

Customer Voice Research Play

Sherbert Research



**Research Report No
DCSF-RW082**

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Play*

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Play

Objectives

- To gain a deeper understanding of what children and parents think about play and play provision (quantity, quality, and accessibility)
- To understand the extent to which the type and range of play provision influences attitudes to play
- To inform communications with children, parents and carers on play provision in terms of tone, language and terms they use
- To assess how to make existing play facilities more appealing
- To gauge what children and parents want in terms of new play facilities (quality, supervision, location, opening times, transport)
- To understand any gender differences in play experiences
- To learn about what parents know in terms of the benefits of different kinds of play

Respondents

Boys and girls aged 8 to 12

Parents (Mums and Dads)

Across England, rural to urban

Key findings

Children and parents use the word 'play' to describe a diverse range of activities which extend far beyond the traditional definitions of the word, which has implications for how play is defined and brought to life in communications.

Outside play is often children's favourite type of play because it allows them to experiment with things, to take physical risks and to gain a rare sense of freedom. Other benefits identified included social interaction and learning about personal responsibility.

Clear gender differences emerged. Boys' play was perceived as more active and associated with sport / free play; their play was also seen as more competitive, with more of a risk / fear factor. In contrast, girls' play was linked with more imaginative and role play; girls' play was also seen as more passive, with talking based interactions. Overall, girls moved away from traditional forms of play earlier than boys, with some nine and ten year-old girls exhibiting characteristics of teenagers.

Whilst parents recognise the benefits of children playing outside, their concerns relating to 'stranger danger' (paedophiles, abduction, abuse etc.) and bullying from older teenagers is causing anxiety around letting their kids 'out to play' on their own. This fear is often exacerbated by a sense that community values and support have deteriorated since their own childhood.

Most parents with children under ten will not allow them to play outside unless they are supervised. When parents do give their children freedom to go out on their own, they prefer for them to visit public places such as shopping malls and cinemas, where the presence of other adults give them a sense that their children are safe/r.

Most children in this sample had access to a range of parks and open spaces within walking distance of their home. Whilst the quality and range of equipment varied between locations, the overwhelming factors affecting usage were the presence / threatened presence of intimidating teenagers; and the state of the equipment which was often vandalised.

Parents and children offered clear guidance with regard to what they want from parks including: a good range of equipment, segregated by age; more naturally inspired play rather than structured man-made equipment; challenging equipment which encourages risk taking in a safe environment, especially for children aged nine plus; well maintained and updated and secured at night to protect from vandalism. Currently, children under the age of 8 / 9 years were felt to be well catered for, however parents and children did highlight a gap in provision for 9 to 13 year-olds.

Play Rangers prompted some interest amongst both parents and children, particular areas of interest included: Offering ideas and stimulation; supervision and safety; and scope to reach out and engage tweens and younger teenagers. However, many questions arose regarding how Play Rangers would operate. Any communication will need to deal with these questions before parents / children can emotionally connect with this idea and think of getting / letting their children get involved.

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