

# The Power of Play

Children and Young People's Call to Action



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# Acknowledgements

Dear reader,

As the drafters of this Call to Action, we extend a heartfelt thank you to the more than 10,000 children and young people who have participated in the online survey and focus group discussions globally. Your insights, experiences, and perspectives have been instrumental in shaping the content and direction of the Call to Action. It is through your voices that this Call to Action reflects the aspirations and needs of children and young people from different backgrounds.

We also extend our deepest thanks to all the organisations that have supported us throughout this process and for their commitment to advocate for our recommendations. Your support is critical in ensuring that our collective efforts translate into actions for children and young people everywhere.

Together, we will champion all children and young people to play and strive for a world where every child can learn, develop, and create friendships through play.

Thank you!

**The Child and Youth Advisory Board**



# Foreword by the Child and Youth Advisory Board

Dear adults, dear decision-makers,

We are delighted to present this Call to Action for more space, time, and opportunities to play. Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood. It shapes our emotions, helps us form friendships, and contributes to our overall well-being. Play is just as essential to our well-being as the air we breathe.

Play enriches our existence and adds depth to our human experience. Sadly, many children lack access to safe and stimulating play environments and are granted very little time to play. That's why we, a diverse group of children and young people from around the world, have come together to support a global campaign on play.

In our consultations with more than 10,000 children and young people across the world, we have heard that many children and young people lack opportunities to play. Some cannot play at all or as much as they would like to. Others cannot play because they are not allowed to or don't have the time. Some children find that play opportunities are not adapted to their mental or physical health. Additionally, children living in countries with wars and environmental disasters may not be able to enjoy their childhood. Others have never realised the importance of playing.

We have also noticed a concerning trend: compared to previous generations, we're playing far less. Only 27% of children play outside their homes today, a stark contrast to the 71% of our parents and grandparents. Our cities, neighbourhoods, and schools are adapted to the needs of adults and cars – not to children and childhood. This is particularly problematic for those of us with special needs. In all those places where our spaces and playtime are limited, children and young people's skills and development are restricted.

This decline in play deprives us of valuable opportunities to learn, socialise, and grow physically. It also negatively impacts our well-being and our ability to form friendships and stay healthy.

As children and young people, we might be vulnerable, but we are also resilient and full of potential. We have a voice, and we would like adults and decision-makers to listen to us. This is our Call to Action. We hope that reading it will inspire you to create safer and more inclusive play environments and opportunities, to make play a priority when considering our well-being and health and ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn and grow through play.

**Amine, France**

**Anjali, India**

**Gabriel, Spain**

**Jess, Germany**

**Lilou, France**

**Maheshwari, India**

**Mahmoud, Sierra Leone**

**Nambiro, Uganda**

**Neema, Tanzania**

**Nishmitha, India**

**Shreeraksha, India**





## Foreword from supporting organisations

As organisations deeply committed to the well-being and rights of children worldwide, we are honoured to support the Child and Youth Advisory Group in the development of this Call to Action.

Through our own programs and by listening attentively to the voices of children from diverse backgrounds, we have gained invaluable insights into the multifaceted nature of play as perceived by children themselves. These discussions have illuminated new dimensions of play, enriching our understanding and reinforcing our dedication to advocating for children's rights.

We recognise that many marginalised children face significant barriers to accessing opportunities for play, stemming from complex social, geographical, and political factors, including entrenched gender perceptions. Upholding their right to play necessitates active engagement with these obstacles, underscoring the interconnectedness of play with broader issues of social justice and equity.

These conversations have also prompted us to reconnect with the child within ourselves, fostering a profound paradigm shift in our approach to advocacy and programming. We have been reminded of the transformative power of embracing playfulness and creativity, both in our personal lives and in our collective efforts to advance children's rights.

Moreover, the discussions have underscored the profound impact of play on mental well-being, self-worth, team dynamics, community cohesion, and conflict resolution. Beyond its tangible benefits for physical and emotional development, play emerges as a potent catalyst for fostering resilience, solidarity, and peace in diverse contexts.

While the resolution to designate a 'day of play' marks an important milestone, we acknowledge that the real work lies in translating this symbolic gesture into meaningful action on the ground. Ensuring the meaningful celebration of this day requires sustained commitment and concerted efforts to address the underlying barriers to play faced by children worldwide.

