

Chwarae Cymru  
Play Wales



# What children say about play in Wales: 2022

'I love to play out with my friends because it's fun and nice to see them again'



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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

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## **Acknowledgements**

A huge thank-you must go to all our local authority partners who worked with us in planning, collecting, collating and sharing the data that makes up this report. Having a standardised survey that is now being used by most local authorities means that we can reliably record children and teenagers' voices from across the country. In turn, we can use this information to better understand and explain to others the barriers to creating a play friendly environment which provides time, space and permission for children and teenagers to play in Wales.

## **Author**

This report has been written by Dr David Dallimore.

David is an independent policy advisor and research consultant specialising in early years childcare and play. He previously worked at Bangor University on research projects including as a WISERD Fellow looking at civil society and volunteering as well as researching and publishing on social care, health and early childhood. He has been an advisor to the Welsh Government and a Fellow of the Senedd Research Service.

# Introduction

**Wales is committed to being a play friendly country<sup>1</sup>. By valuing and increasing quality play opportunities it is hoped that children and teenagers will have more time, space and permission to play, and so enjoy the health, social, mental and emotional benefits that play provides.**

This report provides a summary of information collected by local authorities across Wales as part of their legal duty to assess the play opportunities that children and teenagers have in their areas.

The Play Sufficiency Duty, as it has become known, is part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children and teenagers can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration. This kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales. In measuring play sufficiency it is important to appreciate children and teenagers' perspectives on what is good and what is not so good about their experience of play in their communities. Most local authorities do this by talking to them in person and by undertaking surveys. These can be used to understand the barriers to creating a play friendly environment and the results have an important role in providing the evidence needed for local authorities to identify gaps in provision and support the development of action plans to address these gaps.

By collating play sufficiency survey data from local authorities, Play Wales has been able to investigate children and teenagers' varying experiences of play across the country. By doing this regularly, we are able to show how those experiences are evolving over time and in response to changing circumstances.

Our last report – *'I learn new things and climb trees'* *What children say about play in Wales* – published in 2019<sup>2</sup> found that when they are allowed out, and able to play in the places they want to, most children and teenagers were happy with the choice of good quality spaces, and overall were satisfied with their play opportunities. Nonetheless, a number of factors were found to restrict their right to play.

Limitations of time, space and permission impede opportunities for them to experience satisfaction in their opportunities to play.

Since then, children and teenagers' lives have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, when for over two years restrictions directly impacted on children's play opportunities due to social distancing, the lack of outdoor access, closure of play spaces, time with friends, school closures and online learning. It is timely therefore, to provide an update on children and teenagers' views and opinions using survey data gathered by local authorities across 2021 and 2022 as part of their 2022 Play Sufficiency Assessments.

In this report, we present an analysis of responses from nearly 7,000 children and teenagers in Wales where they tell us about what's good and what's not so good about the play opportunities in their local area and how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play.

## Background

Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficiency of play opportunities for children. The first part of the duty, the duty to assess sufficiency of play opportunities, was commenced in 2012, with local authorities being required to submit a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) to the Welsh Government every three years. This means that by 2022, four PSAs have been completed and submitted by local authorities in Wales.

The second part of the duty, the duty to secure sufficient play opportunities, was commenced in 2013 and sits within the Welsh Government's overall rights-based approach to legislating for children and young people. This approach is enshrined in Welsh law under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. A rights-based approach allows for an appreciation of the intrinsic value of play as a right as well as its instrumental value for addressing other policy concerns. It also makes a clear statement about how society in Wales views children and childhood.

## The research

Statutory guidance<sup>3</sup> for local authorities includes a toolkit and template to guide the information required in the PSA. These were developed in partnership between the Welsh Government, Play Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The toolkit and template were updated in 2015, in 2019 and further revised for the 2022 PSA. The toolkit includes a standard *Play Satisfaction Survey* that seeks to gain the views of children and teenagers about the play opportunities in their local area. Support for local authorities in deploying the survey was provided by Play Wales in 2021-22 through a series of workshops and a new guide to using the *Play Satisfaction Survey*.

In 2022, Play Wales asked local authorities in Wales to share the results from their *Play Satisfaction Survey*. Of the 22 local authorities, 17 responded and 15 were able to provide anonymised data in a format that could be used for this report (compared with 13 in 2019). One consequence of the pandemic has been an increase in the use of online versions of the survey. This has resulted in greater consistency of how the data is collected, but also greater digital literacy has improved the range of data. For example, for the first time we were able to collate more localised data from postcodes or from knowing where children and teenagers attend school. In turn, this has meant that we can examine factors such as rurality and indices of deprivation in our analysis. Across most questions posed in the *Play Satisfaction Survey*, we have presented graphs and charts that break down responses by these factors and also by characteristics including gender, disability, ethnicity and age.

A full breakdown of the profile of survey respondents is contained in Appendix 1.

While there are some limitations to the data (see Appendix 1) it provides a unique set of information. We hope that it will be useful and interesting for policy-makers, those responsible for ensuring play sufficiency in local communities, playworkers and parents.

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. For children and teenagers themselves, playing and hanging out together is one of the most important aspects of their lives. They value time, freedom and quality places to play. When asked what is important to them, they consistently mention playing and gathering with their friends. When they play, children and teenagers contribute to their immediate wellbeing and to their own development.

For children to have sufficient play opportunities, they need time to play, space to play and the recognition by adults that this is every child's right. Children's play is therefore reliant on having the space, time and permission to play, and sufficiency of play opportunity can only exist where all three of these things are positively presented. The questions in the survey were designed to examine these themes and therefore, the three domains form the structure for our analysis and this report.



# Time to play

There is good evidence that children’s play is vital for their social and physical development and play is often the way they wish to spend their free time<sup>4</sup>. Children associate free time with freedom, independence and choice. However, play of this nature is often limited and increasingly precious.

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* asked children and teenagers firstly, how much time they spent playing ‘out’, and then asked whether the time they had to play was sufficient.

## How often do children play?

In responding to the question, ‘How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?’, 38% of children and teenagers said that they go out and play or hang

out with friends most days. A further 33% play out a few days a week. However, 29% never, or hardly ever play out. When compared with 2019, we found that in 2022 they are playing out less regularly. While the proportion who don’t ever play out with friends has not changed, those who hardly ever play out rose from 17% to 21%.

The decline in children and teenagers playing out may be a hangover from COVID-19 restrictions (and certainly as is discussed later, children talked a lot about the restrictions that they faced during the pandemic) but it may also be reflective of longer-term trends<sup>5</sup> showing that less of children’s time is being devoted to play, in favour of structured or educational activities.

### How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?

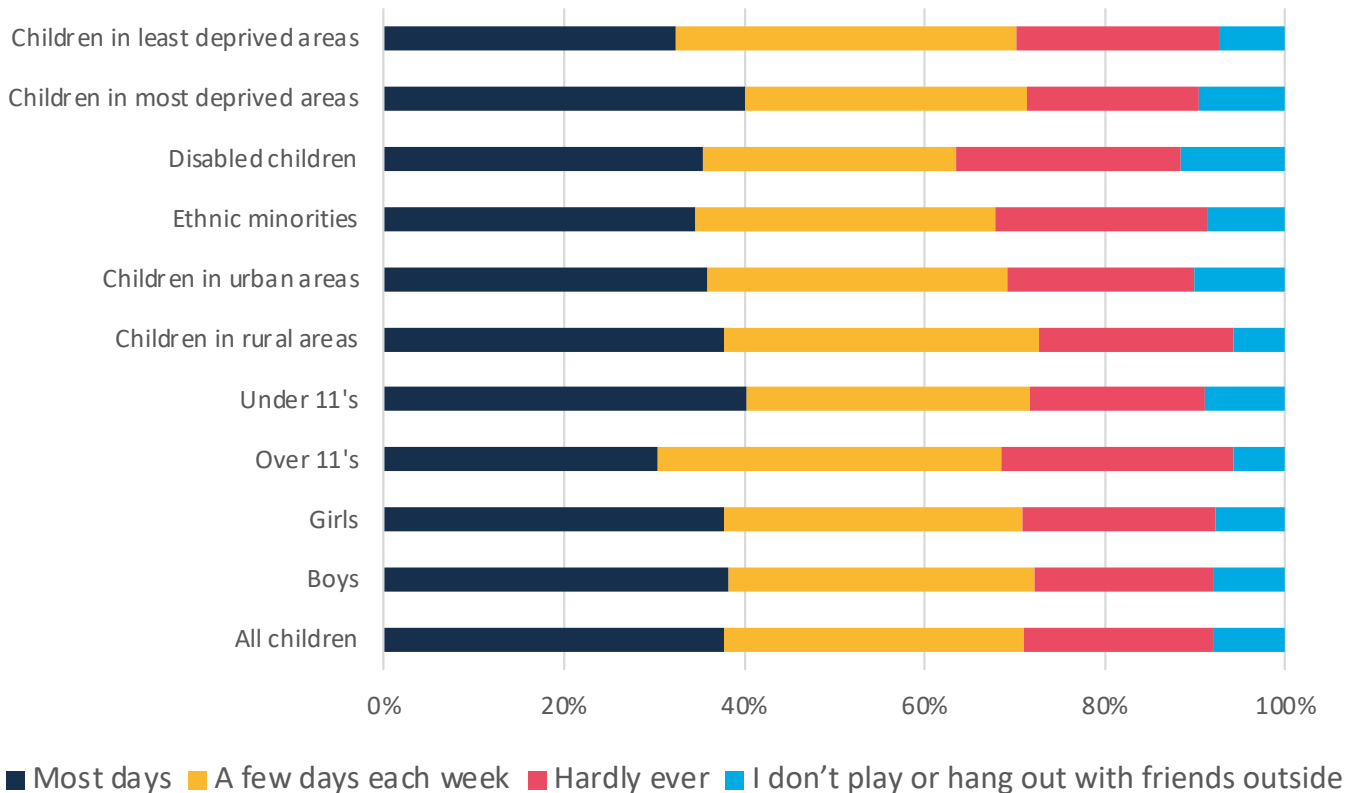


Figure 1: Time spent playing out (6,869 responses)

As found in 2019, there was little difference in responses between the time that boys and girls play out but we found that younger children (under 11's) play out far more than older children and teenagers (aged 11 and over). 37% of disabled children (compared with 29% of all children) said that they rarely, or never play out.

