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Results on Children and Young People's Play from The Scottish Parents' Survey 2021



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



**social
research**

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Key Findings

This report presents the findings on children's play from the Scottish Parents' omnibus survey of 1,004 parents of children and young people aged 0-17 across Scotland, run by Ipsos MORI Scotland. The survey was conducted between 1 November and 2 December 2021.

The key findings from the survey were:

- 57% of parents reported that their child played outside on most days or every day during the past year. 3% of parents said their child never played outside.
- Parents of children aged 0-11 were more likely to say that their children played outside every day or most days than parents of young people aged 12-17.
- Of the parents whose children did play outside in the last year, 91% reported that their child had played in either their own garden or someone else's during the past year. Other common locations were local open spaces (87%), play parks (79%) and local streets (45%). Parents with household incomes below £26,000; those living in the most deprived areas; and those with qualifications below degree level were less likely to say their children played in local open spaces.
- 48% of parents said that improvements to local play parks would encourage their children to play outside more. 40% said that if they felt more confident in the safety of the local area, this would encourage their children to play outside more.
- Parents of children aged 0-11 were more likely than parents of young people aged 12-17 to identify specific supporting factors that would encourage their children to play outside more, such as improvements to local play parks and safety in their local area. Parents of young people were more likely than parents of children to say nothing would encourage this.
- 87% of parents of children aged 0-11 said that family and friends were helpful sources of support when playing with their children. Half of parents (50%) said that Play, Talk, Read and/or Bookbug programmes were helpful support resources when playing with their children.
- 71% of parents of children aged 0-11 said that having more time would encourage or support them to play more with their children. 52% of parents said that access to more indoor and outdoor play spaces would encourage or support them to play more with their children. Men were more likely than women to say that having more time and access to more physical play resources would encourage or support them to play more with their children.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings on children's play from a survey of parents in Scotland in 2021. Questions covered their children's experiences of play during the past year, what has supported play, and what might encourage children and their parents to play more in the future.

Policy background

The 2013 [Play strategy for Scotland: our action plan](#) sets out a vision for a nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people – in homes, nurseries, schools and communities. The [progress review](#) of the play strategy in 2021 highlighted the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's play experiences. The Scottish Government is working with partners across key sectors to take forward a number of commitments, including a £60 million investment in renewing play parks across Scotland to ensure that all children have access to quality play in their community. The voices of children and young people and their families are key to help understand what more can be done to fulfil all children's right to play.

Methods

The Scottish Parents' survey is a telephone omnibus survey run by Ipsos MORI Scotland. It is a representative survey of parents of children aged 0-17 in Scotland, weighted by age of the parent, working status, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)¹ classification and the age of the child.² The survey took place between 1 November and 2 December 2021 and 1,004 parents responded. It asked parents five closed questions on the topic of their children's play.

Socio-demographic variables included in the survey were: age of selected child³; respondent age, gender, working status and qualification; household type and income; number of children in the household; rurality; and SIMD. Due to small sample sizes within demographic sub-samples, it is not possible to report all breakdowns. This report therefore only reports demographic findings that are both meaningful and statistically significant at the 5% level. Additionally, numbers may differ between figures and text due to rounding.

Analysis and reporting was undertaken by the Scottish Government, Children and Families Analysis Unit.

¹ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing.

SIMD is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. SIMD ranks data zones from most deprived (ranked 1) to least deprived (ranked 6,976). ([Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020](#)).

² Note that the sample over-represents respondents educated to degree level and from higher income households.