In presenting this Call to Action, we echo the voices of children and young people, urging stakeholders at all levels to prioritise play as a fundamental right and catalyst for holistic development.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the children and young people who have actively participated in the Advisory Group, as well as those who have generously shared their perspectives through the online survey and engaging in focus group discussions.

Your invaluable contributions have been instrumental in shaping this Call to Action, enriching it with diverse insights and lived experiences. Your voices serve as powerful reminders of the importance of focusing on children's perspectives in advocacy efforts. The insights you have shared will guide us as we continue to advocate for your right to play in the years to come. Together, we are inspired to continue our collective journey towards a world where every child's right to play is honoured and upheld. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and invaluable contributions.



# Introduction

The Call to Action presents the findings of a global consultation with children and young people on the importance of play and the factors constraining children from playing as much as they would like. Over 10,000 children and young people from all parts of the world participated in an online survey, and hundreds contributed through playful workshops and focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were critical to hearing the voices of younger children, not captured by the online consultations.

We, a Child and Youth Advisory Group from France, Germany, India, Spain, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda, analysed the findings from the consultations and authored this Call to Action with support from the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project. Throughout this document, we offer our recommendations to adults and decision-makers on how to create more space and opportunities to play.

This Call to Action highlights the importance of play for children and young people. It identifies barriers to play and proposes solutions and recommendations for parents, teachers, governments, and businesses to create more opportunities for play. Within this Call to Action, we also show how play, in its different forms, positively impacts our lives, health, and well-being.

We also remind adults and decision-makers of children's right to be heard in decisions impacting their lives. In other words, we invite adults and decision-makers to consult us children when making decisions that impact our right to play.

The global consultations with the children and young people and the development of the Call to Action have been supported by the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project in collaboration with BRAC, The Concerned for Working Children, Eurochild, Save the Children International, the Government of Sierra Leone, International Play Association (IPA World), The LEGO Group, and Play in Education, Development, and Learning (PEDAL) at the University of Cambridge. The strictest safeguarding standards have been applied throughout the process.

# What we mean by play

Play is our right to have fun and express ourselves freely through different activities and sports. Play is not just for fun; it is essential. It helps us be creative, learn new things, and make friends. Playing makes us feel good and helps us grow up healthy and happy, both in our bodies and our minds.

**“Play helps us forget the bad moments in our life.”**

Anjali, India





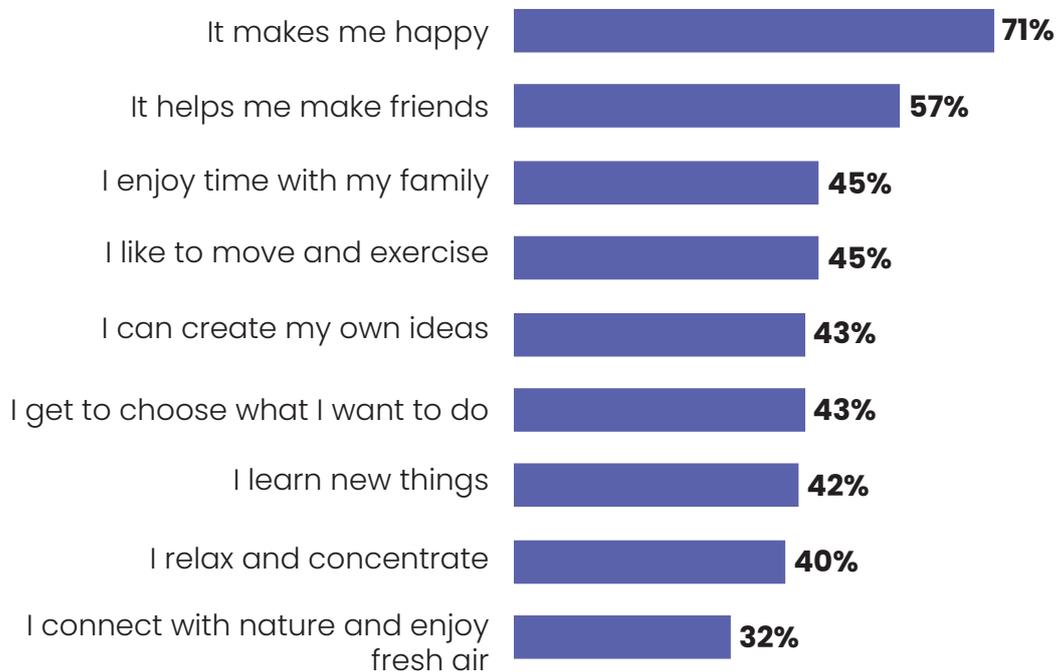
## Why play matters to children and young people

Play is incredibly important to children and young people, irrespective of their age or background. According to our survey, 97% of the children and young people we consulted consider play to be important.