Some differences can be observed between children and teenagers living in deprived areas where they were more likely to play out most days, but also more likely than those in less deprived areas not to play

out at all. This is consistent with previous research<sup>6</sup> that has found that children are less likely to play out independently if they are from more affluent homes, and if they do not have family networks close-by.

Although there was no significant difference in the time spent playing out between those living in rural and urban areas, there was a difference between responses across local authorities, with only 14% playing out most days in Cardiff compared with nearly 60% in Pembrokeshire.

### Children who play-out most days

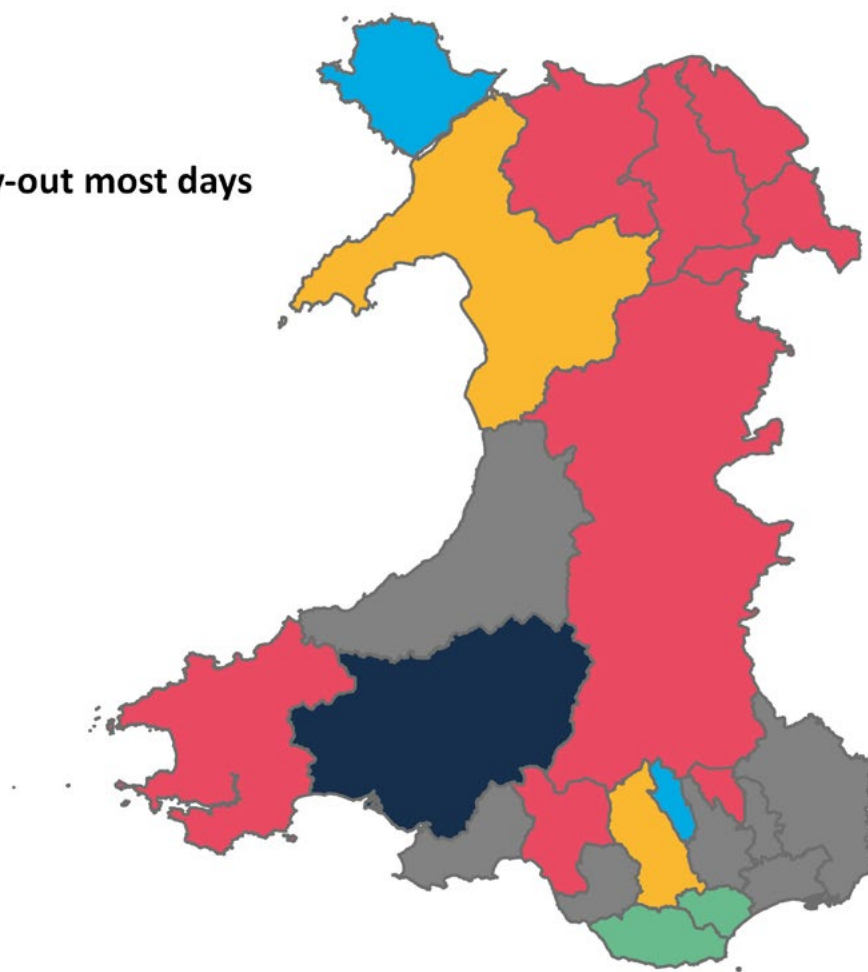
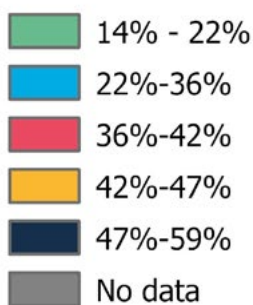


Figure 2: Proportion of children who play out most days – by local authority



## Do children have enough time to play?

With a slight decline since 2019, we found that three-quarters of children and teenagers in Wales said that they had loads, or enough time to play, while a quarter said that they did not have enough time or would like more time to play.

Girls, older children and children living in more deprived areas were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of time they had to play. Least satisfied were disabled children, where 37% said they needed much more time for playing or hanging out with friends. Consistent with the previous question, in the areas that we have data for, more respondents in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan said that they needed a lot more time to play, while those in Merthyr Tydfil, Flintshire and Neath Port Talbot were most likely to say that they had sufficient time to play.

‘There’s not enough time as school takes up most of the day.’

Girl aged 11 or over from Merthyr Tydfil

‘I don't always get long enough to play on the things I like.’

Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire

### Do you have enough time for playing or hanging out with friends?

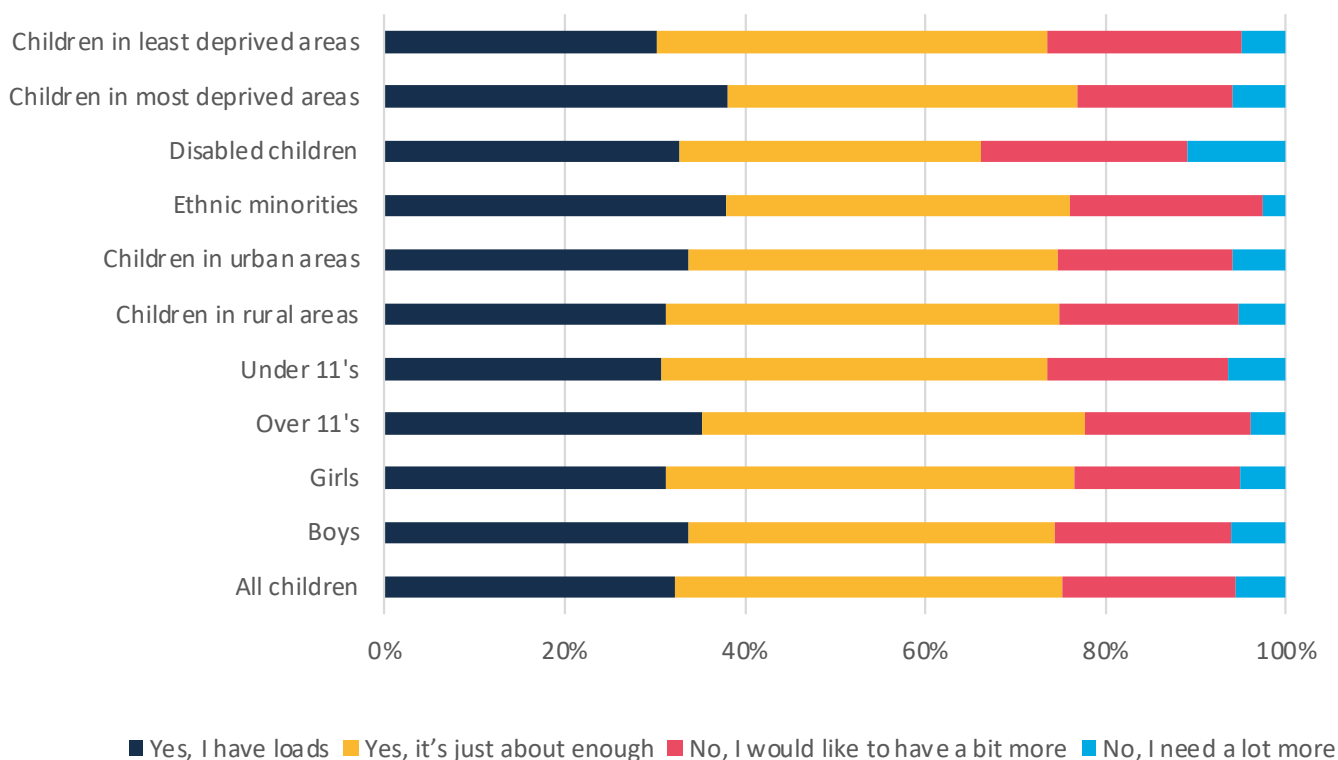


Figure 3: Time to play (6,836 responses)

### Children who don't have enough time to play

- Less than 15%
- 15% to 20%
- 20% to 25%
- 25% to 31%
- 31% to 40%
- No data



Figure 4: Children who say they don't have enough time to play or hang out by local authority



# Space to play

While children and teenagers need the time to play, they also need spaces that are accessible to them where they feel safe and that facilitate the kind of play that they want. While these include ‘formal’ designated play spaces such as playgrounds, playing fields, skateparks or games areas, other places that they really value are often places not formally recognised. These include the streets, open ground and local woods.

## Where children play

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* asked children and teenagers about the types of places where they play or hang out. While there are some small differences in the places girls and boys play and between local authority areas, the greatest differences are found when examining preferences by age.

Unsurprisingly, respondents of all ages most commonly play or hang out in each other’s houses or gardens, but for younger children, structured spaces – both outdoors and indoors – were found to play a larger role. For children under 11, play areas with swings, slides and other equipment to play on

seem important. Given that these are predominantly provided and maintained by local authorities, their importance in contributing to play sufficiency should not be underestimated.

For older children and teenagers, streets, open ground, local woods and other informal spaces were more important. The proportion visiting formal provision – such as youth clubs – was lower than observed in previous surveys. In 2022, we also found that fewer than one in ten aged 11 or over used a youth club. Whether this is due to reduced provision or changing preferences is unknown.

From their responses, we were able to calculate the average number of different spaces children and teenagers identified as places where they play. This is useful in indicating the extent of choice of play space available with different characteristics and in different locations. We found (Figure 6) that girls use a greater variety of play spaces than boys, as do younger children, children living in rural areas and those living in more deprived areas. Disabled children and ethnic minority children report using a lower than average number of play spaces.