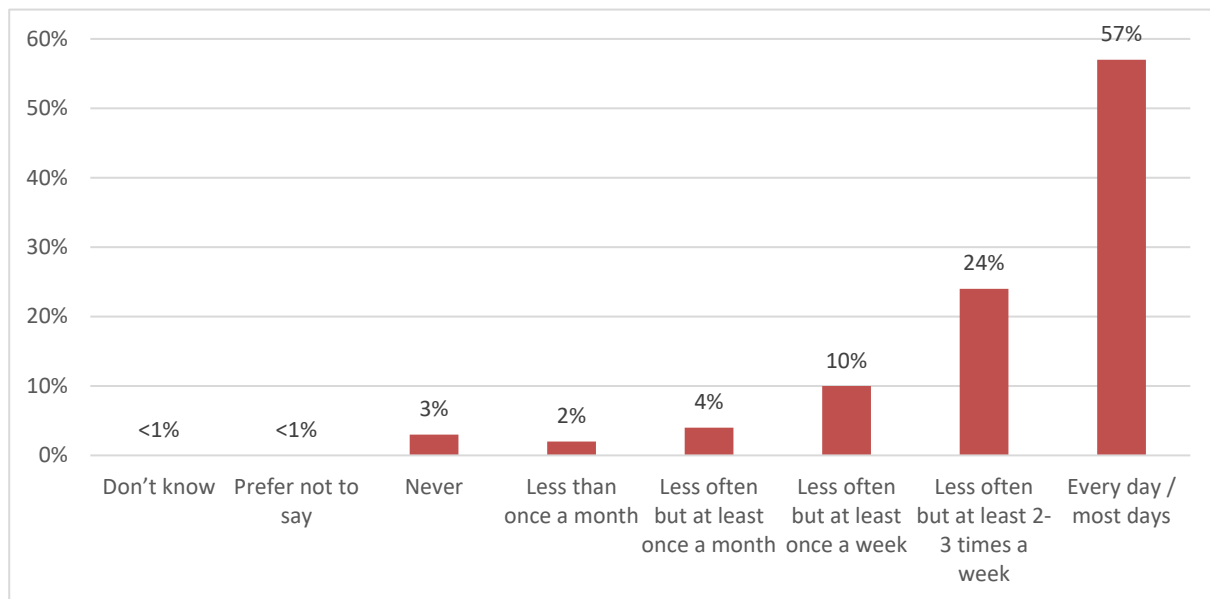
³ Where a household has more than one child, a selected child was asked about. Only particular questions are asked generally of all/any children in the household.

2. Children's outdoor play in last year

Parents were asked how often their child had played outside in the last year on average.

Over half of parents (57%) reported that their child played outside on most days or every day during the past year. One in ten parents (9%) said their child played outside less than once a week, including 3% saying their child never played outside. Figure 2.1 shows the responses to this question.