There are numerous reasons why play holds such significance in their lives. The majority believe it is important because it brings them joy, helps them form friendships, and allows them to spend quality time with others, including their families. Additionally, play plays a crucial role in facilitating learning, physical activity, and relaxation for children and young people.

In workshops and consultations, children also shared that play is important because it helps them tackle challenges. It helps overcome stress, sadness, and loneliness. Play unites children and young people and helps them overcome their differences.

### When asked why play is important, children and young people responded that:



**“Play can create bridges to connect with other children.”**

Consultation participant, Denmark



# The cost of play deprivation

## Barriers to play

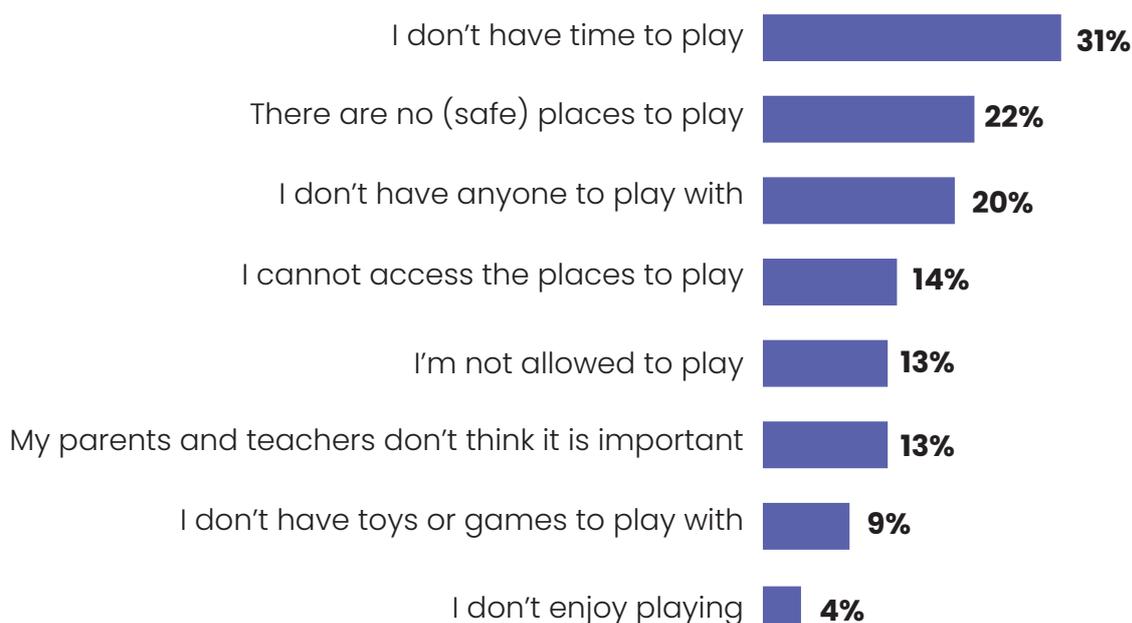
Children and young people are not playing as much as they want to or as much as they need to thrive. In our survey, 65% of children and young people told us that they would like to play more.

There are many reasons why children and young people are not playing enough. For many, the biggest barrier to play is time. Homework, household chores, or work often take children and young people away from play. Another barrier is the lack of access to safe places to play close to home. Roads are often busy and unsafe for children, and playgrounds are frequently far away, making it difficult for children to access them without their parents' supervision. In focus group discussions, children shared their concerns about safety on the road to playgrounds or traffic on the streets where they like to play.

The lack of safe spaces for play also impacts the online world. In focus group discussions, children bring up their concerns about the safety of online spaces. Many children enjoy playing online but say that they lack the tools and knowledge on how to stay safe from harassment, cyberbullying, or harmful content when playing online.

Finally, the perception that play is not important among parents, teachers, or other adults is a significant barrier. We believe that if adults engage in play with us, they too will recognise how important play is.

