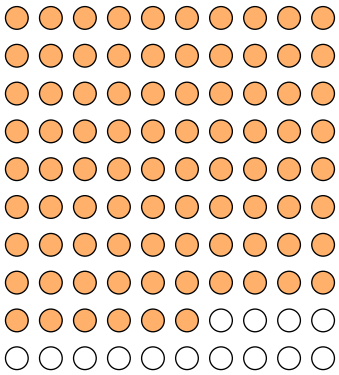
Play is central to childhood. Through play, young children explore their world, build relationships, express creativity, develop skills, and make sense of their experiences. Understanding how children play, where they play, and what matters most to them provides critical insight into the environments and conditions that support healthy development, inclusion, wellbeing, and participation.

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76%

of children aged 3 to 8 feel happy about play at school.



Filled: ages 3 to 8 who feel happy
Hollow: neutral (21%)
or unhappy (3%).

Source: Play Matters child survey

How do I play?

To support meaningful analysis across different developmental stages, the findings from the child survey are presented in two age-group sections.

The first section focuses on children aged 3-8 years (early childhood) and explores the play environments, activities, and experiences associated with younger children.

The second section focuses on children aged 9-12 years (middle/upper primary school) and examines how play evolves as children become more independent, socially connected, and engaged in a broader range of recreational and leisure activities.

Presenting the findings in this way enables similarities and differences across age groups to be identified and provides a clearer understanding of how children's play preferences and experiences change throughout childhood.

Child question 8: How Do You Play?

Play evolves across childhood, reflecting children's changing interests, social relationships, and growing independence. The Child Survey findings summarised in Table 7 illustrate how play types shift across age cohorts. Younger children were more likely to engage in imaginative, exploratory, and playground-based play, whereas older children increasingly participated in organised sport, digital gaming, and friendship-based social activities.

Table 7. Comparison of popular play types across child age groups

Type of Play	Children Aged 3-8 Years	Children Aged 9-12 Years
Imaginative and Pretend Play	Very common. Playing families, princesses, dinosaurs, babies, superheroes, toy-based role play, cubbies and make-believe games.	Less common but still present. Role-play, invented games, "Among Us" in real life, building bases, creative storytelling.
Physical and Playground Play	Playground equipment, climbing, swings, slides, monkey bars, chasey, hide-and-seek.	Continued importance of playgrounds, monkey bars, ninja courses, spider webs, running games, obstacle challenges.
Sport and Ball Games	Soccer, footy, basketball, netball, informal ball games.	Much more prominent. Soccer, basketball, netball, AFL, cricket, volleyball, tennis, hockey, organised sport and club participation.
Tag and Chasing Games	Tag, chasey, What's the Time Mr Wolf, hide-and-seek, group chasing games.	Tag, octopus, memory tag, spider, Marco Polo, cops and robbers and other playground games.
Construction and Building Play	Lego, Duplo, blocks, cubbies, building forts and structures.	Lego and construction activities still present.
Nature and Exploration Play	Sandpits, mud play, fairy gardens, exploring outdoors, climbing trees, bike riding.	Parks, beaches, bushland, bike riding, outdoor exploration, nature play and adventure activities.
Creative Play	Drawing, colouring, crafts, creating with toys and materials.	Drawing, arts and crafts, comic-making, music, creative projects, baking and making things.
Digital Play	Minimal references. Mostly toy-based and physical play.	Major form of recreation. Minecraft, Roblox, Fortnite, PlayStation, Nintendo, online gaming and digital communities.
Socialising and Friendship-Based Play	Playing games together and sharing imaginative experiences.	Highly significant. Talking, walking, hanging out, online gaming with friends and social recreation.
Independent Play	Drawing, colouring, Lego, toys, reading, playground play, pretend play.	Gaming, reading, listening to music, drawing, practising sport, creating, watching videos, reflecting and relaxing.

The Child Survey findings reinforce the importance of providing a broad range of play types that support children's interests, growing independence, and needs throughout childhood. The findings demonstrate that children engage in a diverse mix of imaginative, physical, creative, digital, social, and nature-based forms of play. Ensuring access to varied play opportunities allows children to explore their interests, develop new skills, build relationships, and engage in diverse forms of play types across childhood.

Changes in play experiences across childhood

Based on the Child Survey findings, Table 8 highlights the diversity of children's play experiences and the ways children adapt their play activities to align with their changing interests, social relationships and aspirations.

While the types of play children engage in evolve with age, daily diverse play experiences continue to provide valuable opportunities for physical activity, creativity, social connection, learning, and wellbeing.

Table 8. Comparison of popular play experiences across child age groups

Children Aged 3-8 Years	Children Aged 9-12 Years
Play is strongly driven by imagination, discovery, and pretend play.	Play becomes increasingly social, organised, and influenced by friendships.
Outdoor play, playgrounds, sandpits, and toy-based activities dominate.	Sport, digital gaming, socialising, and organised recreation become more prominent.
Friends are important, but play is often focused on the activity itself.	Friendships become central, with many children valuing simply being together.
Independent play centres on toys, creativity, and exploration.	Independent play centres on digital gaming, hobbies, skill development, personal interests, and relaxation.
Play is strongly imaginative and exploratory.	Play reflects increasing independence, identity development, and peer connection.

