

2022

State of Play Australia



State of
Play



Touched
by Olivia



Let's Play!

This report honours the rights of the child, every child, to play. Since 2004, The Touched by Olivia Foundation has spoken with children, youth and families all around Australia about their Play habits. We have used this to advocate for play for ALL children and the society-wide benefits of inclusive play where everyone can play often and play together. Our mission is that every Australian community has an inclusive playspace.

This report has one main goal, to share the lived play experiences of Aussie children and families, what is stopping them from playing and how to get us all playing more.

In our Livvi's Place inclusive playspace model, we collaborate with playmakers to remove the environmental, communication, institutional and attitudinal barriers that prevent people from playing, playing with others, and playing in their local communities. We are led by kids and communities and engage with thousands of children, teens and families each year about play, inclusive place making and what a playspace requires to be used and loved – by all.

In these numerous engagements over the past few years, we observed that what children & teens tell us is often quite different from what adults tell us. This explains some of the reasons our youth aren't playing as much as we might like. Some reasons were universal right around the country, some were specific to certain locations and demographics.

The SoP 2022 is a little different to those that have gone before. In addition to aggregated national data. We have engaged with children and adults separately. We have looked at locations, age groups and those that live with disability and compared this information.

One unified, resounding response, from both kids and adults everywhere was that they value the importance of play and believe our children and teens need to, want to and should play more!

On that note, this is a call to action to all play makers, play champions and play experts, AKA – the kids. Remember, play is children's work; it is the lens through which they synthesise living, learning and ultimately thriving. It is the bedrock to a healthy and happy childhood and the foundation to an inquisitive, resourceful, creative, resilient and connected adult life.

Read on and see how deep, authentic engagement with all in our communities can ensure a just use of our public spaces and create playspaces where we will all play, play more often and play together.



No 2 children are the same - but they all love to play!



The UN Sustainable Development Goals for the State of Play survey are

- ⊕ Good Health & Wellbeing**
- ⊕ Quality Education**
- ⊕ Reduced Inequalities**
- ⊕ Partnerships for the Goals**

Overview

This report shares our national survey results to find out who is playing, with whom, when, where and how. Importantly, who is not playing, why this is the case and what do we need to do to make sure that everyone can play.

We asked questions that delved into the inequity of play provision and how lack of play opportunity impacts health and wellbeing. We looked at current lifestyle trends, explored the screen effect and the after-school activity overload to see how all of these are effecting the quantity and quality of play.

We didn't forget the teens either, inspired by our national mental health, obesity and lack of physical activity figures for this age group. They're too cool to call it play, but we wanted to hear what they thought about our parks and outdoor passive recreation spaces on offer to them.

Inclusive play and design labels are used in many and varied ways. Here is how we define the use of these terms for this report.

Play – as a natural, creative, freely chosen, child-directed, active process of self-discovery and learning.

Inclusion – is when we feel safe, welcome & that we belong.

Accessible Space – those with physical disability able to enter a space.

All Abilities – considers stages of development or range of capacity to participate.

Inclusive Space – Where there is a range of choice and options to participate equally with others.