### When asked what stops children and young people from playing, they answered:



## Different barriers for different children

Some children and young people face even bigger barriers to accessing play.

Unfortunately, play spaces and activities are not always accessible for children and young people with disabilities. For example, 20% of children with disabilities indicate that they cannot access the playgrounds and other play spaces. Our survey also revealed that 35% of children with disabilities reported not having anyone to play with, compared to 20% of children and young people without disabilities (351 children and young people with disabilities participated).

Gender also impacts opportunities to play. In some countries, girls have fewer opportunities to play than boys due to household chores or because parents restrict them from going out alone: 37% of girls stated they lack time to play, compared to 25% of boys. In the focus group discussions, children and young people also highlighted that playgrounds and play spaces are often tailored to meet the preferences of boys, such as football, rather than girls.

Barriers to play also vary by country and region. For example, children in Latin America are highly concerned about the shortage of safe play spaces compared to other regions. In Asia, over 20% of children mentioned they are not allowed to play, whereas the figure is less than 10% in Europe or the Americas. In Africa, 28% of children reported that their parents and teachers do not consider play important, compared to just 9% in Europe.



Additionally, 40% of children and young people living in countries affected by war and 38% in those impacted by natural disasters (such as floods, heavy rain, or extreme heat) express concerns about the lack of safe play spaces, compared to 22% of children and young people overall.

**“In my country, boys have an opportunity to play, while girls are burdened with home activities. Parents believe that if girls get time to play, it will lead them to bad company.”**

Neema, Tanzania

## **The consequences of lost play**

Our consultations show that play deprivation impacts the health and well-being of children and young people. When deprived of play, we experience feelings of boredom, sadness, disappointment, and loneliness. Some of us even feel anger.

During the focus group discussions, children also expressed that they lose motivation to engage in other activities, such as studying, when they are unable to play. In a world without play, children and young people fear missing out on physical activity, opportunities to develop friendships, and the chance to nurture their cognitive abilities.

**“Adults should know the happiness of children is connected to play.”**

Consultations with children in India

### **When asked how not playing makes them feel, children and young people answered**

- 1.** Bored - 56%
- 2.** Sad - 40%
- 3.** Disappointed - 26%
- 4.** Lonely - 24%
- 5.** Angry or frustrated - 18%



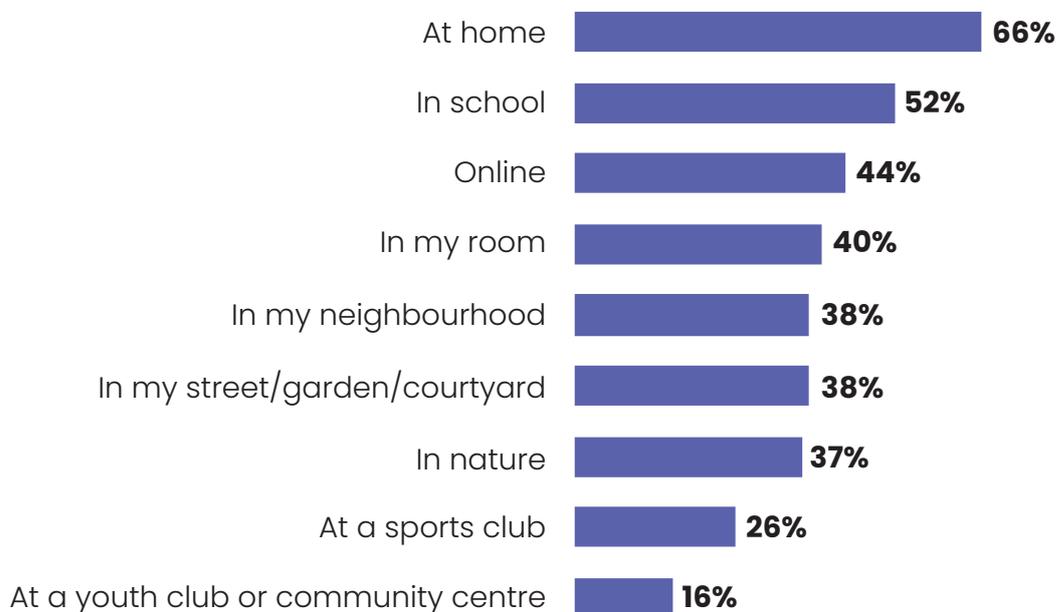
**Call to Action:  
Our recommendations**



## Build and create play-friendly spaces

Our consultations with children and young people not only show that children and young people like many different types of play, but they also like to play in many different places, indoors as much as outdoors and online. During the focus group discussions, children highlighted the importance of nature: 'Play is a way for us to connect with nature and feel like we are part of something bigger.'