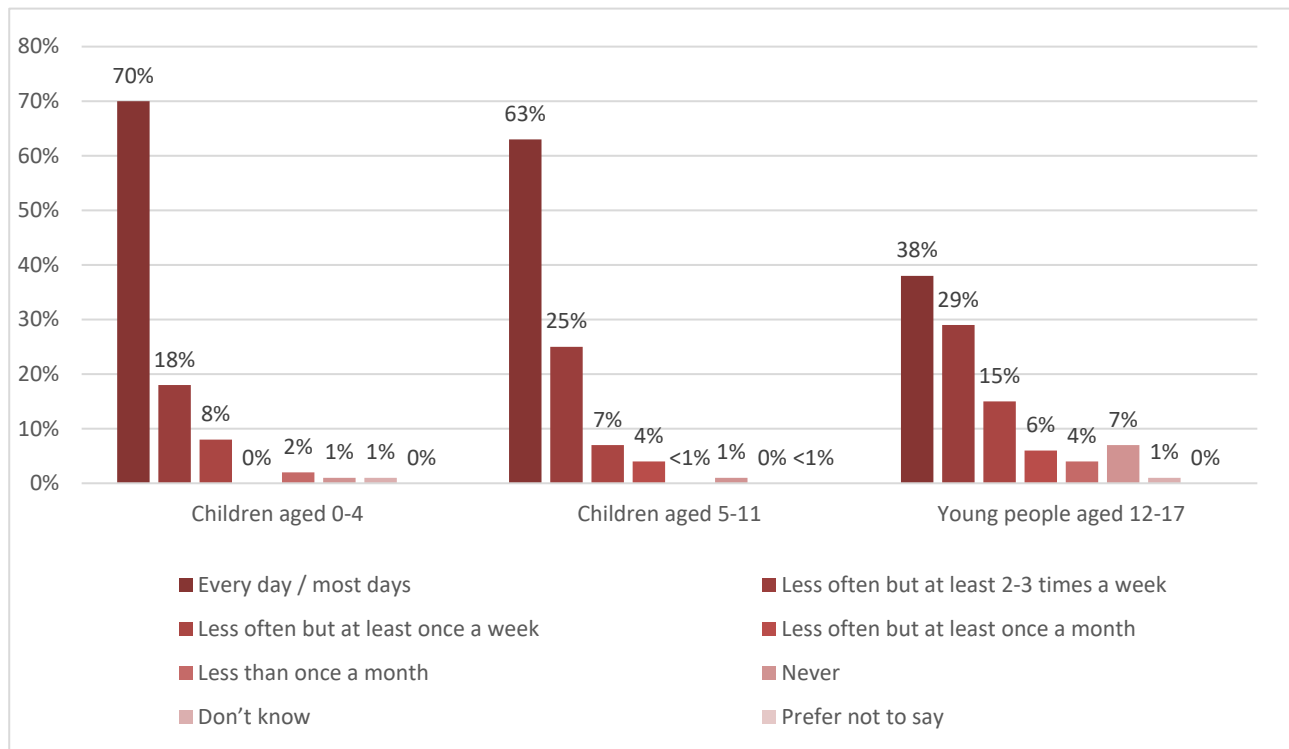
Figure 2.1 – Frequency that parents said their child played outside, on average, in the last year.



Base: 1004

As Figure 2.2 shows, there is a clear pattern in the frequency of outdoor play by age of the child. Children aged between 0-11 were more likely to play outside every day or most days compared with young people aged between 12 and 17.

Figure 2.2 – Frequency that parents said their child played outside, on average, in the last year, by age groups of children and young people.