Inclusion



Accessible

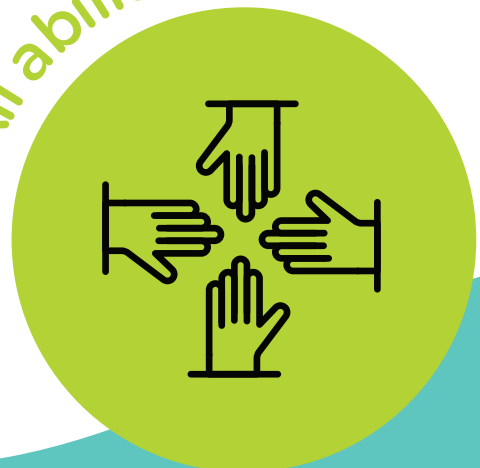


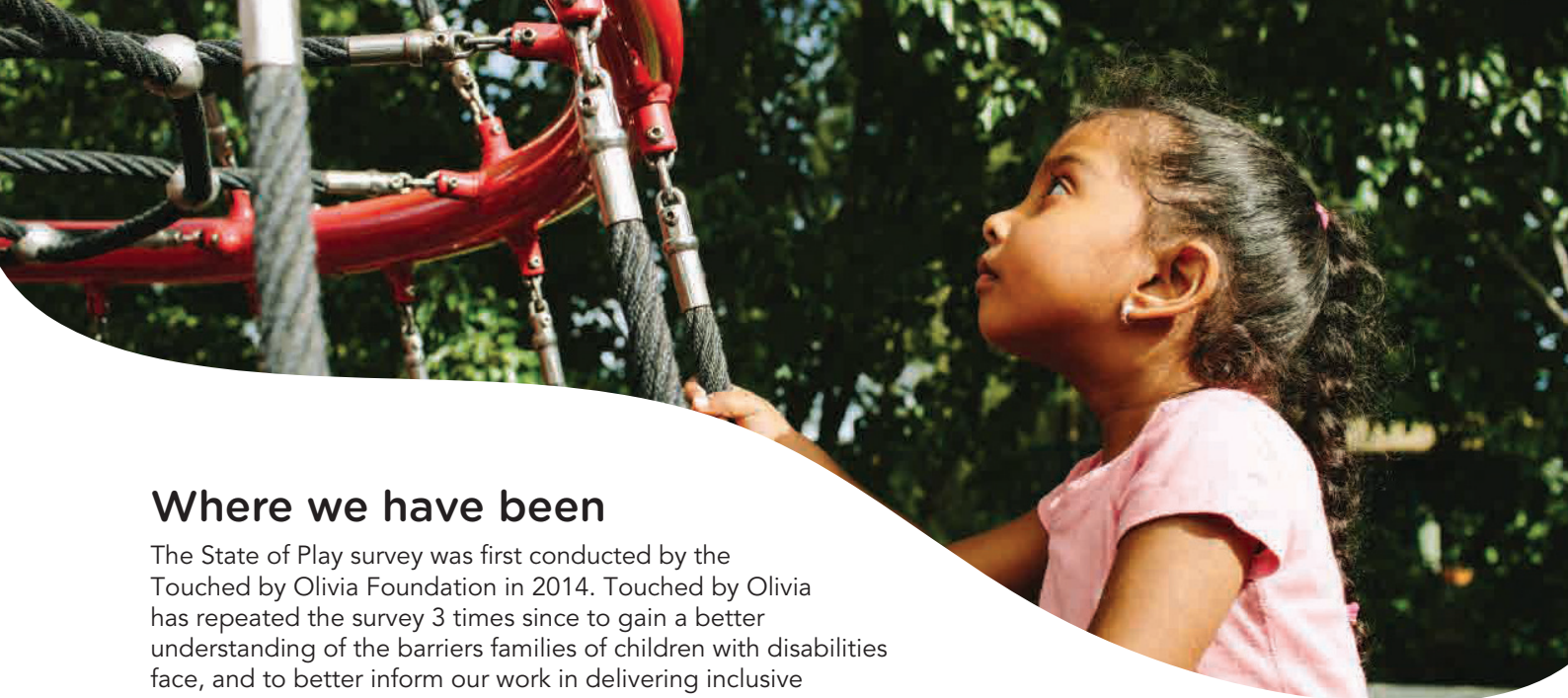
Kids 1st Approach

Play



All abilities





Where we have been

The State of Play survey was first conducted by the Touched by Olivia Foundation in 2014. Touched by Olivia has repeated the survey 3 times since to gain a better understanding of the barriers families of children with disabilities face, and to better inform our work in delivering inclusive playspaces across Australia.

www.touchedbyolivia.com.au



Where we are now

There is currently a network of more than 45 Livvi's Place playspaces across Australia. They are sought out and well-known throughout the country as thriving family and community destinations where all are welcome and included. They are seen as a standard of best practice in community-led inclusive playspace design and delivery in Australia. Many councils and developers are also working hard to deliver inclusive playspaces. However, participatory planning and inclusive design still remains the exception, rather than the norm on the whole. Embedding best practice from the outset is the goal.



Where we need to go from here

This survey is a representative sample of how many children and youth across the country are not experiencing the benefits and joy of play due to many and varied barriers.

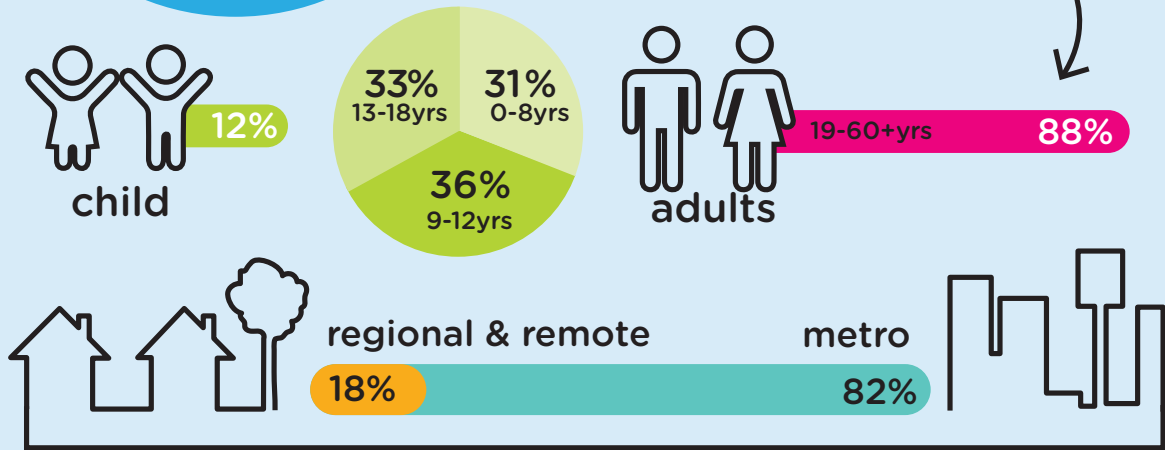
This report is invested in increasing awareness of this lack of play provision for all and also in education around what the barriers to play are in the words of children, teens & families. Preparing this report is part of our strategy to increase people's awareness that there is a serious lack of play provision for all and that more education must occur around the barriers to play that continue to exist in the lives of children, teens and families. We hope that by doing this we will also bring more communities together through play.