### When asked where they like to play, children and young people responded:



**"We have to play on the roads near our households, but movement of vehicles on the road stop us from playing."**

Consultations with children in India

## We recommend

### Parents to:

- Respect our right to play at home by allowing us to play within and near our homes.
- Help us by creating safe play spaces at home and encourage creative play by making use of existing toys, furniture, and other materials at home.

### School management and teachers to:

- Design playful classrooms and school environments that prioritise interactive and hands-on learning. Make it easier for us to move furniture around, add colourful decor, and designate areas for play to spark our creativity.
- Let us play outdoor during breaks and incorporate nature-based activities into our lessons.
- Equip classrooms and play areas with materials and tools that support different types of play, for example art supplies, building blocks, books, musical instruments, and sports equipment.
- Teach us digital skills so we know how to stay safe when playing online.

### Local and national governments to:

- Build cities, communities, and playgrounds that are child-friendly, safe, and accessible to all children.
- Invest in making play spaces accessible to children with disabilities and special needs, including those of different ages and genders.
- Implement stricter laws and policies to ensure our safety when playing and socialising online.

### United Nations and civil society organisations to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of play in our development.
- Advocate governments to build cities, communities, and playgrounds that are child-friendly, safe, and accessible to all children.
- Identify and address barriers to access to play for children with disabilities, refugees, those living in low-income communities, and other vulnerable groups.

**Businesses to:**

- Fund, design, and build inclusive and engaging play spaces that meet the needs and interests of children and young people.
- Consult children, including children with special needs, on their play preferences. Those who develop public spaces, playgrounds, and toys should particularly consult children from different backgrounds.
- Assess how your business activities and products impact our play opportunities and well-being, for example polluting our living environments, or exposing us to harmful content when we play online.





## Create more time and opportunities for play

Adults have the power to make the world more playful, and there are many things adults can do to make it happen. According to our consultations, children and young people particularly want adults to create more time for play.

Specifically, parents, caregivers, and teachers have the power to determine how children and young people allocate their time. In addition to supporting children and young people in dedicating time to homework, work, and helping out with household chores, these adults can also help secure more time for play.

### When asked how children can play more, children and young people called for:



## We recommend

### Parents to:

- Value our playtime and allocate dedicated time for us to play, in addition to time for homework and household chores.
- Stay informed about the benefits of play.
- Provide us with space to explore and create independently. Step back to observe and appreciate our play.

### School management and teachers to:

- Ensure that students have time and opportunities to play between classes.
- Integrate play into curriculum and lesson plans across subjects.
- Train teachers on how children can learn through play.
- Reduce academic pressure and homework to allow us more time for play after school.
- Educate us on vital elements of play, like inclusion and safety.
- Create a school culture that values and celebrates playfulness as an essential part of learning and development. .

### Local and national governments to:

- Include play in the school curriculum.
- Incorporate play into laws, policies, and budgets.
- Consult children, including those with special needs, to identify barriers to play and define solutions to overcome them.
- Understand that you have the power to create more play in the world! Use that power to advocate for our right to play with other governments.
- Advocate for the adoption of an International Day of Play and collaborate with us on international initiatives focused on play..

### United Nations and civil society organisations to:

- Make play a priority in your work and activities, especially for children with special needs and those living in countries affected by wars and natural disasters.
- Develop guidance to advise parents, caregivers, schools, governments, and decision-makers on how they can improve play and learning opportunities for children and young people..