When you’re not in school, what types of places do you play or hang out in?

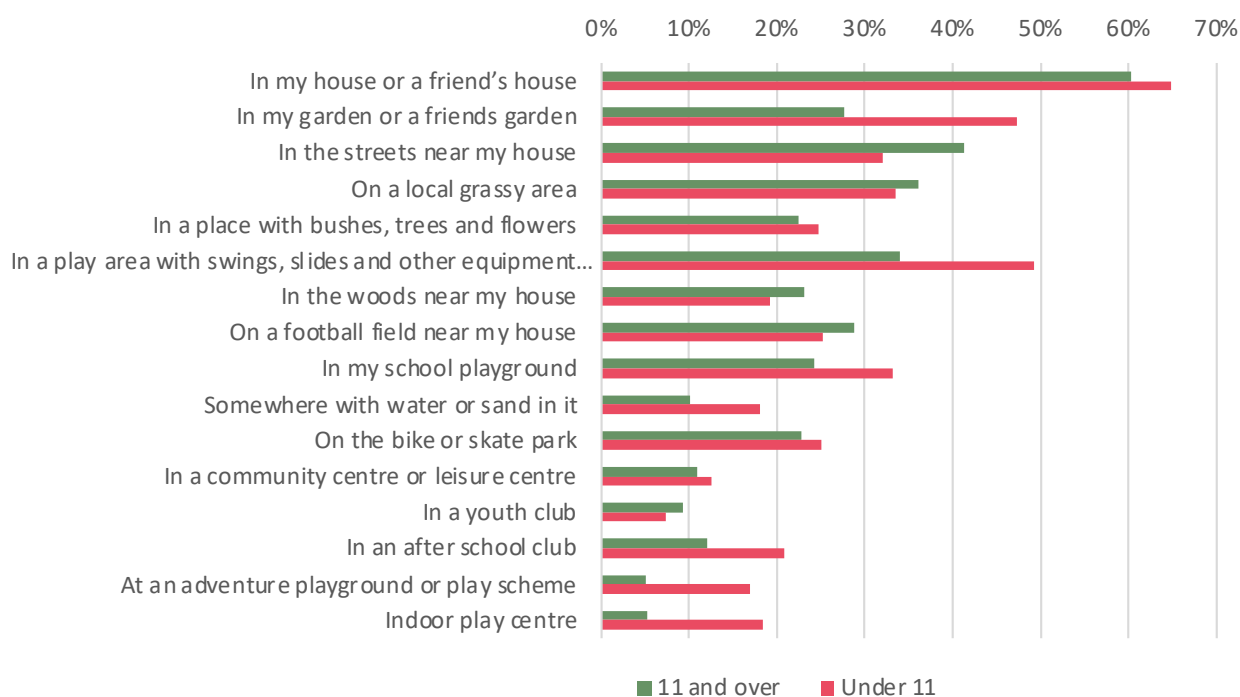


Figure 5: The places children play (6,966 responses)

## Average number of play spaces identified by each child

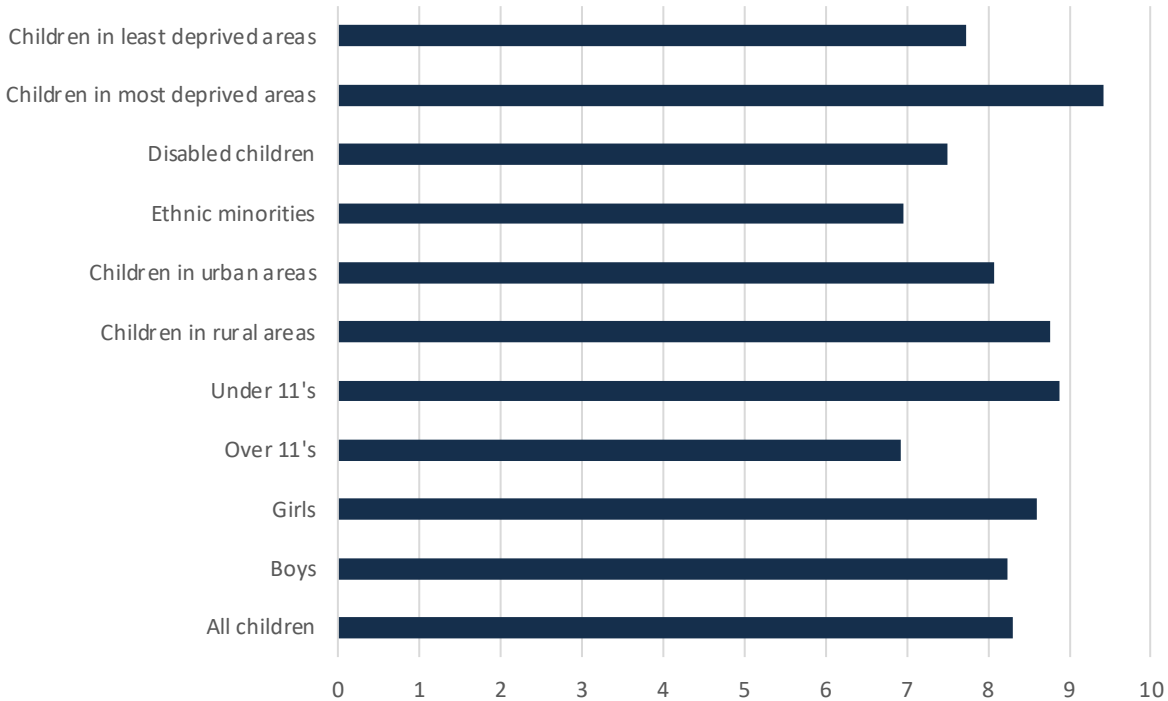


Figure 6: The average number of play spaces identified (6,966 responses)

By local authority, we found that the average number of play spaces identified varies widely across Wales – from just four in Flintshire and the Vale of Glamorgan, to over 14 in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

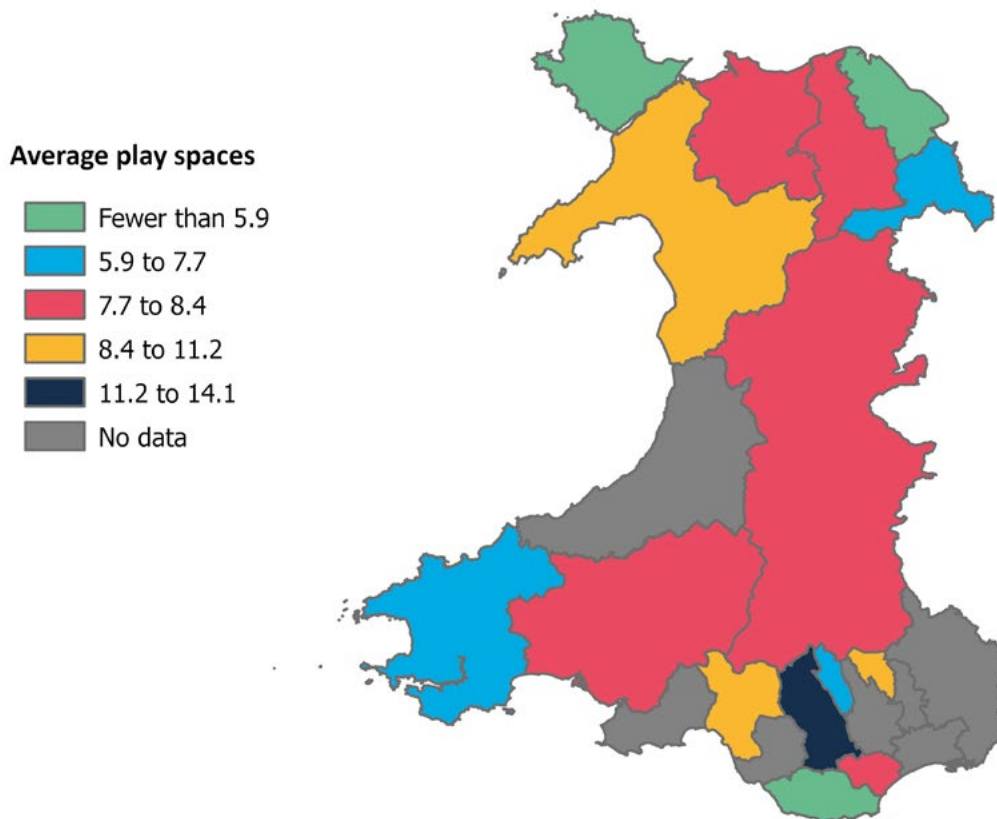


Figure 7: The average number of play spaces identified by local authority

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* further asked whether children and teenagers were able to play in all the places they would like to.