As the survey reflects, without advocacy and promotion of core values of inclusion and benefits of play for all children, many will continue to miss out on the important social and peer support that organically occurs at playspaces every day. Children and families living with disability will continue to be socially isolated and miss out on the opportunity to be included and play alongside their peers. Inclusive play provides the opportunity for people living with disability to become more visible in their community. It also helps to break down the barriers and prejudices so many people hold towards people with disability.

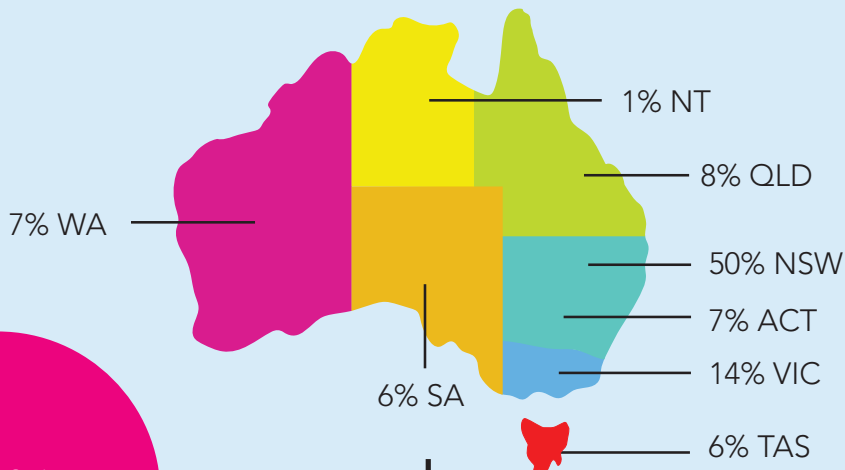
The Process

The survey was open to all people from all states and territories and all ages with questions for children (0-18) and adults (19-60+). The data was collected online via Typeform from September 24 to November 25, 2021

600 people completed the survey!



Overall, the survey respondents represented every state:



61%



Have a family member living with disability

53% of families have a child living with disability
8% have an adult living with disability
8% have both a child & adult living with disability

39%



Have no family members living with a disability

The Results



**State of
Play**



Summary of Findings and Recommendations:

Priorities For Inclusive Play

Delving into the results of the State of Play survey, we have identified the following priorities for advancing inclusive play opportunities for communities in Australia.

1.

An inclusive playspace in **every local community**. Families want to play more, however, most need to drive to play or passive recreation spaces that cater for their ages or are inclusive. Driving to playspaces takes more time and effort and this is a big reason we are not playing.

2.

Greater provision for **regional & rural communities**. The children and youth in these locations have far fewer play opportunities than their metro friends. Kids living with disability in rural communities have extremely limited opportunities to play with purpose or independence.

3.

Design needs to consider and provide safety, fun and comfort for all ages. **Inclusive means 0-100!** Due to safety considerations most kids under 12 go to playspaces with adults, and in more recent times, many with grandparents. Additionally, teens feel they aren't considered in the planning of open spaces. They feel unwelcome, but they want safe places to be outside with their friends as they understand play improves wellbeing.

4.

Parents want their children to play more, but our current way of life puts play way down on the priority list. Despite parents understanding the benefits of play, it is a struggle getting **play higher on their agenda**. The catalyst to getting play prioritised is through offering local, easy enjoyment of intergenerational spaces that provide a sense of community.

5.

Listen to and **co-design with kids & teens** - they are the real play experts. Kids shared different priorities for their play than the adults. It's vitally important that children and teens have input into the spaces that are meant to be for them.

6.