### Businesses to:

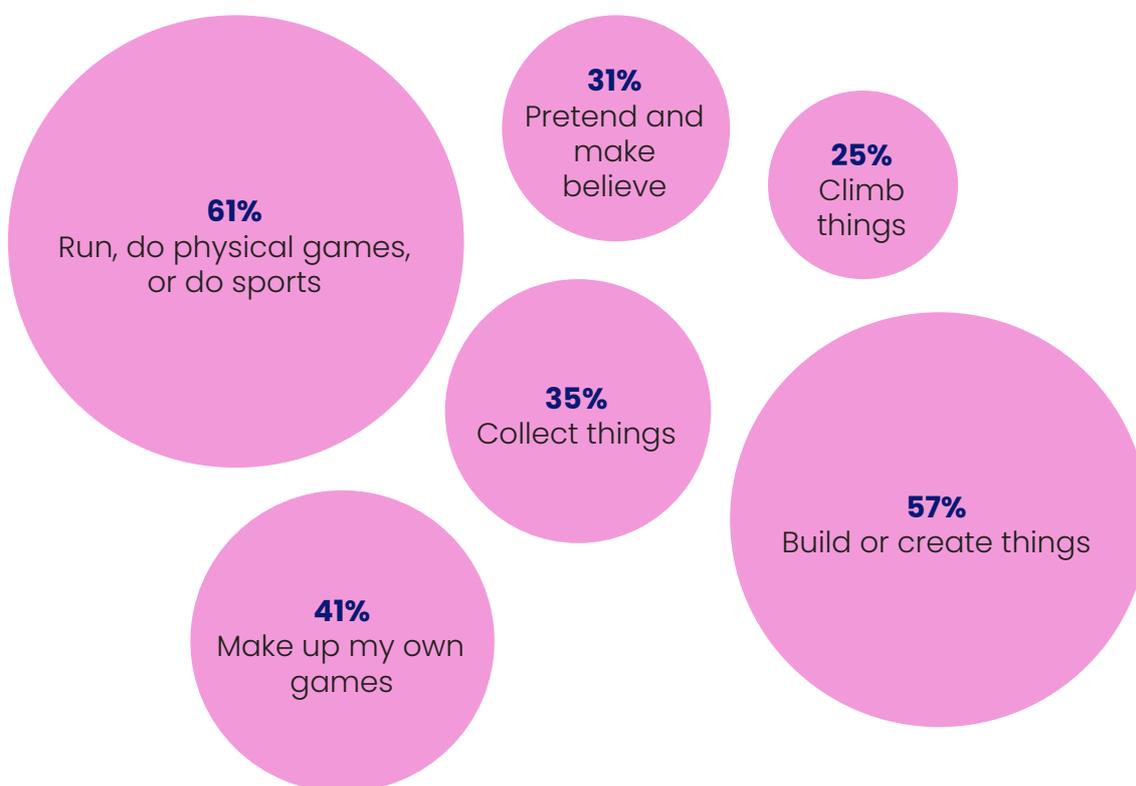
- Give money, volunteers, and resources to schools and community organisations that support play initiatives.
- Develop and promote products and services that encourage play, creativity, and inclusivity.



## Define what play should look like with children

When designing spaces for play, adults should consider that children are diverse and have varying needs and preferences regarding play. According to our survey, children and young people expressed a preference for a wide range of play activities, including sports and physical activities, building, and creating games.

**When asked about their favourite type of play, children and young people indicated the following priorities:**



Hearing children's and young people's opinions is a key part of supporting their preferred forms of play. In focus group discussions, children and young people are calling to be heard in decision-making concerning play and its characteristics. They would like to have a say when parents decide when and with whom they can play, when local governments decide on how cities and communities are planned, and when national governments decide on budgets for play and leisure.

## We recommend:

### Parents to:

- Support and encourage us to try different forms of play.
- Help us manage our screen time to allow for more active and imaginative play, while also recognising the importance of online play to us.
- Listen to us when deciding when, what, and with whom we play.

### School management and teachers to:

- Involve students in identifying play opportunities and spaces to ensure that they reflect our different needs, interests, and priorities.
- Ensure that there are always spaces dedicated to different types of play in school.

### Local and national governments to:

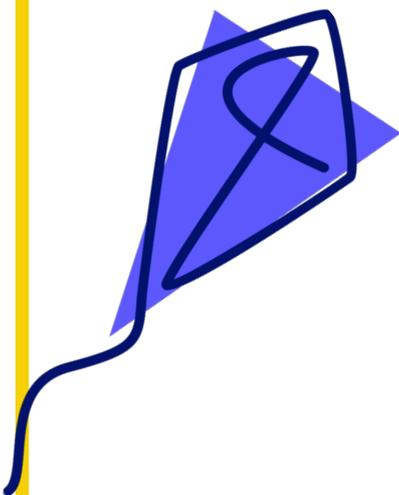
- Involve children and young people in decisions related to play. For example, establish diverse and representative children's advisory groups to advise and guide decisions regarding opportunities for play.
- Offer diverse, accessible, and affordable play and sports facilities to enhance our opportunities for play..