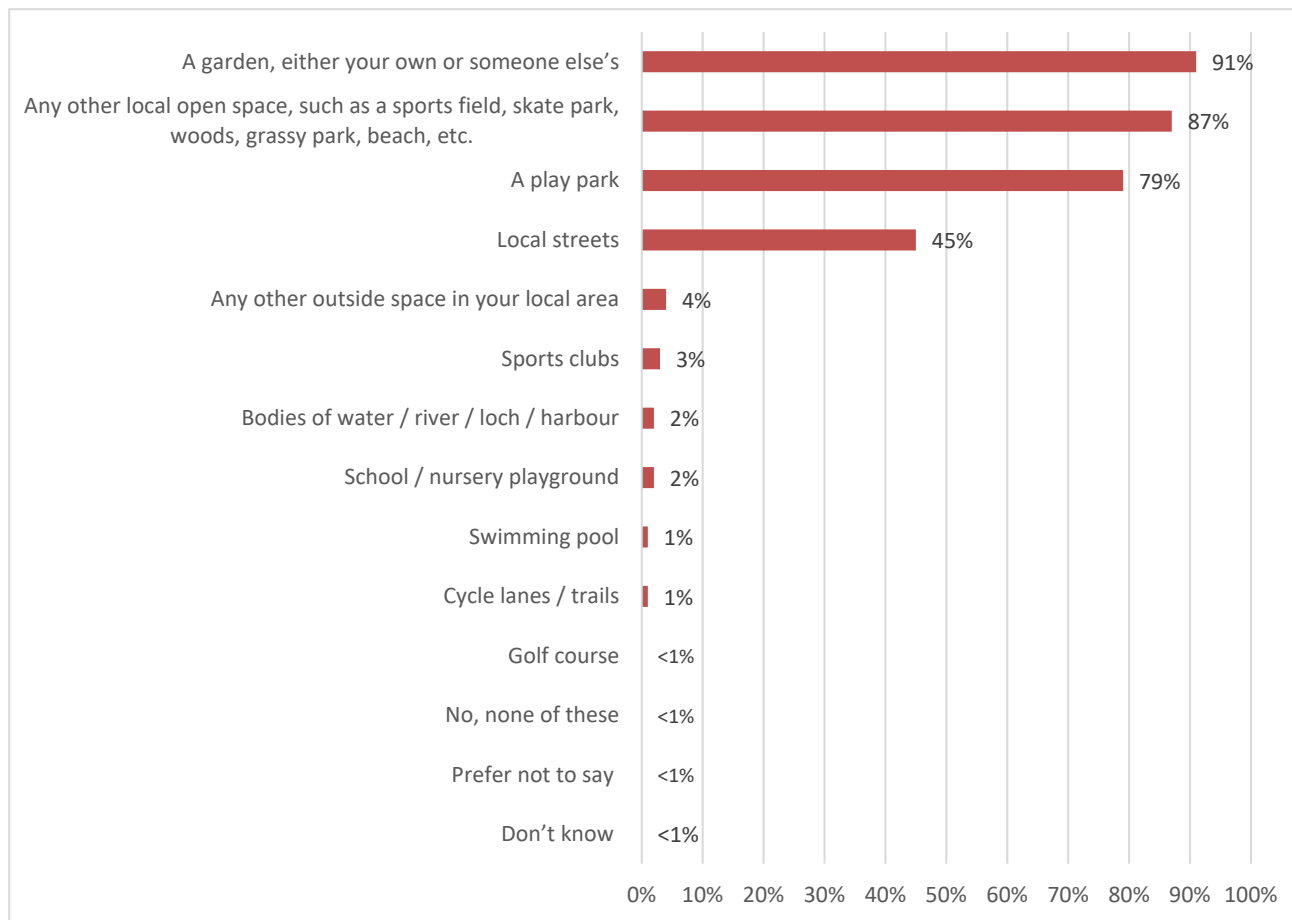
Base: 1004

3. Locations of children's play in local area during last year

Parents were asked about the types of locations that their children played outside during the last year.

Of the parents whose children did play outside in the last year, the vast majority (91%) reported that their child had played in either their own garden or someone else's during the past year. Other common locations were local open spaces (87%), play parks (79%) and, to a lesser extent, local streets (45%). Other locations were each selected by less than four per cent of parents. Figure 3.1 shows the responses to this question.

Figure 3.1 – Outside places in the local area that parents said their child has played in the last year.



Unweighted Base: 964 (parents of children who have ever played outdoors in last year)⁴

Parents of older children (aged 12-17) were less likely to report that their children played in gardens or play parks than parents of children in the 0-4 and 5-11 age groups. There were no meaningful differences by age for other locations.

Children from some households were, however, less likely to play in 'other types of local open spaces like sports fields, skate parks, woods, grassy parks or beaches':

- Parents with household incomes below £26,000 were less likely to report that their children had played in these spaces than parents with household incomes above £32,000 (69% of parents compared with between 89% and 95% of parents in higher household income brackets).
- Parents from the most deprived areas were less likely to report that their children had played in these spaces than parents from less deprived areas (75% of parents in SIMD 1 compared with between 91% and 94% of parents in SIMD 3 to 5).

⁴ Note that the 'swimming pool' option did not clearly distinguish between outdoor or indoor swimming pools.

- Parents with qualifications below degree level were less likely to report that their children had played in these spaces than parents educated to degree level or above (84% compared with 91%).