There is breadth and diversity of children's play experiences across childhood. While play preferences and participation patterns change over time, play remains a vital mechanism through which children build relationships, develop skills, express creativity, explore their environment, and support their overall wellbeing.

Key finding

Children's play types and play experiences evolve as they grow, but their importance in their daily lives remains constant.

Across childhood, play supports friendship, creativity, physical activity, learning, and wellbeing. While younger and older children engage in imaginative and exploratory play, older children increasingly valued sport, digital recreation, socialising, and activities that reflected growing independence.

Feelings about play at school

Child question 4: How do you feel about playing at school?

For children aged 3-8 years, play was associated with fun, excitement, imagination, and adventure. Across both child age groups, positive experiences of play were strongly influenced by access to varied and engaging play environments.

Survey qualitative data findings confirm that younger children value imaginative games, playground activities, and opportunities to explore and play with friends. For children aged 9-12 years, positive feelings were more closely linked to sport, friendships, and inclusion fostering a sense of belonging. Older children more frequently described enjoying opportunities to participate in games, spend time with peers, and feel part of a group. The findings below (Figure 7) suggest that play at school contributes positively to children's happiness.

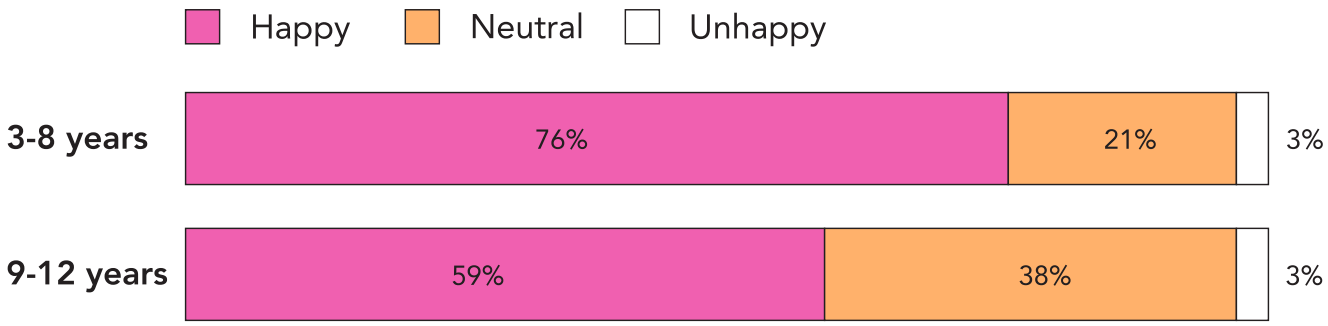


Figure 7. How I feel about play at school
Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Children rated how they felt about playing at school on a 7-point scale shown as emojis, where 1 represented "Unhappy", 4 "Neutral" and 7 "Happy". Most children felt positive about playing at school, although the level of positivity differed between age groups.

Among children aged 3-8 years, responses were overwhelmingly positive. More than three-quarters (76%) selected ratings towards the happy end of the scale (7), while 21% reported neutral feelings (4) and only 3% indicated feeling unhappy (1). These findings suggest that play is a highly valued and enjoyable aspect of the school experience for younger children.

Among children aged 9-12 years, positive perceptions remained evident but were less pronounced.

How we asked

Children were asked to rate how they felt about playing at school using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Unhappy", 4 represented "Neutral", and 7 represented "Happy".

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Unhappy Neutral Happy

Emoji ratings are shown as numbers 1 to 7.

A majority (59%) reported feeling happy about playing at school, while a substantially larger proportion (38%) selected the neutral midpoint of the scale and 3% reported feeling unhappy. Although older children generally viewed play positively, their responses indicate lower levels of enthusiasm compared with younger children.

Overall, the findings suggest that positive feelings towards school play decline somewhat as children progress through childhood. The increase in neutral responses among older children may reflect changing play interests, greater academic demands, evolving social relationships, or a perception that available play opportunities are less aligned with their developmental needs. Nevertheless, the consistently low proportion of children reporting unhappiness (3% in both age groups) demonstrates that school play remains a positive and valued experience for most children.

Key finding

Younger children reported the highest levels of enjoyment of school play, with 76% indicating positive feelings compared with 59% of older children, suggesting a need for age-appropriate play opportunities that remain engaging throughout childhood.

Time to play at school

Child question 5: Do you have enough time at school?

Figure 8 compares children's perceptions of whether they have enough time to play at school across two age groups (3-8 years and 9-12 years).

The findings reveal a notable difference between younger and older children's perceptions of the amount of time available for play at school.