### United Nations and civil society organisations to:

- Work together with children and young people to promote play.

### Businesses to:

- Work together with children and young people to raise awareness and promote our right to play.



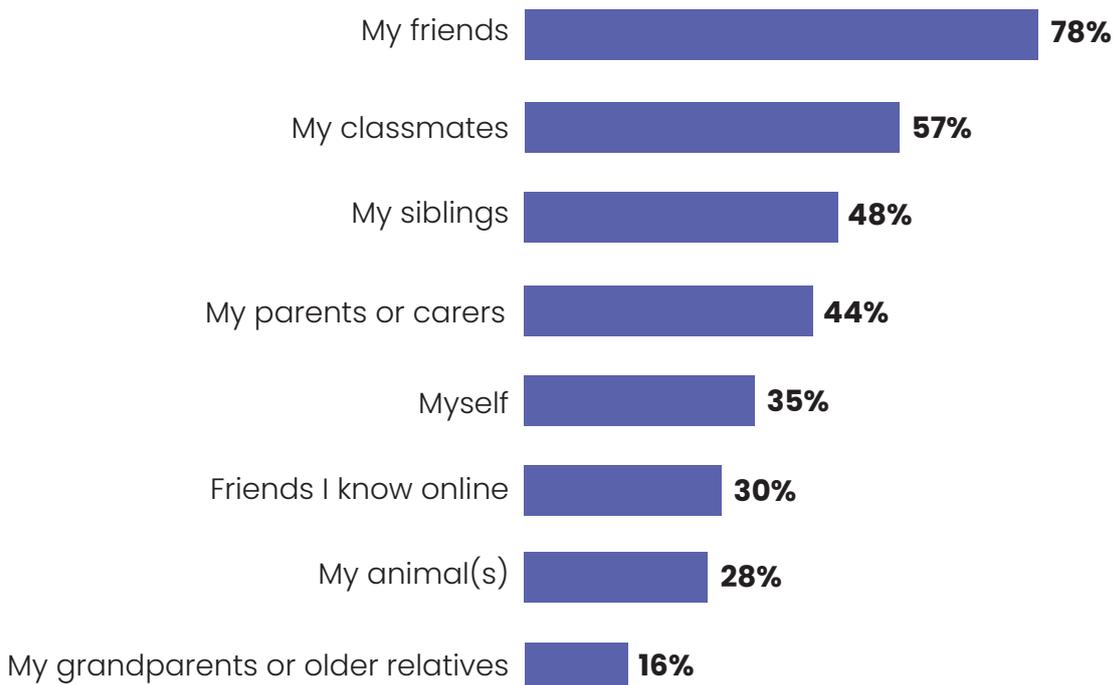


## Support children in building relationships through play

Children and young people consider play important for forming and maintaining relationships. According to our consultations, most children and young people prefer to play with their friends and classmates. Siblings, parents, or caregivers are also considered important playmates. Additionally, animals are valued play companions, although children and young people also enjoy spending time playing on their own.