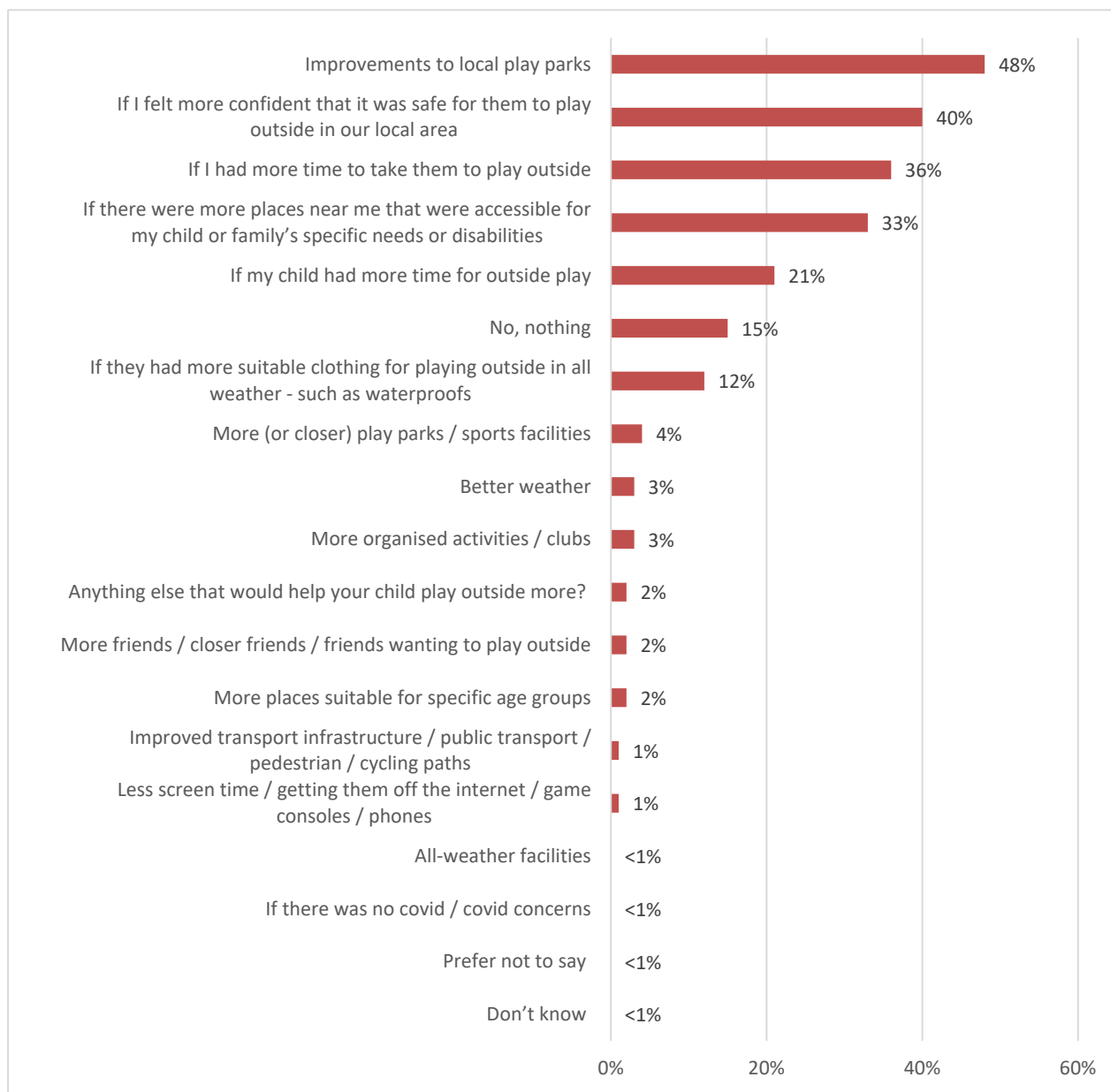
4. Factors that would encourage children to play more outside

Parents were asked about possible factors that would encourage their children to play outside more.

The most commonly identified factors were: improvements to local play parks (48%); if parents felt more confident in the safety of the local area (40%); if parents had more time to take their children to play outside (36%); and if there were more nearby accessible places for their child or family's specific needs or disabilities (33%).