Kids told us they value playtime and want us to **up the ante**. They play to stimulate all senses, experience a sense of adventure, be free, immerse in nature and want spaces to foster relationships. They feel less connected to their community with the lure of technology, jam-packed timetables and seek solace from this when they go to a park or playspace. They need local spaces that allow them to gather, particularly teens, to make friends and have time and opportunity to connect with themselves, others and nature and thus improve their mental health.

7.

Embrace a **risk for benefit** approach. Kids rated risky play as a high motivator to go to the park and their playspaces had very limited opportunities. Adults had risk as the lowest factor when considering what kids want or need.



We hope the State of Play report 2022 will give councils, developers and designers a better understanding of the needs and wants of kids and communities when it comes to creating playspaces and recreational parks.

A great day of play makes us...



70%
Happy and excited to play more
↓
Prioritises the importance of play for kids

55%
Exhausted but energised and healthy
↓
Encourages healthy lifestyle choices

51%
Safe, free and independent
↓
Builds self esteem, risk taking and resilience

42%
Calm and relaxed
↓
Supports mental health



28%
Skilful and strong
↓
Promotes child development

22%
Part of my local community
↓
Promotes acceptance and belonging



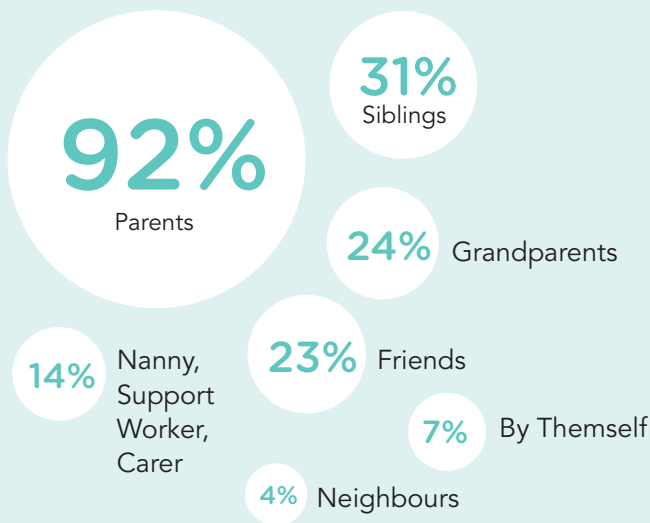
Why we play

Why do you go to the playspace or park?

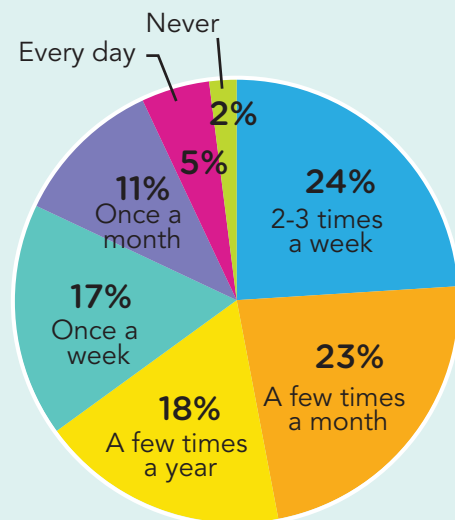
1. To have fun and play
2. To get out of the house for a change of scenery
3. To play on equipment we don't have at home
4. To have some calm time outside in the fresh air
5. To get active and better at playing eg: climbing
6. To access a free activity
7. To play with other kids
8. To have time to chat and catch up with family and friends
9. To celebrate a birthday or social occasion
10. To meet other people in our neighbourhood



Who do you usually go with?



How many times do you visit a playspace?



Overall, 71% of children and youth are experiencing outdoor, free play in a playspace once a week or less.

1 in 3 said they visit a playspace only once a month, a few times a year or never. Of these respondents, 75% have a family member with disability. **Therefore, disability makes it THREE times more likely you won't experience the playspace very often.**

Of the 46% who visit the playspace most often (multiple times a week or every day), only 14% are in regional or remote areas. **People living in regional and remote areas are 86% LESS likely to visit a playspace multiple times a week compared to their metro counterparts.**

What stops kids from playing?

Safety

Do you allow your children or grandchildren to go to a playspace without adult supervision?



Are you allowed to visit a playspace without an adult?



Top reasons why kids don't go to the playspace by themselves:

Adults whose children are over 8 years:

81% Fears about safety

46% Road safety

Youth aged 9-18 who answered:

60% Don't feel safe without an adult

60% Road safety

Overwhelmingly, both kids and parents agree that safety fears are stopping them from playing in playgrounds.

Facilities

49%

Of adults said their kids can't go to the playspace by themselves because they can't access or play independently.

Locality Are there enough local playspaces in walking distance to keep you engaged and happy?