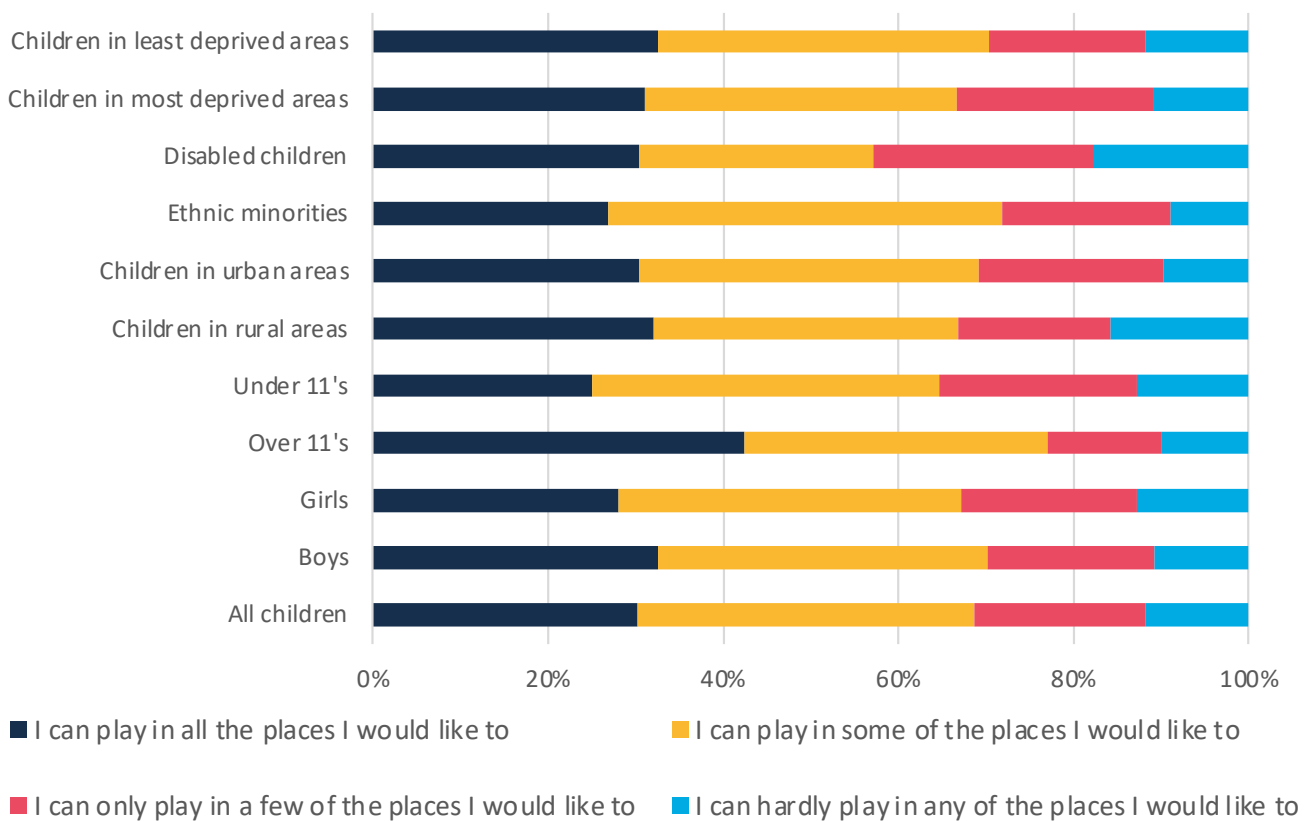
Of those surveyed, 30% said they could play in all the places they wanted to (24% in 2019) and a further 38% (33% in 2019) said that they could play in some of them. 12% said they were very restricted and could play in hardly any places (8% in 2019) and 20% said that only a few places were available to them (21% in 2019). The survey results show a polarised trend from 2019 in that more children and teenagers are satisfied with the choice of play spaces, and more are also dissatisfied.

Across different characteristics, for example age, gender, location, there are few differences in satisfaction with choice of play spaces although as expected, older children and teenagers feel less restricted and have greater choice. As found previously, disabled children feel that their choices are much more limited with 18% saying that they could hardly play anywhere (15% in 2019).

**'I am disabled & use a wheelchair. Most places don't have good enough paths for my wheelchair so it's difficult to get out on my own.'**

**Disabled boy aged 11 or over from Cardiff**

### Can you play in all of the places you would like to?



**Figure 8: Freedom to play (6,447 responses)**

In their comments, children and teenagers talked a lot about parks and playing fields as focal points within their communities where they could play and hang out.

**'I love the Sixbells Park and the zipewire, I love risky play.'**

**Girl aged under 11 from Blaenau Gwent**

**'My area is good for play because there are three play parks, football club, rugby club and more great things.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Carmarthenshire**

**'There is a massive park with a woodland, a football pitch, swings, a slide and it's just a great place in general.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Conwy**

**'The park is amazing, the leisure centre I go to is great, my friends live close by.'**

**Girl aged under 11 from Rhondda Cynon Taf**

They also talked about the value of a range of informal spaces where they play and hang out.

**'The woods opposite my house and the park. I love playing on the mountain.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Blaenau Gwent**

**'Lots of woods, streams and green space to play in.'**

**Girl aged 11 or over from Cardiff**

**'There are a lot of children in my street and we are all good friends. My parents can see through the window and keep an eye on us.'**

**Girl aged under 11 from Denbighshire**

**'It's a nice street not many people there, me and my friends like to just walk around exploring and we don't get into trouble.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Neath Port Talbot**

**'I live close to the beaches and to go sea swimming.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Ynys Môn**

**'I'm lucky to live on a farm and I can go out whenever I want.'**

**Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire**

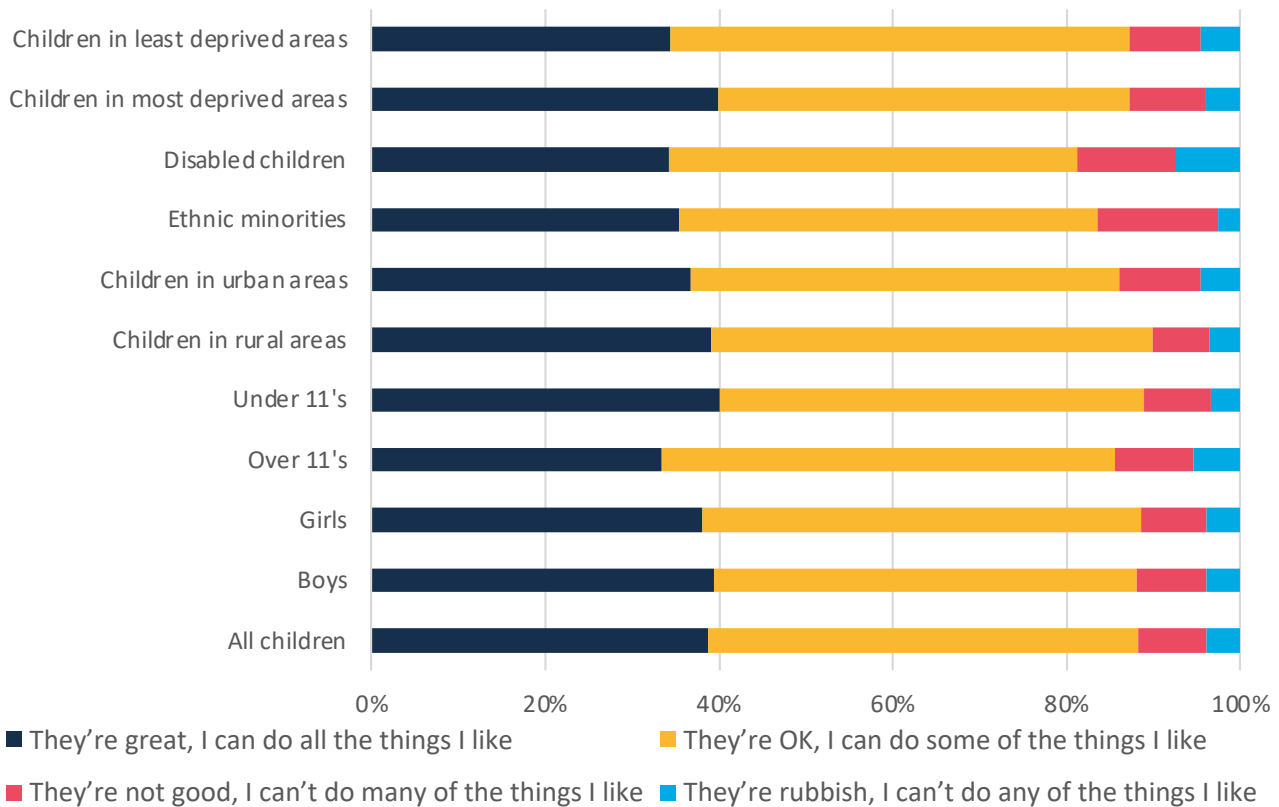
## How good are play spaces?

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* asked children and teenagers to also consider the quality of the spaces where they play or hang out.

Most (88%) said that the places they play in are good where they can do all, or some of the things they want to. However, the proportion of children and teenagers said that they 'weren't good' or were

'just rubbish' rose from 10% in 2019 to 12% in 2022. Disabled children and teenagers expressed the greatest dissatisfaction (19%) with the quality of play spaces while higher than average proportions of older children and teenagers (14%) and ethnic minorities (16%) were also critical of the spaces they had available for play. By local authority, responses were relatively consistent, apart from Cardiff where over 40% of respondents said that the spaces they play in are 'not good' or 'just rubbish'.

## How good are the places you play in?



**Figure 9: Quality of play spaces (3,598 responses)**

As we reported in 2019, many children and teenagers are very critical of the state of parks and dedicated playgrounds in their areas.

'The parks and skate park are really poor and unsafe. Adults are always shouting. It's really scruffy where I live.'

**Girl aged 11 or over from Blaenau Gwent**

'Our local park is rubbish. I have a baby brother and little sister and we never go to our park because it's so bad. We drive somewhere else because everywhere else has better playgrounds than us.'

**Boy aged under 11 from Cardiff**

'The parks in the area are terrible. The [park] has very little equipment, doesn't even have a baby swing for my younger sister. The next closest park is always full of smashed glass. The park is usually full of kids hanging around by the big swings. It is a large space with rubbish climbing frames. If I want to go to a good park I have to travel in the car.'

**Boy aged under 11 from Cardiff**

'Well, whenever I go to the park there is lots of smashed bottles and cans lying on the floor, there was also lots of teenagers there and they called my best friend names because she is ginger.'

**Girl aged under 11 from Denbighshire**

# Permission to play

The freedom for children to play is not just dependent on the time they have and the access they have to suitable play spaces. Children's play is often dependent on how safe they feel in play spaces, whether they feel they 'belong' in social spaces, the freedom allowed to them by their parents, and the acceptance of children's play by the wider community.