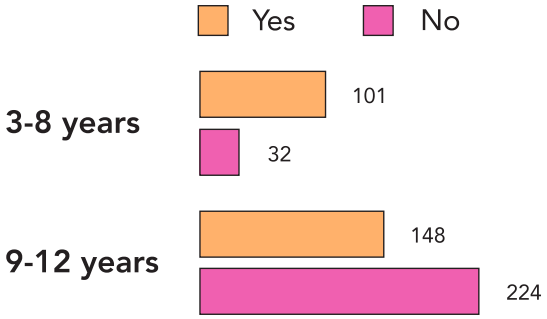


Figure 8. Time to play at school

Among children aged 3-8 years, the majority (101 respondents) reported that they had enough time to play at school, while 32 respondents indicated that they did not. This suggests that younger children generally feel their school day provides sufficient opportunities for play and recreation.

In contrast, children aged 9-12 years were more likely to report that they did not have enough time to play at school. While 148 respondents indicated they had enough time to play, a substantially larger number (224 respondents) reported that they did not. This makes lack of play time one of the most significant concerns identified by older children.

Overall, the findings suggest that perceptions of play time become less positive as children move through middle childhood. As children grow older, increasing academic demands, structured schedules, extracurricular commitments, and changing social interests may reduce opportunities for unstructured play and recreation during the school day. The results highlight the importance of ensuring that schools continue to protect and prioritise adequate time for play, particularly for older children, given the significant role that play has in supporting physical activity, social connection, creativity, learning, and wellbeing.

Key finding

While most younger children felt they had enough time to play at school, a majority of older children reported not having enough play time, suggesting that access to time for play may become more restricted during the later primary school years.

Space to play at school

Child question 6: Do you have enough space to play at school?

Figure 9 shows children's perceptions of whether they have enough space to play at school, by age group (3-8 years and 9-12 years).

Most children felt they had enough space to play at school; however, perceptions differed between the two age groups.

Among children aged 3-8 years, the overwhelming majority (105 respondents) reported having enough space to play at school, compared with only 25 respondents who indicated they did not. This suggests that younger children generally perceive school environments as providing adequate space for their play and recreational activities.

Among children aged 9-12 years, 222 respondents also reported having enough space to play at school. However, a substantial proportion (130 respondents) indicated that they did not have enough space. Although most older children still felt they had sufficient space, dissatisfaction was considerably higher for middle/upper primary school children than among early childhood children.

Overall, the findings suggest that perceptions of play space become less positive as children grow older. This may reflect the changing nature of children's play, with older children increasingly participating in organised sport, active games, social recreation, and other activities that require larger, more specialised, or age-appropriate spaces. The results highlight the importance of ensuring that school environments provide a variety of accessible and flexible play spaces that meet the evolving recreational needs of children across different age groups.

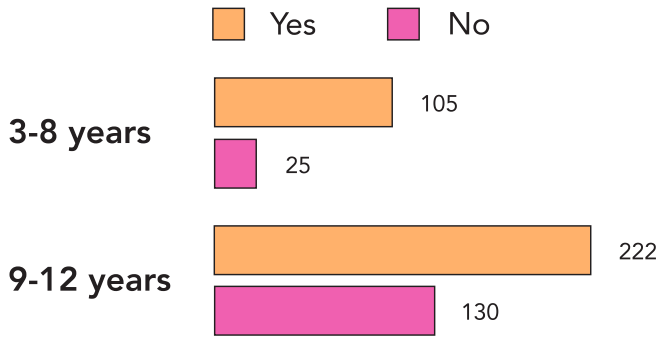


Figure 9. Space to play at school

Things to play with

Child question 7: Do you have enough things to play with?

Figure 10 compares children's responses across age groups to the question of whether they have enough things to play with.

Among children aged 3-8 years, most respondents (109 children) reported having enough things to play with; however, 24 children indicated that they did not. While this represents a smaller proportion of younger children, the findings suggest that some children may face limitations in accessing the toys, materials, and resources that support play, exploration, creativity, and learning during these early years of development.

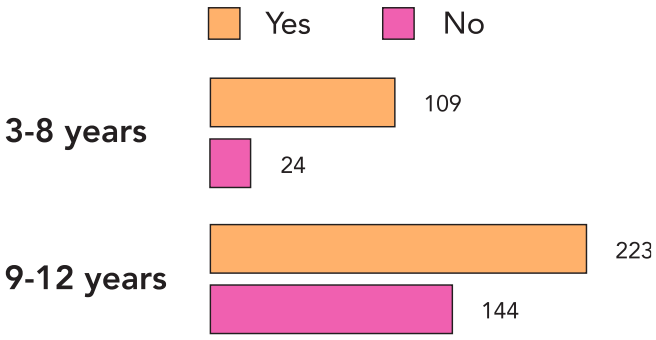


Figure 10. Things to play with

Among children aged 9-12 years, 223 respondents reported having enough things to play with, but a substantial number (144 children) indicated that they did not. This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that a considerable proportion of older children perceive barriers to accessing the resources, equipment, or opportunities needed to engage in activities they enjoy. Limited access to play resources may reduce opportunities for social connection, physical activity, skill development, creativity, and recreation. As children's interests diversify with age, access to age-appropriate play materials, sporting equipment, digital resources, and recreational opportunities becomes increasingly evident. These findings highlight the need to ensure that all children have equitable access to the resources and opportunities necessary to support healthy play, participation, wellbeing, and development throughout childhood.