15% of parents said that nothing would encourage their child to play outside more. Figure 4.1 shows the responses to this question.

Figure 4.1 – Factors parents said would encourage their child to play outside more.



Base: 1004

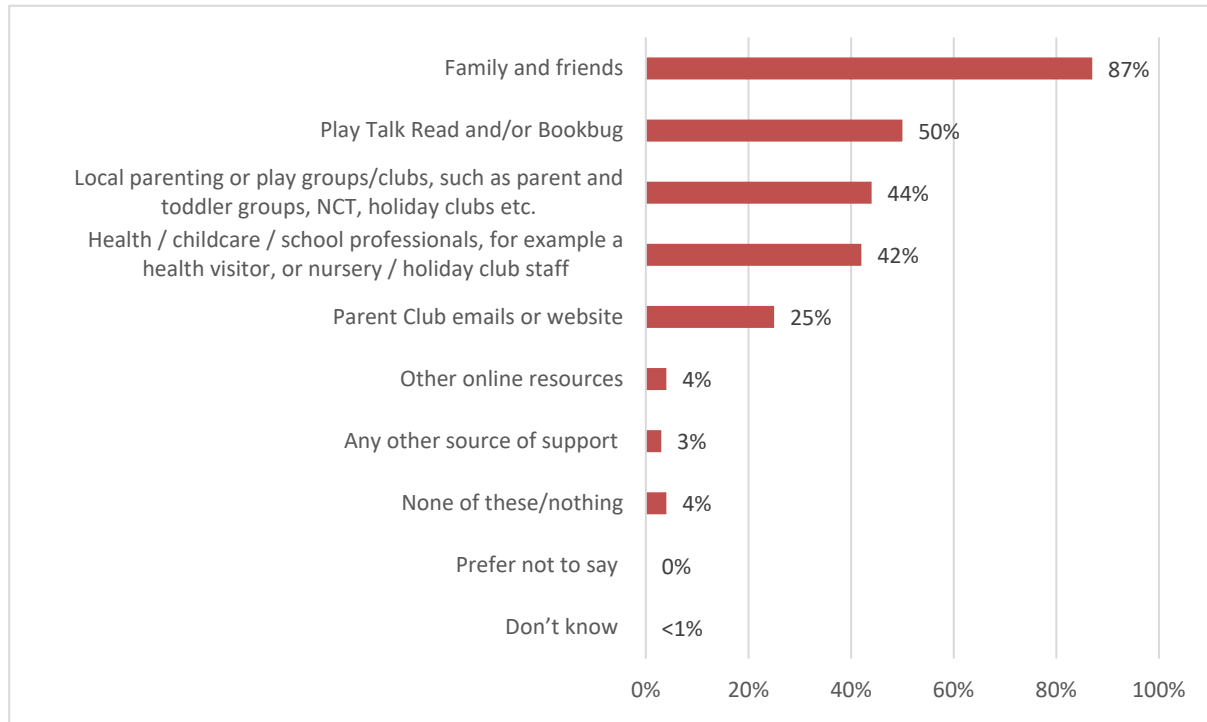
Parents of children aged between 0-11 were more likely than parents of young people aged between 12-17 to identify specific factors, such as improvements to local play parks (55% compared with 34%) and safety in their local area (45% compared with 30%). Parents of young people were more likely than parents of children to say nothing would encourage their children to play outside more (31% compared with 7%).

5. Sources and resources helpful for parents when playing with children

Parents of children aged 0-11 were asked about which sources and resources they have found helpful when playing with their children.

The vast majority of these parents (87%) said that family and friends were helpful sources of support when playing with their children. Half of these parents (50%) said that Play, Talk, Read and/or Bookbug programmes were helpful. Figure 5.1 shows the responses to this question.