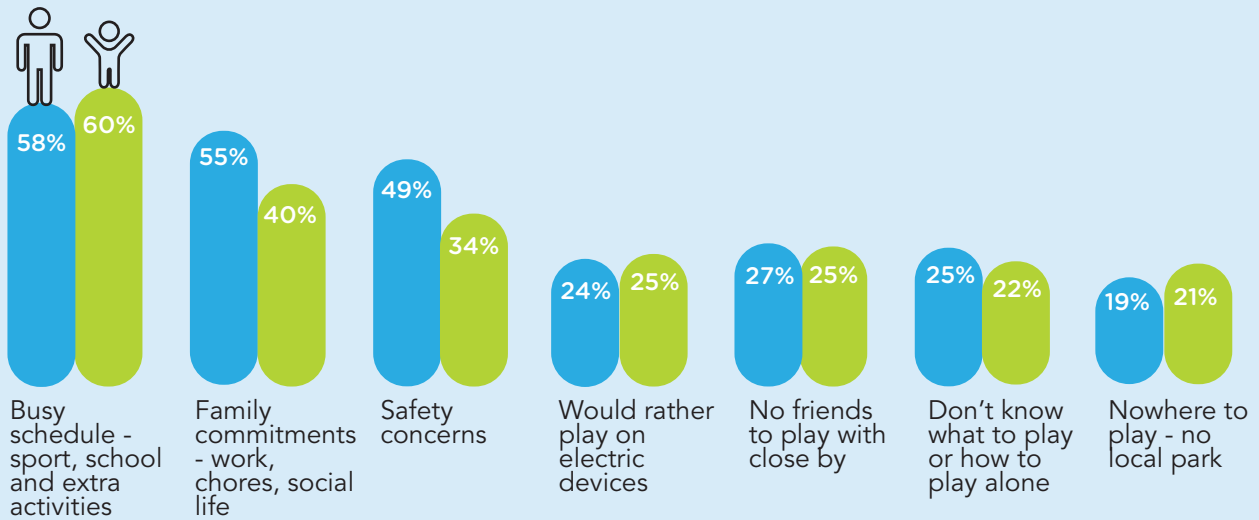


44% said there aren't enough LOCAL playspaces that they actually enjoy and want to go to.

What stops kids from playing?

What factors limit your child's free play time?

● Adults ● Children



1 in 4 (both kids and adults) say they don't know how to play by themselves.

Parents don't prioritise play, even though 94% admit they want their children to play more. Instead, children are over scheduled and over committed.

1 in 4 children and adults say they don't know how to play by themselves.

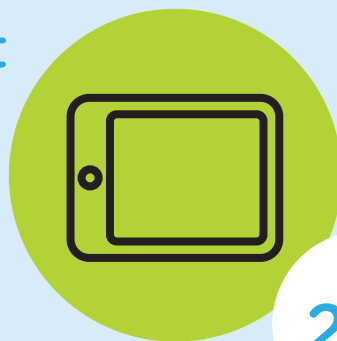
The screen effect

93% of adults think their children spend too much time on screens.

And the kids admit it too - a whopping 2 in 3 children spend up to 5 hours a day in front of a screen. 1 in 3 spend up to 10 hours!

That's time that could be spent playing and learning through play.

83% of kids wish they had more time to play.



64%

Up to 5 hours a day in front of a screen

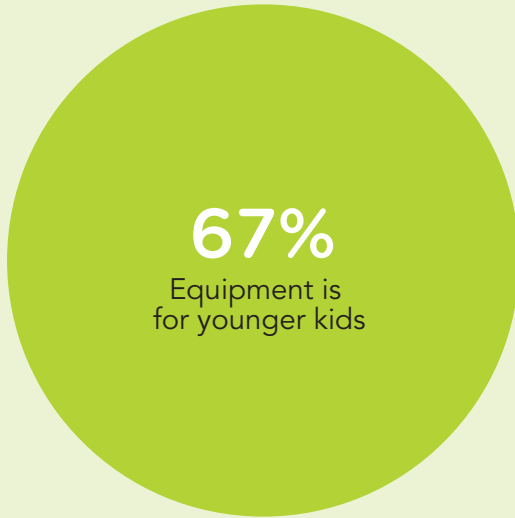
26% 5-10 hours a day

9% 10+ hours a day

1% Only 1% of kids said they have no screentime

What our teenagers say

Why don't you play at public playspaces?



I am too busy with school, sports and extra activities



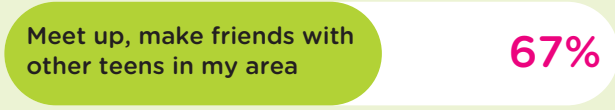
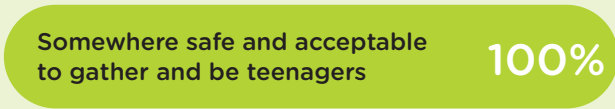
Teenagers don't feel welcome to gather and be active in parks



Nothing there interests me or my friends



Why is it important you have public parks or physical outdoor activity spaces for teens?