## Feeling safe

The survey asked children and teenagers how safe they felt in the places they play. 41% said that they always feel safe and a further 49% said that they usually feel safe. These results are similar to those found in 2019, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic this might seem surprising but may be reflective of children's resilience. Certainly, fear of COVID-19 was rarely mentioned when children and teenagers were describing the things that were not good about local play spaces. Comments regarding feelings of safety and their freedom to play where they wanted to focus on the fears they felt from road traffic, strangers, broken glass, dog poo and feeling intimidated by older children they did not know well.



'There is a lot of glass and rubbish on the floor from older children, there needs to be a zebra crossing on the main road to make it safe for us to walk because cars come around too fast, there is a lot of dog mess.'

Boy aged under 11 from Blaenau Gwent

'There are lots of gangs of big kids who make it scary for us to go to the park even with my mum because they swear and won't let us go on the stuff. The big kids should have their own park.'

Girl aged under 11 from Cardiff

'Cars driving fast, some of the adults look scary that hang about the area, there's not a lot of fun things to do that are different.'

Girl aged under 11 from Ynys Môn

'The parks are where the bullies hang out. People who take drugs and steal live around me. There are sometimes needles left lying around. Somewhere for the teenagers can go so they are not in the children's park.'

Other / Prefer not to say aged under 11  
from Wrexham



## How safe do you feel when playing or hanging out?

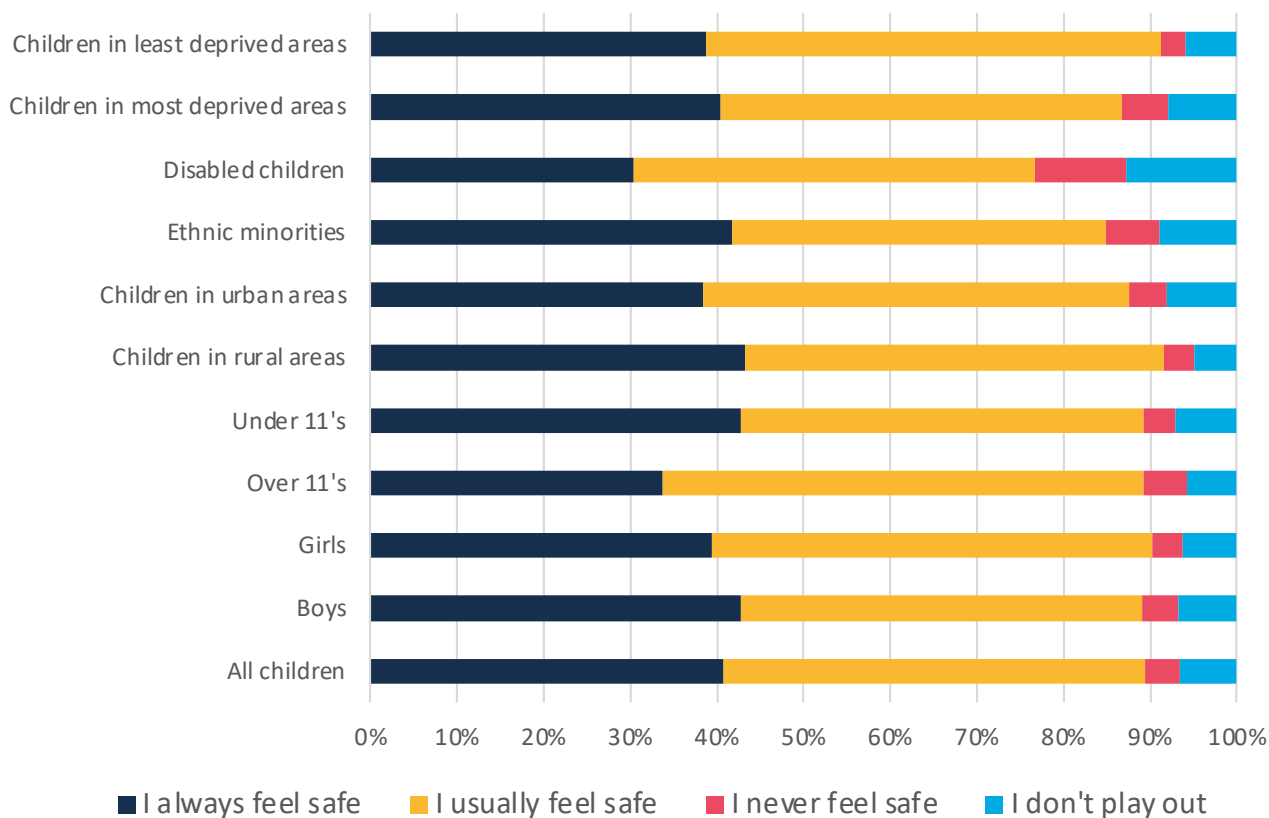


Figure 10: Feelings of safety (6,705 responses)

Across most of the characteristics (such as gender, age, ethnicity, location), responses around safety were relatively consistent with around 90% of children and teenagers always, or usually feeling safe when they were out. Only 4% said that they never felt safe, but this rose to 23% of disabled children and teenagers and 15% of children and teenagers from ethnic minorities.

'Cars go too fast. I'm deaf and can't hear them.'

8 year-old disabled child from Cardiff

'I get bullied because I'm different.'

12 year-old disabled child from the Vale of Glamorgan

'My closest park is broken and the other one has lots of things that are too scary for me to play on.'

9 year-old disabled child from Cardiff

'I am severely disabled, non-verbal etc. It's very difficult for me to go out in the community anyway and my parents struggle to take me places which are suitable. There are no parks or open spaces nearby that cater to mine or any disabled child/young adults' needs.'

8 year-old disabled child from Cardiff

Figure 10 shows that 7% of children and teenagers responding to the survey do not play out because they don't feel safe. Taken alongside responses to the question 'How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?' (Figure 1) we can assume that safety is the primary concern amongst the 8% who said that they don't play or hang out with friends outside. The data suggests that this is more prevalent in urban areas and in areas of higher deprivation.

## Adult attitudes

The attitude of adults – both parents and the wider community – towards play has been found in previous research to be important in children's freedom to play<sup>8</sup>.

In response to the question, 'What are grown-ups like when you're playing or hanging out?', 88% of children and teenagers said that adults were great, or at least okay with them when they were playing out. Those who thought that adults didn't like, or even hated them playing out were most likely to be disabled (21%) or were older children and teenagers (17%). This has been observed in other studies<sup>9</sup> with negative attitudes found to come from a lack of understanding of what children's play is, and differing views on what should be considered as being acceptable behaviour. Adults often have different views of children and can associate older children and teenagers congregating together as anti-social behaviour.

Responses to this question were found not to have changed significantly since 2019.

### What are grown-ups like when you're playing or hanging out?

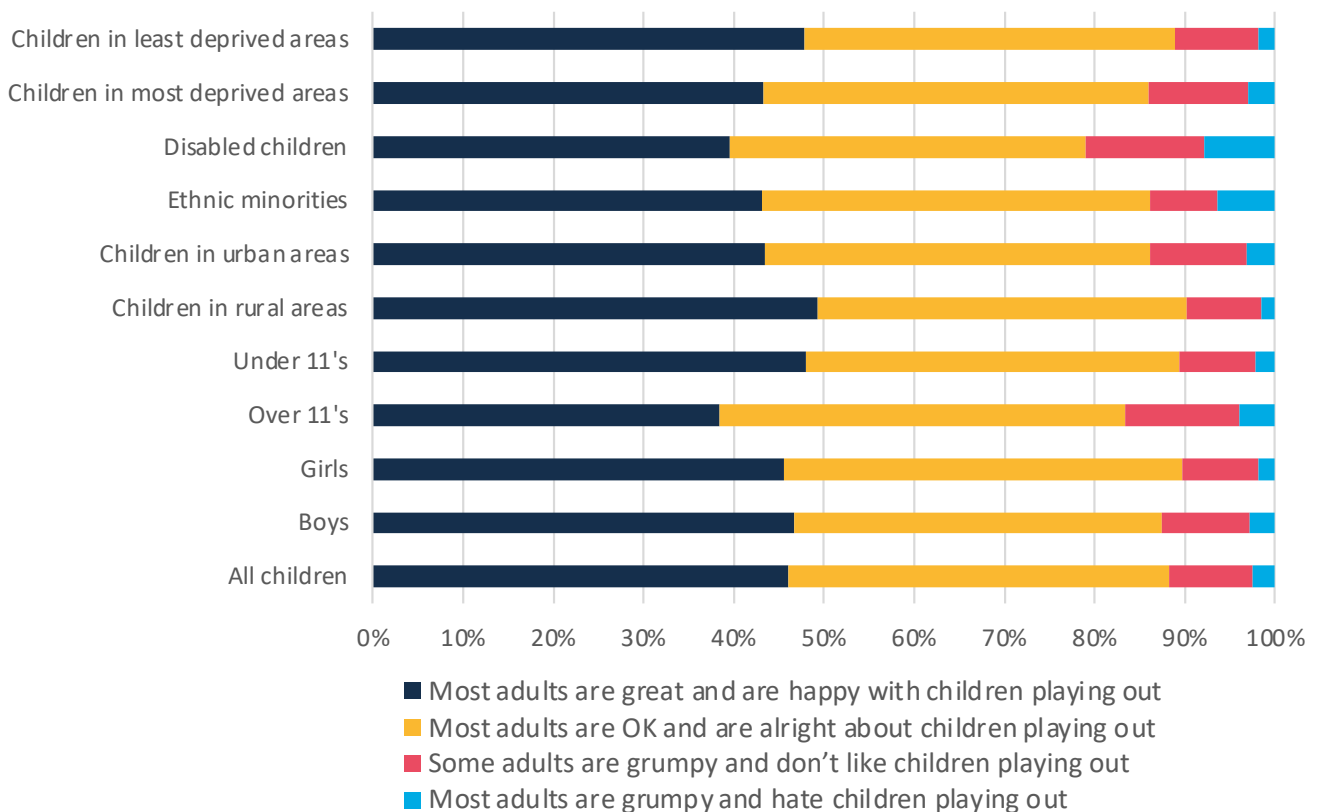


Figure 11: Adult attitudes (5,222 responses)

'All we do is talk as we get told off by grumpy adults for playing football or bikes near their cars in case we damage them.'