Figure 5.1 – Sources and resources that parents said they found helpful when playing with their children.⁵



Unweighted Base: 510 (all those with children aged 0-11 in the household)

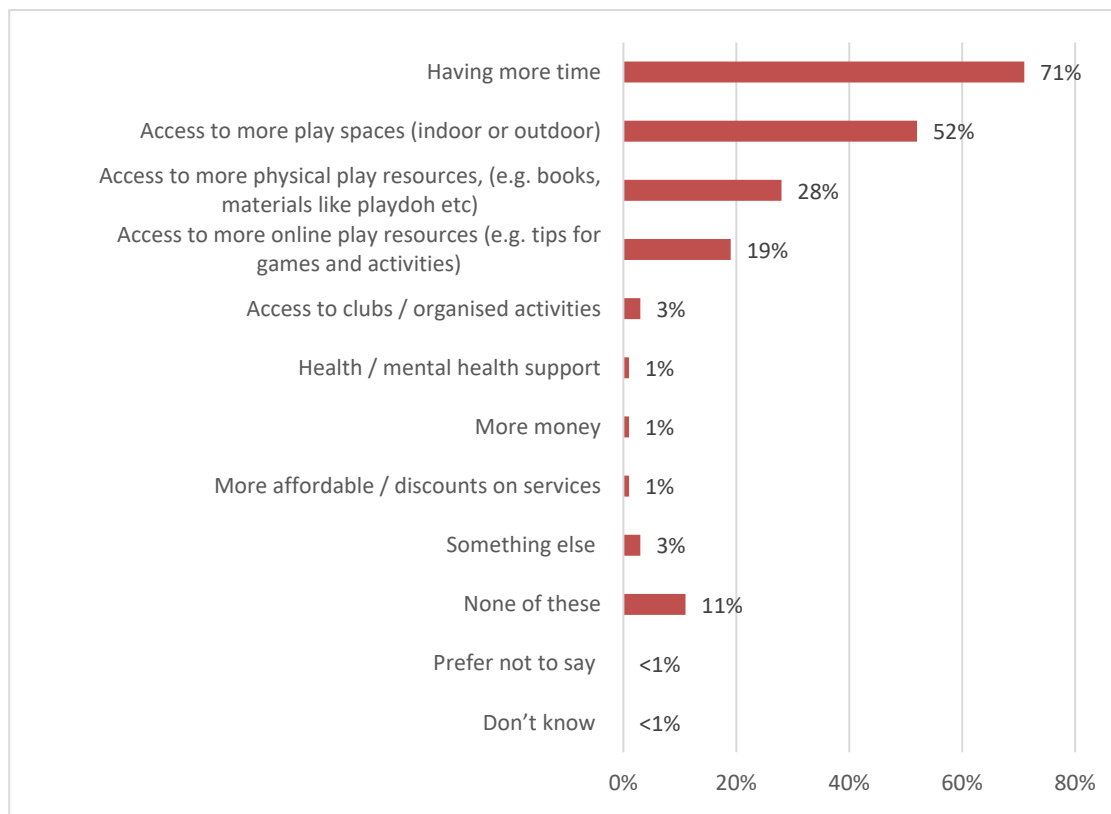
6. Factors that would encourage or support parents to play more with children

Parents of children aged 0-11 were asked what would encourage or support them to play more with their children.

The most commonly selected factors were having more time (71%) and access to more indoor and outdoor play spaces (52%). Smaller percentages also identified access to physical play resources (28%) and online play resources (19%). Figure 6.1 shows the responses to this question.

⁵ Question was asked about all children aged 0-11 in parents' household.

Figure 6.1 – Factors that parents think would encourage or support them to play more with their children.⁶



Unweighted Base: 510 (all those with children aged 0-11 in the household)

Men were more likely than women to say that having more time would encourage or support them to play with their child or children (80% compared with 66%). Men were also more likely than women to say that access to more physical play resources would encourage more play (35% compared with 24%).

⁶ Question was asked about all children aged 0-11 in parents' household.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

☐ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.



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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.

ISBN: 978-1-80435-227-4

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1049930 (03/22)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
March 2022

Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80435-227-4

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1049930 (03/22)