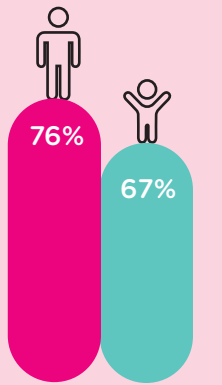
Community engagement is key to developing playspaces and public recreation spaces that cater to the entire community. Inclusion means designing intergenerational spaces where all ages can spend quality time together.

Top tip: If you don't know what the teens want, just ask them!

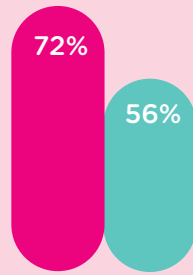
How can we get more kids playing?

What would make visiting playspaces and parks more fun and enjoyable for you?

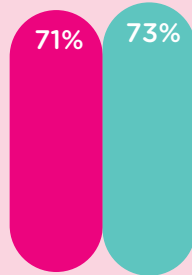
● Adults ● Children



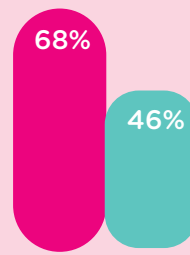
Equipment for all ages and abilities, particularly teens and even adults



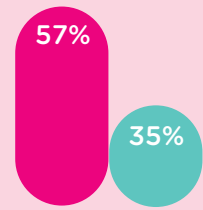
Toilets for everyone - nappy changing facilities and lift assistance for older children and adults



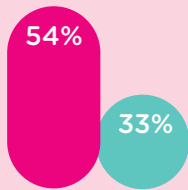
More shade, trees and nature incorporated



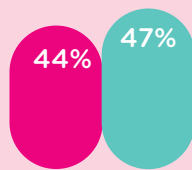
Equipment we can all play with and on together



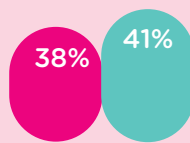
Sensory play - sandpits, water, music and sounds



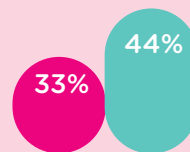
Fencing around the playspace



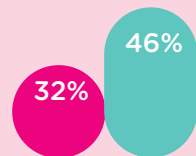
Better seating



Different spaces such as quiet, hiding, social spaces to just chat



Cooking facilities and space for picnics and event gatherings



Equipment that is tricky and you want to improve on

Kids want to build resilience

Kids rank risky play as #5 priority versus adults ranking it last as a reason to visit a playspace. They say they want to play on equipment that is tricky so they can improve skills. It's more than kids wanting to experience new things; kids need to be exposed to risk taking to develop skills, test their boundaries & learn about their own strengths and weaknesses.

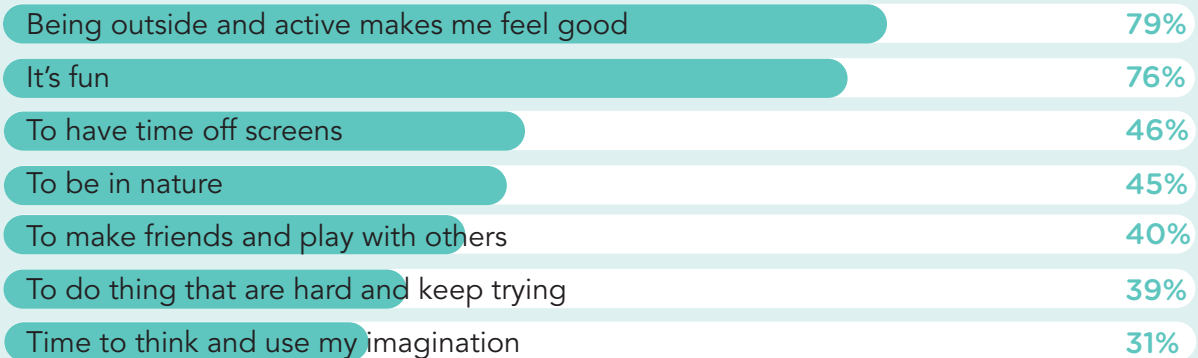
Kids seek connection to community

More shade and nature is the top priority for 3 in 4 kids. They also want better seating, while facilities for picnics and event gatherings and social and quiet spaces to chat is also a priority for them. **Kids are clearly saying that socialising in public spaces is important to them – they want shaded places where they can build friendships and community connections.**