Girl aged under 11 from Gwynedd

'Adults often shout at us and the police will move us on. Sometimes it is really cold and wet.'

Girl aged 11 or over from Blaenau Gwent

'There is a lot of grumpy adults and they scream sometimes and swear but only sometimes.'

Girl aged under 11 from Wrexham

'Adults don't like us there because we are too old to be in parks.'

Girl aged 11 or over from Merthyr Tydfil

'There's nowhere to hang out for teenagers. Gangs with knives hanging around. Gangs and adults fighting. Drunk adults. Adults on drugs. Adults begging. Dog poo everywhere. Old people get scared when they see us in a group, but we don't cause trouble, we're just scared to be on our own and want to be with our friends.'

Girl aged 11 or over from Cardiff

## Being allowed out

Children and teenagers' responses to a number of survey questions highlight the significant proportion who do not play or hang out outside their homes and gardens, or the homes and gardens of friends. As discussed in the previous section, for some, this is because they do not feel safe. However, children and teenagers were also asked whether they were allowed to play out by their parents or other significant adults. Responses show that 28% are not allowed to play out on their own or with friends. This has increased from 25% in 2019.

We found little difference between girls and boys, nor between rural and urban areas. But, unsurprisingly, we found a large difference by age with 37% of under 11's not allowed out compared with just 9% of children aged 11 and over. Over 40% of ethnic minority children and teenagers said they were not allowed out.

'I am not allowed to play outside on my own where I live, I always have to have a parent with me.'

Girl aged under 11 from Blaenau Gwent

'It's a small village and there's no pavements so normally I am not allowed to play out by myself because I do not have friends in the village.'

Girl aged under 11 from Denbighshire

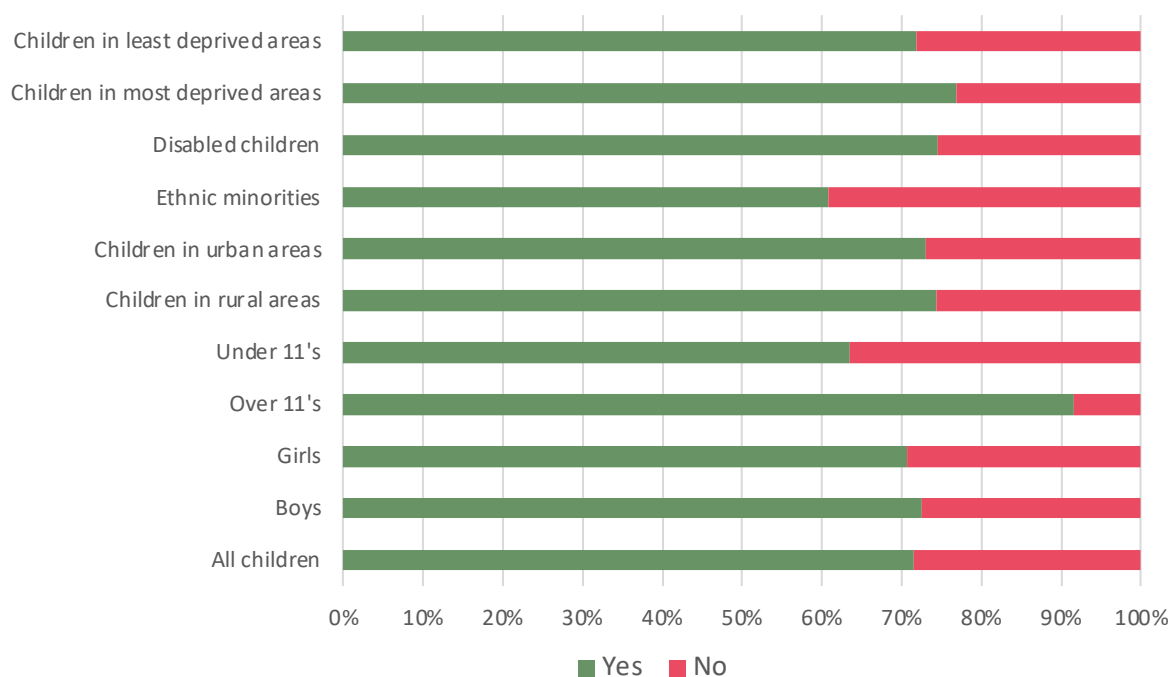
'I sometimes can't go where I want to go so I wish I can go to the allotments, it's close to where I live it's behind my house. But my mum does not let me.'

Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire

'I am not normally allowed to hang out with my friends outside of school or my house.'

Girl aged under 11 from Conwy

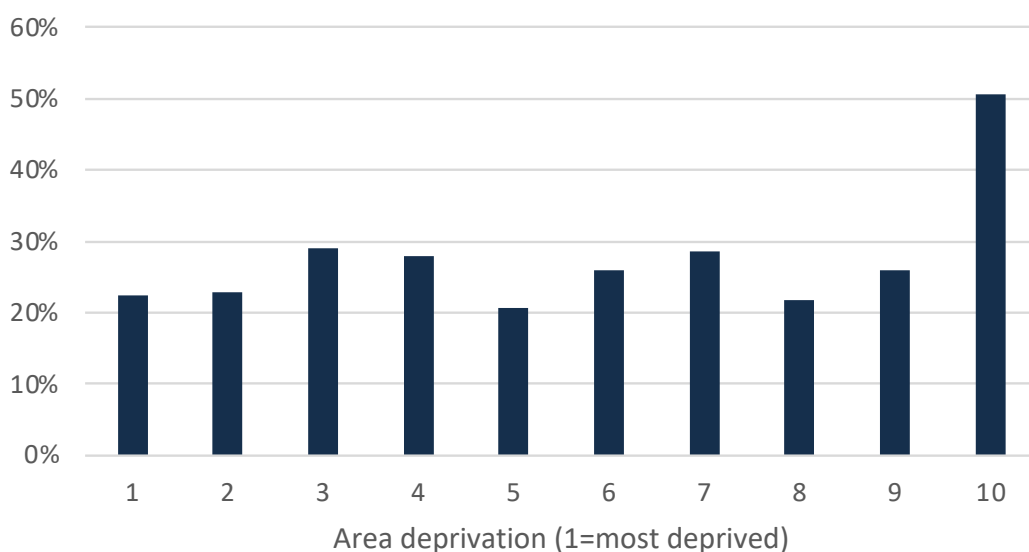
## Are you allowed to play out on your own or with friends?



**Figure 12: Permission to play by age (6,681 responses)**

This data reinforces the strong link between feelings of safety and children and teenagers being allowed to play out by their parents as found in previous *Play Satisfaction Surveys* and in other studies<sup>10</sup>. There seems to be a strong link between parental perception of neighbourhood safety and levels of children's independence. With the geographic data available in this survey, we found that across most areas attitudes are similar, but we observe that over 50% of children and teenagers are not allowed out if they live in the 10% most affluent areas of Wales.

## Children not allowed out



**Figure 13: Children and teenagers not allowed out to play by deprivation level (6,681 responses)**

There was wide variation between local authorities – from Merthyr Tydfil where 97% of children and teenagers said they were allowed out to play, to Cardiff where only 37% said they were permitted.

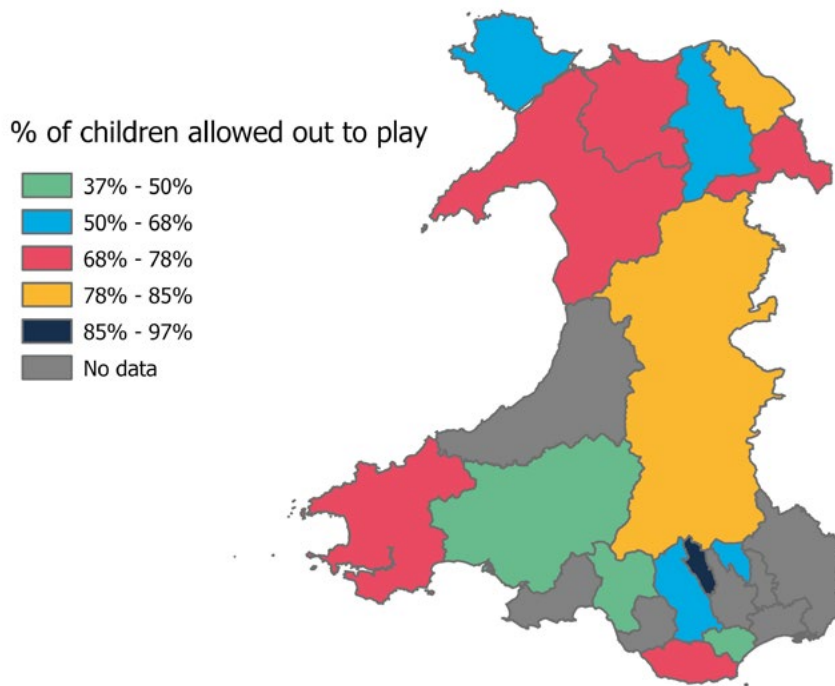


Figure 14: Proportion of children and teenagers who *are* allowed to play out by local authority

### Getting to play spaces

Important when considering the freedom for children and teenagers in choosing play space, is an understanding of how they actually get to the places where they play.

50% said that they are able to walk or ride on their own or with friends, while 48% rely on an adult to either walk or drive them to where they play. The proportion of children and teenagers travelling

independently fell from 55% in 2019, while those travelling with an adult rose from 44%. Older children and teenagers, boys, those living in rural areas and in more deprived areas were all more likely to travel independently to play. Ethnic minority children and teenagers were most likely to rely on adults to travel.