Playing with friends

Child question 9: How do you play with friends?

Friendship is one of the strongest drivers of children's play. Across childhood, play helps children build relationships, develop social skills, experience belonging, and create shared memories. While the forms of play change with age, the importance of connection remains constant.

> "[When I play] I do gymnastics with three of my friends. I also sometimes play piggy in the middle or soccer."
> (Age 10)



Age 10. Gymnastics with friends.

Imaginative and active play

For children aged 3-8 years, play with friends was strongly centred on imagination, creativity, and collaborative play. Children frequently described engaging in pretend games, playground activities, tag and chasey, building cubbies, hide-and-seek, toy-based play, and nature exploration. Imaginative play was particularly prominent, with younger children describing activities such as "mums and dads, babies, princesses, dinosaurs, ninjas" (Age 5) and "pretend dinosaur riding" (Age 6). Other children described playing "friendly ninjas" (Age 7), "make believe games" (Age 8), and building cubbies and fairy gardens with friends. These forms of play allowed children to create shared stories, explore distinct roles, and engage in cooperative interactions with their peers.

Playground games and active outdoor play were also valued. Younger children talked about activities such as "hide and seek and chases" (Age 7), "what's the time Mr Wolf" (Age 6), and "gang up chases and on the monkey bars" (Age 8). These activities encouraged teamwork, social interaction, negotiation, and shared adventure while supporting physical development.

While imaginative and active play remained a priority across childhood, the nature of children's play evolved with age. As children moved into the upper primary years, play increasingly centred on organised sports, rule-based games, digital gaming, and shared interests with friends.

Sports and games

As children moved into the 9-12-year age group, play with friends remained highly social but became increasingly focused on sport, organised games, digital gaming, and social connection with peers. Sport was the most commonly reported form of play, with soccer particularly dominant alongside basketball, netball, football/AFL, cricket, volleyball, and tennis.

> "mostly we just eat the whole recess and play some basketball, tennis, tag and hide n seek.."
> (Age 10)



Age 10. Playing basketball.

The child's comment reflects the time constraints of short recess (and lunch) periods, where eating understandably takes priority, leaving only limited time for play. Despite this, children engaged in a range of cooperative activities that support teamwork and social interaction as best they can.



Age 10. Playing tag with friends.

Structured play activities provide opportunities for cooperation, teamwork, friendly competition, and advance skill development. As one child (Age 11) explained, "We play soccer together every school day."

Traditional games also remained relevant to older children. Many described playing tag, hide-and-seek, octopus, Marco Polo, memory tag, spider, and cops and robbers. One child (Age 10) explained, "We play games like cops and robbers, tag, hide and seek, octopus, or play on the playground." While similar games were evident in both age groups, older children's games often involved larger peer groups, more complex rules, and greater levels of negotiation and cooperation.

Digital play became much more prominent among older children. Participants frequently described playing Roblox, Minecraft, and Fortnite together online while also recreating aspects of these games during face-to-face play. One child (Age 12) explained, "I play with them on Roblox, walk around, play in the pool and play sport with friends." These responses demonstrate how digital and physical play increasingly intersect during the upper primary years. Another participant reported that an online gaming partner was also a friend they interacted with face-to-face, illustrating the interconnected nature of physical and virtual play environments.

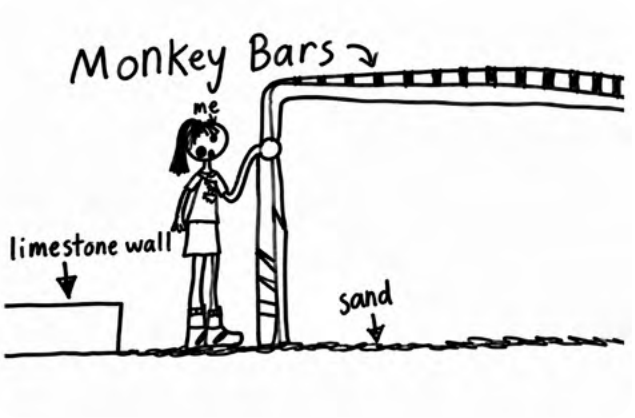


Age 11. Playing digital games, with friends in person too.

Although sport and organised games featured prominently in older children's accounts, children across both age groups highlighted the importance of natural environments as spaces for exploration, creativity, physical activity, and social play. Parks, beaches, bushland areas, and playgrounds provided opportunities for children to engage with friends, interact with varied play equipment and natural materials, and create their own play experiences.

Nature based play

Nature-based play emerged as a consistent feature of children's experiences across both age groups. Children described using natural environments as places for exploration, creativity, physical activity, adventure, and social connection.



Age 7. Climbing the monkey bars.

With my friends I play...

- "4 square is great and we have soccer on the oval. I wish we had more trees to climb." (Age 9)
- "We bike through the beautiful nature in the park." (Age 7)

These responses highlight the ways that natural settings supported children's creativity, adventure, physical activity, and social interaction. Whether through building fairy gardens, climbing trees, riding bikes, or creating secret worlds together, nature offered opportunities for both imaginative and active forms of play.