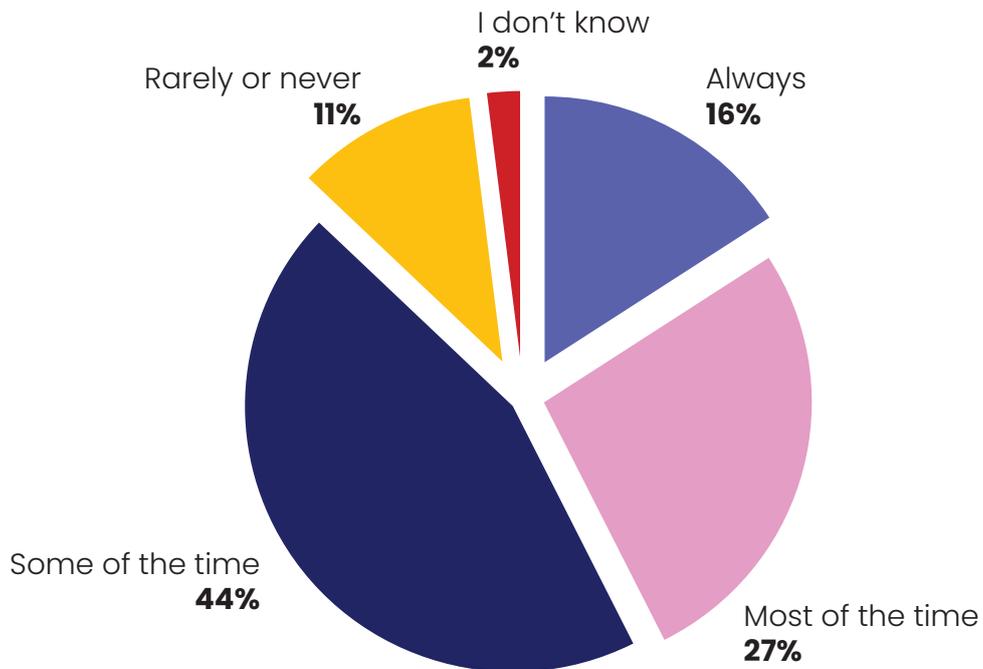
In focus group discussions, children and young people emphasised the vital role of play in developing social skills, forming friendships, and building connections with others.

### When asked who they would like to play with, children and young people responded:



While parents and caregivers are considered important playmates, 80% of children and young people express a desire to play more with them.

**When asked if they feel that parents or caregivers have enough time to play, children and young people responded:**



## **We recommend:**

### **Parents and caregivers to:**

- Encourage us to engage in social play activities with other children by providing opportunities for playdates, group activities, and hobbies.
- Designate areas at home where we can engage in play with siblings and friends.
- Play with us!

### **School management and teachers to:**

- Support us in making friends and socialising through play. Offer assistance to children who struggle with social interactions or forming friendships.
- Use play to teach us social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts.
- Ensure that play activities are inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

### **Local and national governments to:**

- Promote family-friendly policies that enable our parents to spend more time with us.
- Allocate funding to develop play spaces and parks that facilitate social interaction and relationship-building, especially for children with special needs.
- Integrate play into education for children of all ages.

### **United Nations and civil society:**

- Raise awareness among decision-makers about the critical role of play in building relationships and fostering social skills. Advocate for increased investment in play-friendly environments and programs.

### **Businesses to:**

- Create toys and games that encourage social interaction, teamwork, communication skills, and relationship-building.
- Create family-friendly workplaces that give our parents enough time to play with us.





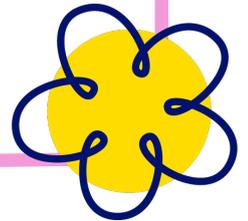
## Promote well-being and happiness through play

Play is a source of many positive emotions. 80% of children and young people think that play makes them happy.

Play also comes with many other benefits. In focus group discussions, children shared how play helps them develop their brains, learn new things, and become physically stronger. It helps them regain their energy after school, work, or other chores. Children also shared that play is an important way of dealing with difficult emotions like stress or sadness.

### When asking how playing makes them feel, children and young people responded:

1. Happy – 80%
2. Energetic – 55%
3. Creative – 48%
4. Relaxed – 45%
5. Competitive – 32%



“When I play, I feel like I’m capable, strong, and healthy.”

Nambiro, Uganda

## **We recommend:**

### **Parents to:**

- Recognise the importance of play to our health and well-being, and the negative impacts of limiting our playtime too much.
- Defend and fight for our right to play.
- Play with us!

### **Teachers and school management to:**

- Encourage us to take breaks to play to enhance our learning and well-being.
- Recognise that play helps us make friends and is important to our learning and equip us to make the most out of it.
- Collaborate with parents to reinforce the importance of play in our learning and well-being.

### **Local and national governments to:**

- Recognise the importance of play when you make decisions that affect us, especially our opportunities to play.
- Raise awareness of the importance of play in child well-being, learning, and development.
- Organise community events and programs focused on play, such as play days, sports tournaments, arts and crafts workshops, and outdoor adventure activities.
- Celebrate the importance of play on the future International Day of Play.

### **United Nations and civil society to:**

- Research the positive impacts of play on our well-being, and take action based on the re-search findings.

### **Businesses to:**

- Recognise that promoting children's right to play is important and use your power to sup-port us in advocating for our right to play.