It should also be recognised that active travel is widely promoted as a simple and sustainable way to promote physical activity, improve health and reduce pollution. Further detail on active travel is included in Appendix 2.

### How do you usually get to places where you play?

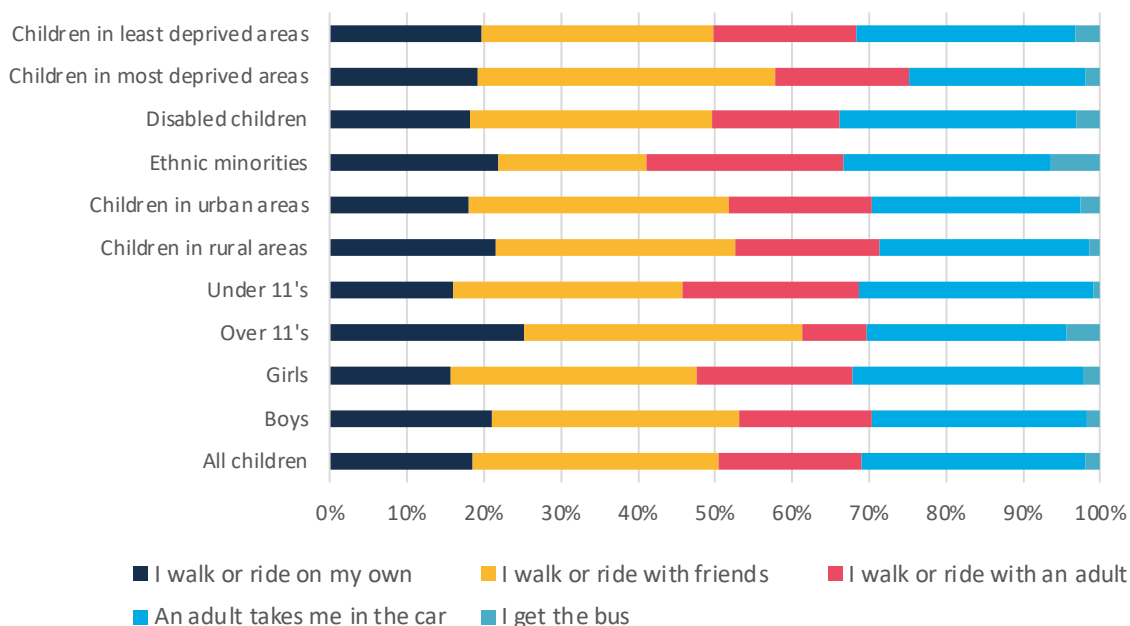


Figure 15: Getting to play space (6,632 responses)

# Overall satisfaction

Probably the most important question asked in the *Play Satisfaction Survey* is, 'Overall how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?' This can be taken to reflect children's play satisfaction. In 2022, 70% of children and teenagers said that their opportunities to play were good, or great. This was a considerable drop from 84% in 2019.

## Overall how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?

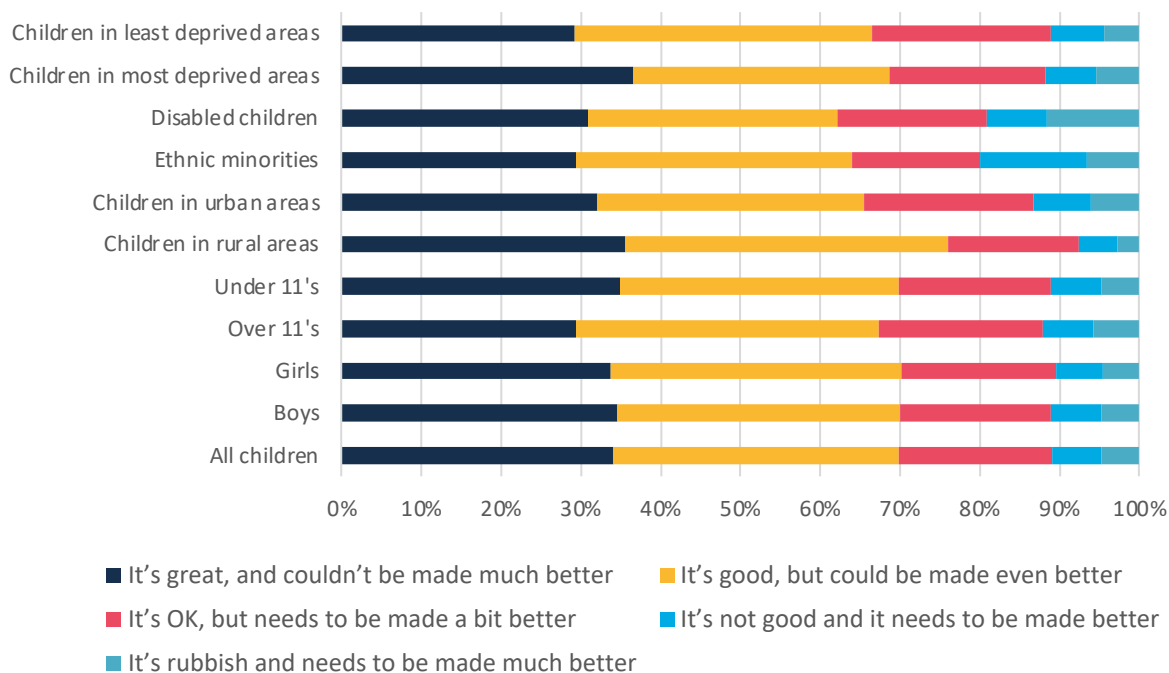


Figure 16: Satisfaction with play opportunities (6,582 responses)

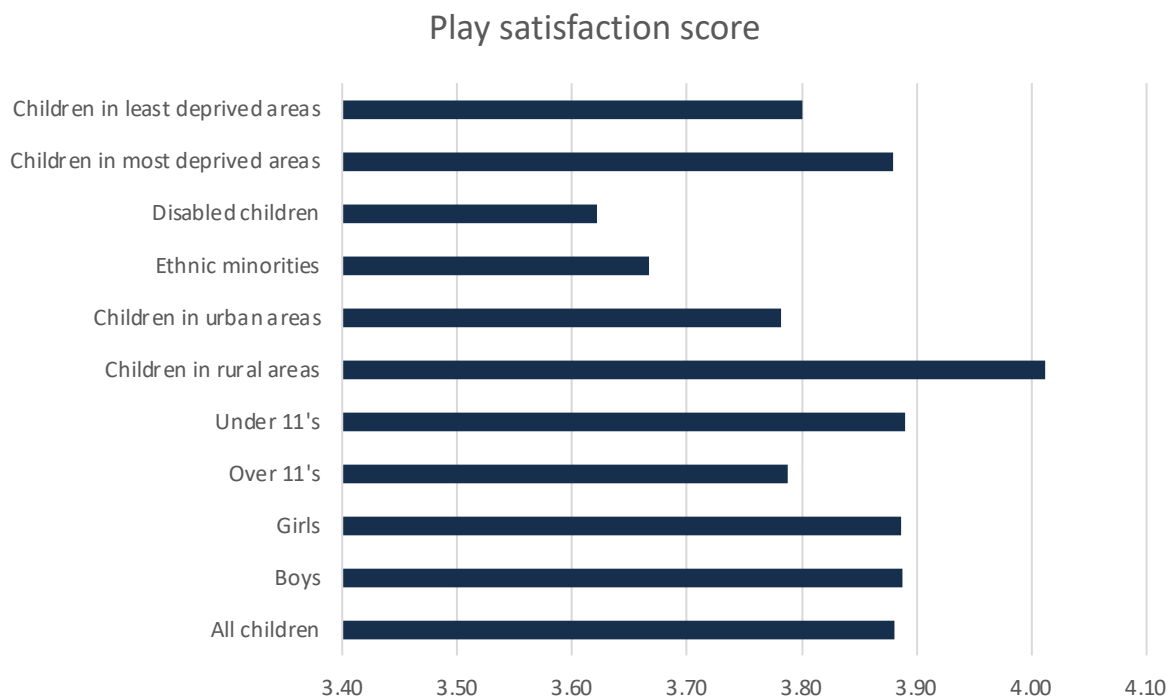
## Play satisfaction scores

By converting responses to a score (1 = it's rubbish to 5 = it's great) we can produce a 'play satisfaction score'. We have used this to examine the relationship between play satisfaction and factors such as age, gender, rurality and deprivation.