Nature-based settings often provided opportunities for children to extend and enrich imaginative play. While younger children engaged in fantasy-based role play and storytelling, older children described building bases, inventing games, and adapting digital experiences into real-world play. As one older child (Age 11) observed, "We always just make it up as we go along," highlighting the continued importance of creativity in children's peer interactions.

> "[I like] Running; climbing; monkey bars; sandcastles; nature soup (mixing up natural ingredients with water into a soup); imaginative play (wild girls, zombies, princesses)."
> (Age 7)

Across these varied experiences, whether playing sport, inventing games, or exploring natural spaces, a common thread was the role that play served in strengthening friendships. For many children, the value of play extended beyond the activity itself and was deeply connected to spending time with others.

Social based play

A notable developmental difference was the role of social connection itself. While younger children's interactions were generally centred on a specific game or activity, many older children described "talking," "walking around," "hanging out," and simply being together as enjoyable forms of play. Comments such as "I like to talk and walk with my friends at school" (Age 11) suggest that friendships become increasingly relevant during the upper primary school years, with social connection valued as much as participation in the activity itself.

From imaginative adventures and active games in the early years to organised sports, nature-based exploration, and deeper social connections in later childhood, play helps children build relationships, develop social skills, and experience a sense of belonging. For older children, friendships were increasingly expressed through shared interests, including digital gaming, sport, creative activities, and informal socialising. Tag, chasey, mud play, sour grass, hide and seek, the witch game, princess games, ball games, board games, and other classic playground activities continue to bring children together through fun, movement, creativity, and connection.

Key finding

The findings demonstrate that friendships remain at the heart of children's play experiences.

While younger children's interactions were often organised around imaginative games and shared activities, older children placed increasing value on social connection itself. Across childhood, play provides a conduit for friendship formation, cooperation, creativity, belonging, and social development.

Playing on my own

Child question 10: How do you play by yourself?

Playing alone provides opportunities for creativity, reflection, and personal growth. Independent play enables children to pursue interests, develop skills, build confidence, and explore their own ideas while complementing the social experiences that remain central to childhood.

For children aged 3-8 years, solitary play was strongly characterised by creativity, imagination, and self-directed exploration. Drawing and colouring, toy play, building with Lego, pretend play, reading books, sand play, bike riding, craft activities, and exploring outdoors were among the most commonly reported activities. These experiences enabled younger children to create stories, express themselves, experiment with ideas, and develop emerging skills independently. Younger children's responses frequently reflected imaginative and creative play, with children describing activities such as "drawing and colouring" (Age 5), "building with Lego" (Age 6), "pretend play" (Age 4), and "exploring outdoors" (Age 7). Others described playing with dolls, toy animals, creating crafts, riding bikes, and building structures from blocks or Duplo. These activities suggest that younger children often use solitary play as an opportunity for imaginative exploration, creativity, and experimentation.

When I play by myself…

- "I watch social media, learn dances, draw, colour, arts and crafts, online games, watch movies, listen to music, I play with my toys" (Age 4).
- "Watch YouTube and art, play with my dog" (Age 7).
- "I like to do crafts and make stuff and bake and rarely if I am super bored I play one player games on my iPad" (Age 7).

Creative and artistic pursuits were also common. Children described drawing, colouring, arts and crafts, comic-making, painting, music, Lego, and creating imaginative worlds. One participant (Age 10) explained, "I just do crafts and drawings by myself," while another (Age 11) reported, "I make comics and read a good book." These activities appear to support self-expression, creativity, and focused engagement.

Many older children also used time alone to practise and refine skills. Activities such as shooting basketball hoops, practising soccer, gymnastics, bike riding, running, and trampoline play were frequently reported. Comments such as "I practice my soccer shooting" (Age 11) and "I kick the soccer ball against the wall" (Age 10) suggest that solitary play often provides opportunities for self-improvement and mastery.
As children grew older, their independent play became more diverse, increasingly reflecting personal interests, hobbies, and opportunities for skill development.

Beyond physical activities, solitary play also included digital gaming, creative pursuits, reading, and quiet reflective activities. Some children described reading books, which could inspire play ideas, listening to music, walking, or simply spending time alone. Statements such as "I just sit by myself and think" (Age 11), "Think about my day" (Age 12), and "Walk around and think about stuff" (Age 10) suggest that these self-directed activities provide valuable opportunities for reflection, independence, and personal space.



Age 9. Playing online.

A notable difference between the two age groups was the emotional response to playing alone. Younger children generally described solitary play positively, focusing on activities they enjoyed and the opportunities for imagination and creativity. In contrast, older children expressed more mixed feelings. While some associated being alone with enjoyment, calmness, and relaxation, many indicated a strong preference for social play. Comments such as "I don't really like playing by myself, I feel lonely so I go find other people" (Age 11), "I hate being by myself" (Age 12), and "It makes me feel sad" (Age 10) suggest that peer relationships become increasingly significant during the upper primary school years.