Health & play connection

Why kids think play is important



Community connections

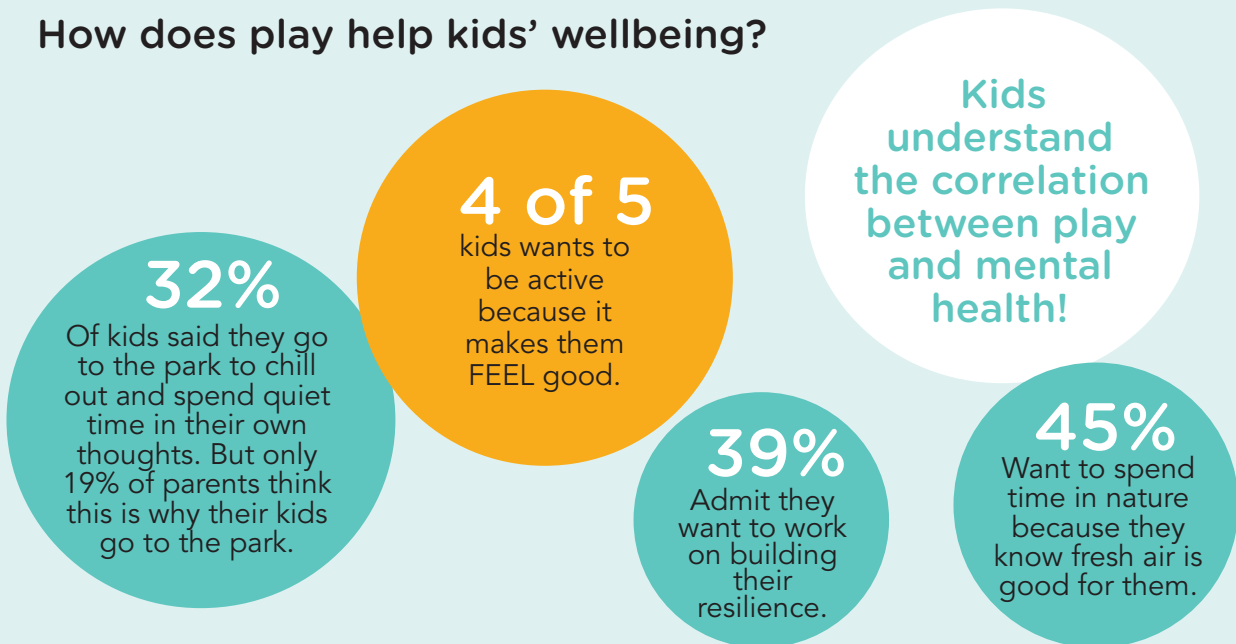


2 out of 5 of kids don't feel connected to their community at all.



1 in 3 adults agree their kids don't have strong community bonds.

How does play help kids' wellbeing?



1 in 4 kids

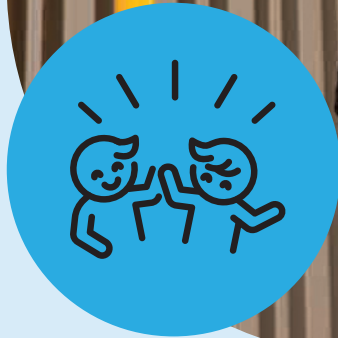


25% of kids worry a lot and rate their mental health as below average. Parents aren't aware of their child's mental health struggles. Only 13% stating their child has low mental health.

Yes, kids want screens and technology – but **46% want to get out and off the screens** – they just need the right facilities in their local spaces to make this happen.
Kids understand that time outside, with friends engaging in play or passive recreation is good for their mental health.

How much time kids play

How much outdoor free play do your kids engage in weekly?



38%
6+hrs

33%
3-5hrs

20%
2hrs

2%
0hrs

8%
1hr

A whopping 63% of kids are playing less than 6 hours a week. That's not even an hour a day!
1 in 3 are lucky to play for 15 minutes a day.

Kids, in your opinion, is this true or not true:

"I wish I had more time to play."