Digital play also featured strongly in older children's accounts of playing alone. Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite, PlayStation, Nintendo, YouTube, and TikTok were frequently mentioned as preferred solitary activities. One child (Age 10) explained, "I play Roblox and online games," while another child (Age 11) reported, "I play games on computer and some one-player games." For many children, these activities provided entertainment, challenge, and opportunities to pursue personal interests.

Key finding

The findings indicate that independent play continues to play a vital role throughout childhood, although its form changes over time.

For younger children, solitary play is often imaginative, creative, and exploratory. For older children, it increasingly supports personal interests, digital engagement, skill development, reflection, and growing independence. While many children value time alone, the findings also suggest that most children, particularly those aged 9-12 years, continue to view play primarily as a social experience and prefer opportunities to play with others.

Ideas for improving play

This section draws on open-ended responses provided throughout the survey.

Although children were not directly asked how play could be improved, many shared suggestions about the spaces, resources, relationships, and time opportunities they valued. These comments provide insight into the conditions that children believe support positive play experiences.

Children's suggestions focused on having more time to play, better access to equipment and resources, larger and more varied play spaces, opportunities to engage with nature, and environments that support friendship, creativity, and active play.

Access to suitable spaces and resources was a recurring theme. Several children expressed a desire for additional playground equipment, sporting facilities, balls, climbing structures, swings, monkey bars, and other resources that would support a wider range of play experiences. As one child explained:

> "I wish we had more things to play with at school."
> (Age 8)

The availability of space was also noted. Some children described how restricted space at home limited the way they were able to play. Hence the importance of having social play facilities beyond home.

> "I don't play alone except at home and I play really slow and always change my game because I don't have much space at home."
> (Age 7)

Children also recognised the value of natural environments that support exploration, adventure, and creativity. Others expressed a desire for more trees, natural areas, and places to build, climb, and explore. One child commented:

> "I wish we had more trees to climb."
> (Age 9)

Another child described the kinds of experiences they most enjoyed that has implications for the provision of open-ended play resources:

> "Twosome [playing in pairs], chatting, whispers, spinnies, tag, making fairy gardens with leaves, sticks, and rocks, digging holes, and making up secret languages."
> (Age 7)

These responses suggest that children value play environments that are well-resourced, nature-rich, and supportive of imagination, discovery, challenge, and self-directed play.

Overall, the findings indicate that while priorities differed somewhat across age groups, a common desire for choice, flexibility, and meaningful play opportunities was evident. Across childhood, participants highlighted the importance of playgrounds, imaginative play resources, and opportunities for exploration with toys, natural materials, and outdoor environments. Older children also valued opportunities to engage with nature and access spaces (virtual and digital) that supported growing independence, and they increasingly referred to sporting facilities and places to socialise with friends outside of school.

Key finding

Collectively, children want more than activities.

Children understood the importance of having sufficient time, space, resources, and opportunities to support their own child-initiated play experiences. Creating environments that listen to children's voices and support their agency can make play more engaging, inclusive, and responsive to their evolving needs and interests.

Key themes across childhood

Across both age groups (children aged 3-8 years and children aged 9-12 years), four key themes emerged from children's responses about play:

- Play supports social connection
- Outdoor environments remain highly relevant
- Creativity and imagination continue across childhood
- Play becomes more diverse with age

1 Play supports social connection and belonging

Play was strongly associated with friendships, belonging, and connection with others. Younger children often formed friendships through imaginative games, playground activities, and shared adventures, while older children increasingly valued socialising itself as an integral part of play. Whether playing tag, building cubbies, playing soccer, or simply being with friends, social connection remained a central feature of children's play experiences throughout childhood.

2 Outdoor environments remain highly relevant

Children consistently identified playgrounds, school grounds, parks, bush areas, sandpits, sporting facilities, and neighbourhood spaces as central places for play. Opportunities to move, explore, take on challenges, and engage with the outdoors were highly valued across both child age groups. Outdoor environments supported physical activity, adventure, agency, exploration, and experiential learning, while also enabling children to develop knowledge of, and connection to, their immediate surroundings and natural environment.

3 Creativity and imagination continue across childhood

Imaginative play was particularly evident among children aged 3-8 years through role-playing families, superheroes, animals, princesses, and fantasy characters. Although imaginative play involving superheroes became less dominant among older children, creativity remained focal through storytelling, inventing games, building bases, drawing, crafts, and digital world-building activities. The findings suggest that creativity remains a consistent feature of children's play, although the ways it is expressed evolve with age.

4 Play becomes more diverse with age

As children moved from early childhood into the upper primary years, play became increasingly varied. Younger children's play was largely centred on imagination, exploration, toys, and playground activities, while older children reported greater participation in organised sport, digital gaming, self-directed hobbies, and social activities extending their social networks. This reflects increasing independence, expanding interests, and the growing importance of peer relationships during childhood.

Together, these themes demonstrate that play remains a powerful influence on children's happiness, friendship formation, creativity, development, wellbeing, and sense of belonging throughout childhood.

Child survey findings

Play was far more than a pastime. It was a powerful vehicle for exploration, creativity, friendship, learning, and growth. Across both age groups, children valued having the time, space, and resources to be active, engage with nature, spend time with family and friends, and discover the world around them.

Children aged 3-8 years commonly engaged in imaginative, exploratory, and pretend play, although digital and sport-based play also featured from an early age. As children moved into the 9-12-year age group, these forms of play remained prominent, while participation increasingly expanded to organised sport, digital gaming, social recreation, and activities reflecting growing physical competence and intellectual development. The message is clear: children need access to inclusive, diverse, and stimulating play environments that support their changing interests, capabilities, and developmental needs.

Children consistently identified schools, playgrounds, parks, sporting facilities, homes, and natural environments as essential places for play, connection, and discovery. While schools were frequently identified as settings for play, concerns have been raised in the broader literature regarding reductions in opportunities for child-directed and play-based learning within educational settings. These concerns highlight the importance of protecting time and space for play both within schools and across the wider community.[10]

Access to diverse play environments enables children to engage in experiences that reflect their interests, abilities, and developmental needs. Across age groups, children valued opportunities to be active, creative, explore their surroundings, engage with nature, and spend time with friends and family. These findings reinforce the importance of creating communities that are rich in play opportunities and support children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Overall, the Child Survey findings highlight the role of schools, families, and communities in ensuring children have access to sufficient time, space, resources, supportive relationships, and freedom to play. Providing diverse and accessible play environments can help children build relationships, develop confidence and skills, express creativity, and experience a sense of belonging as they grow.[11]

Children's art



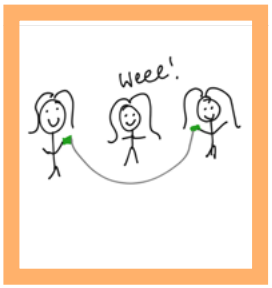
Age 9. Dribbling a soccer ball towards the goal at school.



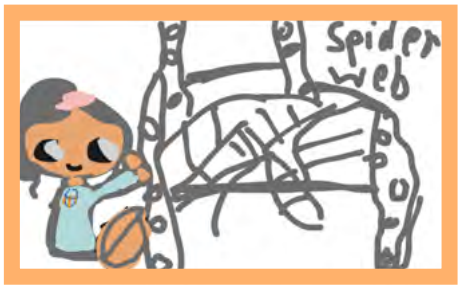
Age 10. Playing on the monkey bars.



Age 11. Goal: playing soccer at school.



Age 10. Skipping with friends.



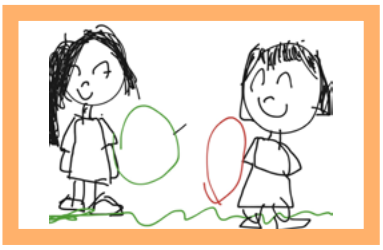
Age 9. Playing on the spider web climbing frame.



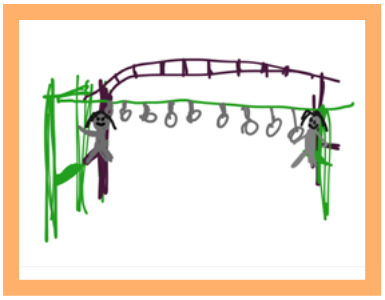
Age 9. Making a sandcastle in the sandpit.



Age 10. Kicking a soccer ball towards the goal.



Age 9. Playing with a friend.



Age 9. Hanging from the monkey bars.



Age 9. Playing with a hula hoop at the playground.



Age 9. Shooting a basketball.

04

Recommendations

Ten areas for action



What children and young people told us points to ten areas for action, grounded in their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Article 31

of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises every child's right to rest, leisure, play, and recreation.

Conclusion

Their collective response strongly voiced the importance of play, recreation, and access to inclusive spaces with sufficient resources, if need be, to satisfy their intrinsic motivation, well-being, social connection, identity, creativity, agency, and active participation in school and community life.

Participant feedback confirms there is significant room for improvement across Western Australia regarding play provision in schools and amidst other community environments. This draws particular focus on improved recreation opportunities, equipment, and expanded green spaces for free-flow play where children and young people can connect, engage in nature-based experiences, and foster a keen sense of identity, well-being and connection.[12]

As the Western Australian Government progresses the development of a state-wide Play Strategy in 2026, there is a window of opportunity to adopt a rights-based approach that recognises play as a fundamental right rather than an optional pastime, thereby elevating 'play' and 'playfulness' as central to children's and young people's healthy lifestyles and as a cornerstone of play-based learning in schools. A rights-based approach is grounded in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises every child's right to rest, leisure, play, and recreation.[13]

Embedding the principles of children's rights to play, inclusive participation, agency, and equitable access to sufficient play (time, space and resources) within policy and planning can help ensure that all children and young people will thrive.

International experience demonstrates that sustainable play policy requires more than short-term programmes and investment. England's Play Strategy achieved significant progress but was not sustained following a change of government.[14] By contrast, Scotland has embedded play within a broader children's rights framework.[15] Wales has established a statutory Play Sufficiency Duty requiring local authorities to assess and improve opportunities for children's play.[16] Finland, Norway and New Zealand have similarly integrated children's wellbeing, participation, access to nature, independent mobility, and child-friendly community design within broader policy frameworks. [17, 18, 19]

Collectively, these examples demonstrate that supporting play extends beyond playgrounds and sporting facilities and requires coordinated action across education, health, planning, transport, local government, and community services.