83%
True

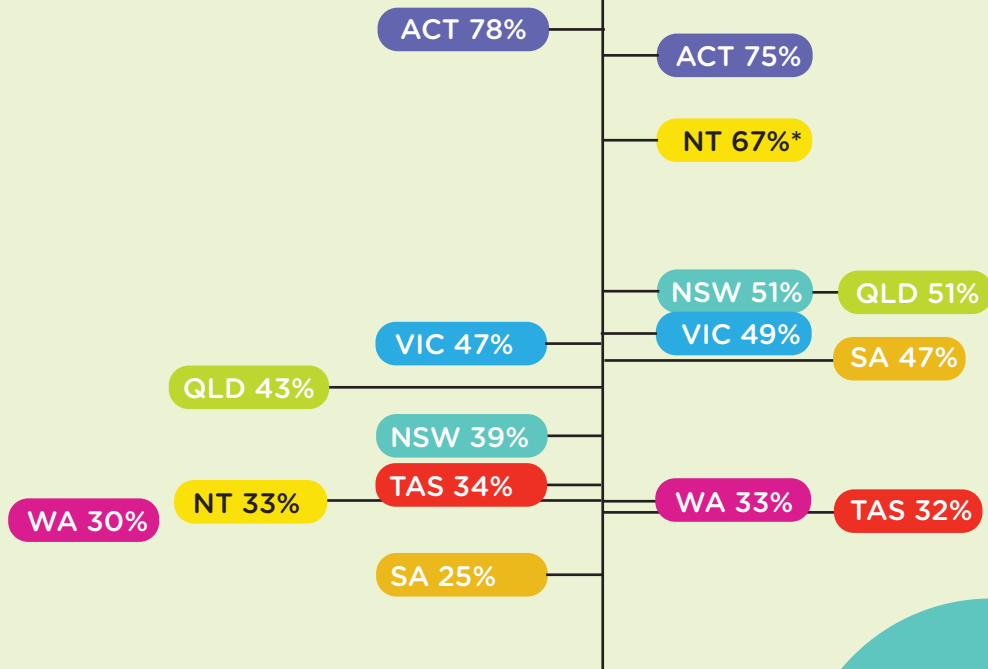


17%
Not True

How each state plays

Who plays the most?
(Those who visit the playspace at least once a week or more)

Who has the most local playgrounds?



*All NT respondents to this question are from Darwin, so is not a true representation of the state.

Those with greatest access to a local playspace are also among those who play the most.



The sentiment is that if you build it local, they will PLAY!





What play means to kids

“

I feel happy when I play;
it helps me imagine
a different world.

Laura, 12 years

“ What play means to children?

It gives me a good place to hang out with my brother usually. We just go there later in the day when there isn't many people so we can chill out together and talk.

Tyler, 15 years



Play is learning, showing what you know what you can achieve, having a go and through all of that your feelings begin to get hurt they get happy they get sad they get excited they get frightened they get stretched so you become physically mentally and emotionally getting to know yourself and most of the time you're happy and having a lot of fun.

Josiah, 7 years

Play is energy! It is important because it gets all of your squiggles out and makes me happier!

Adz, 6 years

Playing is a time to let go of any outside stress. It shouldn't be limited to children. Anyone can play because playing isn't one thing. To play is to be free and to think creatively. It can be running around in a world of your own or sitting down and just admiring the world around you. Play let's us be who we really are without judgement or fear which is important for growth.

Sienna, 14 years




Playing isn't just fun, it has more to it. It calms kids down and makes them feel more free and shows how much imagination they have. Without play the world would just be boring and dull.

Ereny, 13 years

Kids of all ages should be able to have fun, chat with friends and enjoy life. When I play I feel safe and warm inside. It is just so important to have a good state of mind and when I play, I have that.

Bradley, 12 years



What
inclusion
means
to kids

“

Everyone together.
Access, understanding,
respect, opportunity
that's equal for all.
It's in action and in
mentality. We all belong.

Isaac, 10 years



“ What inclusion means to kids

Having things I can access at a park, not just for babies and little kids. I love to swing and play at parks, but the equipment is too small for me.

Lily, 17 years

If everyone could enjoy the fun, activities and moments at the same place, it is inclusion to me. In my situation as a child on the spectrum, even I am still unsure how to make friends with other kids. However, I am able to enjoy all the fun activities and equipment at the playgrounds at the same time with others.

Chi, 8 years

Inclusion means being accepted for you and no physical or mental differences should ever change that.

Emily, 15 years

I love playing as it makes me happy and I love when I can be included and play with my friends in my walker or wheelchair. I learn lots of new skills and how to cooperate.

Alex, 7 years

Growing up 30 years ago with a sister with disability, inclusion in play was never a thing. Playgrounds were for the able bodied children, that was that. When I see playgrounds now that are inclusive of all abilities it warms my soul. To see children of all abilities accessing play spaces, the joy this brings to them is clear but.. the joy this brings to their parents, families and educators is something most people will never truly understand. To see the person you love be included and valued is worth more than gold.

Rachel





Congratulations to Place Design Group winning the Award of Excellence for Playground Design and Development for Variety Livvi's Place Glenfield at the NSC Orator Awards 2021.



Edgebrook also won Park of the Year at the Park & Leisure Australia's National Awards of Excellence 2021.



Congratulations to the City of Casey and Stockland, winning Playspace of the Year at the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) Victoria Landscape Architecture Award 2021 for Variety Livvi's Place Edgebrook.



Congratulations to Livvi's Place Albert Park, Cootamundra winning the Award of Excellence for Playground Design and Development at the NSC Orator Awards 2022