These lessons are highly relevant to Western Australia. Since 2013, a groundswell of community support and a growing body of local research have highlighted concerns about the decline of play in schools and emphasised the importance of play for children's wellbeing, participation, learning, belonging, and community connection.[20, 21] Western Australian families, caregivers, scholars, teachers, and health professionals have called for greater recognition of play within government policy, planning, education, and community development. They have advocated for child-friendly

environments that support children's everyday play experiences and, more recently, for the development of a government-led Western Australian Play Strategy.[22, 23, 24, 25, 26]

Advocacy organisations, including the Play Matters Collective, Early Childhood Australia (WA Branch), Early Years in Society, the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA), and Nature Play WA, have also been instrumental in strengthening this agenda by bringing together parents, researchers, educators, families, and community organisations to promote play as a critical component of healthy development and wellbeing.

The establishment of the Western Australian Play Strategy Advisory Committee in 2026 reflects growing recognition that play is fundamental to children's wellbeing, development, and participation.[27]

The findings of this study provide further evidence of the need for a coordinated, evidence-informed, and rights-based approach to protecting and promoting play opportunities across childhood and adolescence.

Child and youth participants in this survey consistently highlighted the value of parks, beaches, schools, sporting facilities, neighbourhood spaces, and opportunities to spend time with friends. They also identified barriers, including limited time, inadequate facilities, and restricted access to activities they enjoy. These findings suggest that play sufficiency depends not only on the availability of physical spaces but also on children's access to time, freedom, resources, and supportive environments that enable meaningful play and recreation.

Recommendations

It is highly recommended that the Western Australian Government develops a Rights-Based Western Australian Play Strategy that:

1. Is grounded in children's rights and aligned with Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. Recognises and upholds Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by ensuring that children and young people are provided with genuine opportunities to express their views and that those views are given due consideration in the development, implementation, and review of play-related policies, programmes, and environments.

3. Establishes long-term policy and legislative mechanisms that protect and promote play beyond electoral cycles.

4. Adopts a whole-of-government approach involving education, health, planning, local government, community services, sport, and recreation sectors.

5. Recognises schools as essential and diverse settings for play, recreation, and social connection.

6. Incorporates a Play Sufficiency framework, informed by the Welsh model, to monitor and improve access, quality, inclusion, and equity across metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote communities.

7. Prioritises equitable and safe access to physically, culturally and linguistically inclusive welcoming play environments for all children and young people.

8. Ensures local governments and relevant agencies actively assess and enhance the sufficiency of time, spaces, and resources available for play across communities, including within schools, according to children and youth perceptions.

9. Embeds ongoing consultation and meaningful participation of children and young people from all backgrounds (and all residential postcodes), with targeted consideration of neurodivergent children and young people with disabilities, Aboriginal children, and culturally and linguistically diverse groups, in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of play opportunities, recognising that children's voices should inform decision-making processes and outcomes.

10. Establishes regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation processes to support accountability, evidence-informed decision making, and continuous improvement, that includes the Department of Education's Public School Review (PSR) process.

A coordinated, evidence-informed and rights-based Western Australian Play Strategy would provide a practical mechanism for ensuring that all children and young people have equitable access to the time, spaces, resources, relationships, and opportunities needed to play, connect, and thrive throughout childhood and adolescence, while fostering more inclusive, child-friendly and connected communities across Western Australia.

Appendix 1: Youth survey questions

1. How old are you? [dropdown option]
2. What is your postcode? _____
3. How do you explain what ‘play’ or ‘playing’ is?
4. What hobbies or activities do you do by yourself for fun?
5. What hobbies or activities do you do with friends for fun?
6. Where do you do these hobbies or activities?
7. Do you have enough time to do these hobbies or activities at school? [Yes / No]
8. Do you have enough space to do these hobbies or activities at school? [Yes / No]
9. Do you have enough equipment to help you enjoy your hobbies and activities at school [Yes / No]
10. How do you feel when you can’t participate in your favourite hobbies or activities?
11. Is there anything you would like to tell us that would help you get more involved in hobbies or activities?
12. Draw a picture of you doing your favourite hobby or activity and explain what you are doing. (Please upload a photograph of your drawing).

Appendix 2: Child survey questions

(Adult to transcribe child's responses if required)

1. How old are you? [dropdown option]
2. What is your postcode? _____
3. Where do you play? We want to hear about all the places that you play, including at school, home, friends, parks.
4. How do you feel about playing at school? [Emoji scale]
5. Do you have enough time to play at school? [Yes / No]
6. Do you have enough space to play at school? [Yes / No]
7. Do you have enough things to play with? [Yes / No]
8. How do you play? What sports, games or activities do you do when playing?
9. How do you play with friends?
10. How do you play by yourself?
11. Draw a picture of you playing at school and explain what you are doing. (Adult to record details on child's drawing if required. Larger sheets of paper can be used. (Please upload a photograph of the drawing).

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