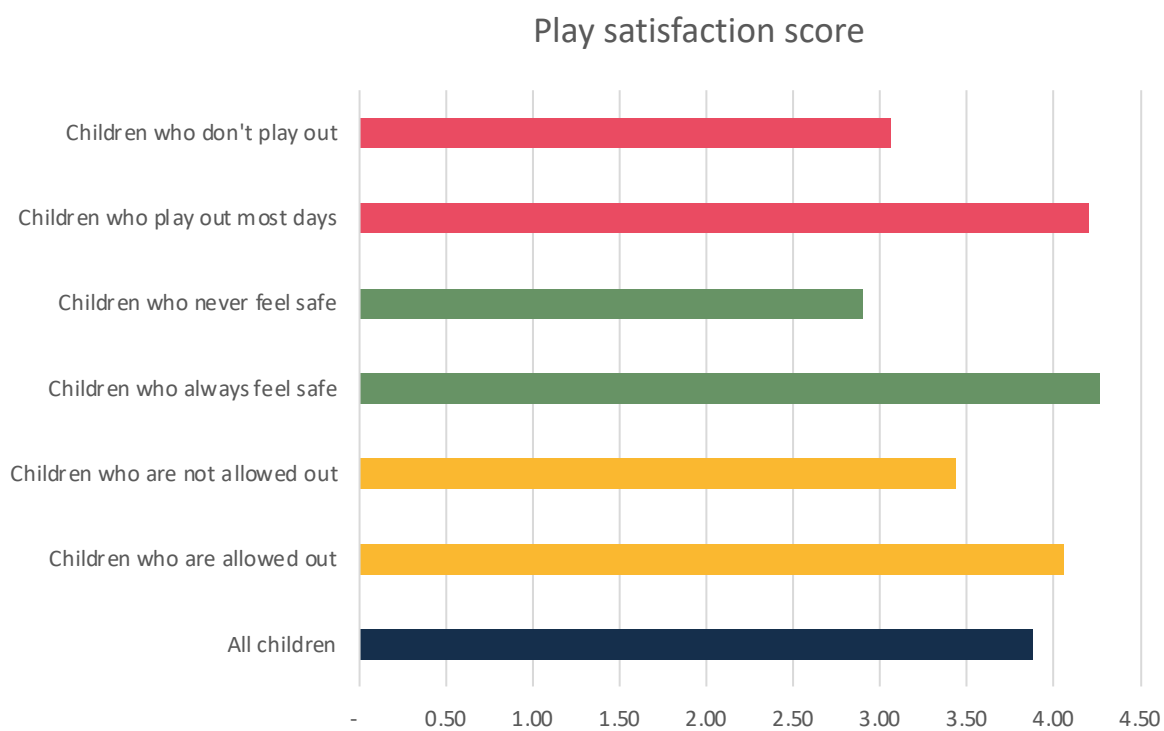
As illustrated in Figure 17, we found no difference in satisfaction between boys and girls, and little difference between those living in deprived or less-deprived areas. Children and teenagers in rural areas were far more satisfied than their counterparts in urban areas, while younger children were more satisfied than older children and teenagers.

Disabled and ethnic minority children and teenagers were by far the least satisfied with their play opportunities. In Figure 18, we have compared satisfaction scores by factors that represent the time, space and freedom to play. Not surprisingly, we find that those who play out most days, those who feel safe and those who are allowed out to play are more likely to be satisfied with their play opportunities.

Across the local authorities that provided data, we found that children and teenagers in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan were least satisfied while those in Powys were most satisfied with their play opportunities (Figure 19).



**Figure 17: Play satisfaction scores by characteristic (6,582 responses)**



**Figure 18: Play satisfaction scores (6,582 responses)**

### Play satisfaction scores

- Less than 2.9
- 2.9 to 3.5
- 3.5 to 3.9
- 3.9 to 4.1
- More than 4.1
- No data

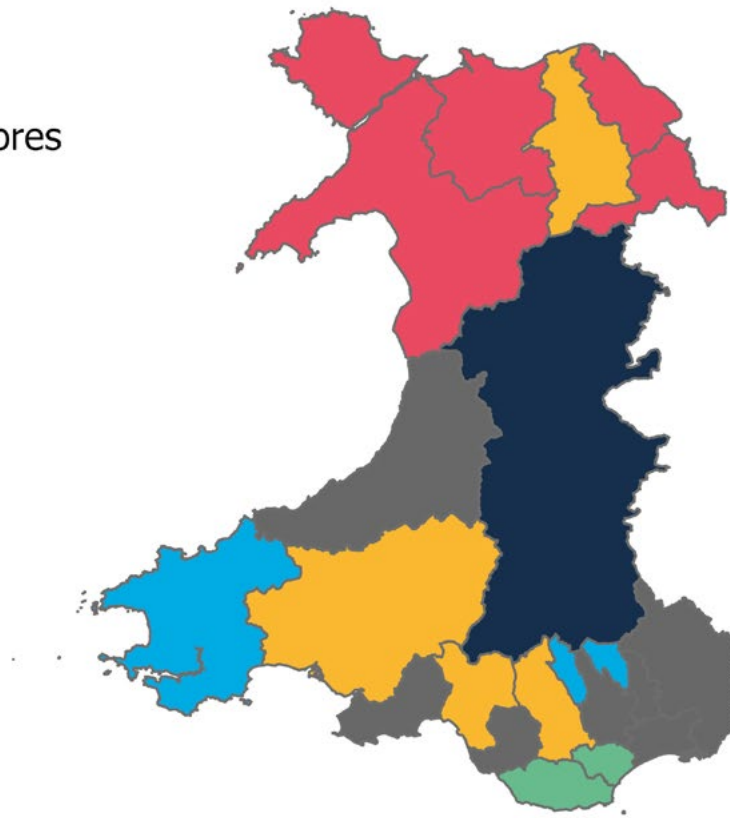


Figure 19: Play satisfaction scores by local authority





# COVID-19

The shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly present in the responses children and teenagers gave to the *Play Satisfaction Survey*. As surveys were carried out by local authorities from late 2021 to early 2022, many responding would have been subject to COVID-19 restrictions at the time or would have had the memory of those restrictions fresh in their minds. To capture their experiences, most local authorities asked them about the extent to which restrictions had affected their play, and they were also asked to provide further information on the impact.

In answer to the question, ‘How has COVID-19, lockdowns and restrictions had an impact on how you usually play?’, 20% said that they weren’t affected at all. 28% said that they were affected ‘a little’ while a further 28% said that they were affected most, or all of the time. Boys were most likely to say that their play had not been affected, while disabled and ethnic minority children and teenagers most commonly said that their play had been affected most or all of the time.

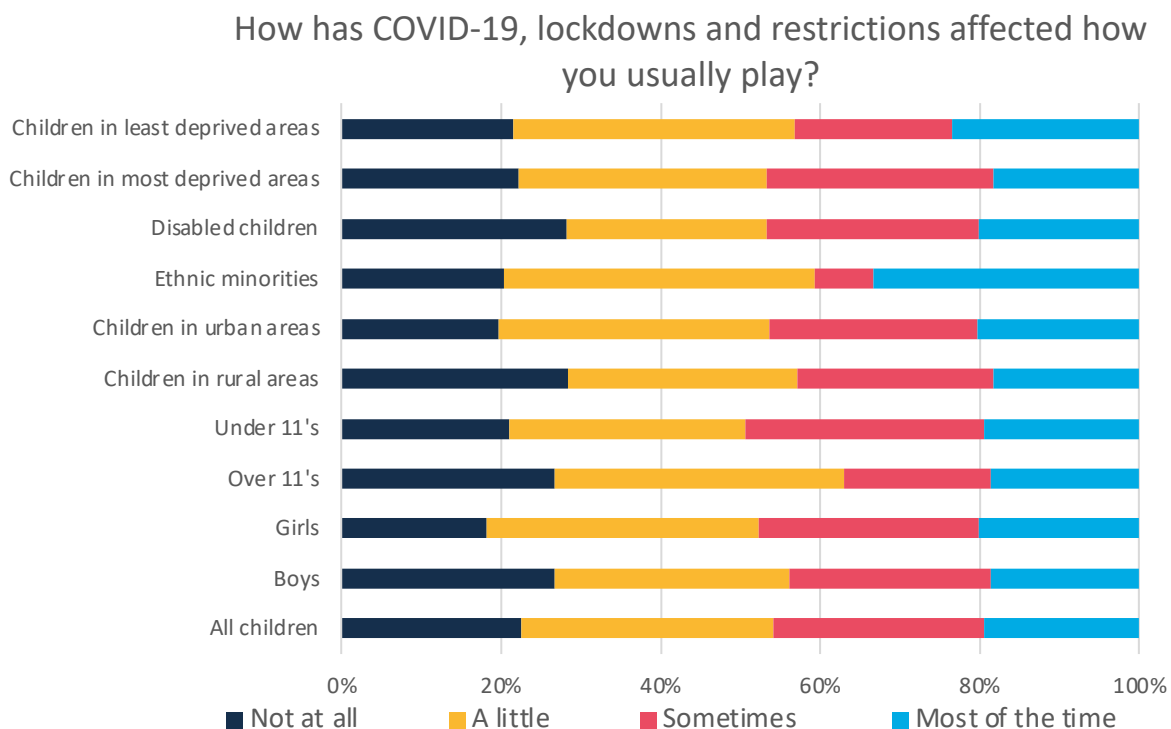


Figure 20: Impact of COVID-19 on play (6,077 responses)

Comments about how COVID-19 restrictions had impacted on play focus on a number of themes. Firstly, it is abundantly clear that children and teenagers missed their friends, socialising, and the intimacy of friendship. While many also described how they stayed in touch online, they often made it clear that this was a poor substitute for face-to-face contact.

‘Quarantine, lockdown and restrictions have affected how I can meet my friends.’

**Aged under 11 from Pembrokeshire**

‘I couldn’t meet up with any of my friends and social distancing made me a bit upset since I couldn’t hug or hold my friends’ hands.’

**Girl aged under 11 from Conwy**

‘I missed hugging my friends.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Neath Port Talbot**

‘I had to do online play I couldn’t see my friends.’

**Girl aged under 11 from Wrexham**

While many children and teenagers expressed strong feelings of frustration at not being allowed out of their houses, they also missed the social opportunities that they associated with playing. Even for those who don’t play out the restrictions on socialising at home caused significant distress.

‘It stopped me playing with friends and going to my friend’s house. It made me real sad and cry.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Wrexham**

‘Can’t play with some of my friends (most actually). Can’t play with most people I meet so I can’t make some new friends.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Conwy**

‘It has been very difficult during Covid to be able to meet up with my friends. It made me feel very upset and frustrated that I could not make any arrangements to see anyone and I felt very lonely. I feel I have missed out on lots of things and new opportunities that could have happened, including trying new activities, making new friends and learning new skills.’

**Aged under 11 from Pembrokeshire**

‘I could not invite friends over for my birthday or have no sleep overs and it made me sad.’

**Girl aged under 11 from Wrexham**

Responses highlight some of the emotions that children and teenagers felt with the restrictions they faced. Many said that they were bored while others expressed feelings of loneliness, frustration and often sadness at a whole range of experiences that they were missing out on.

‘I felt lonely a lot and I wanted to play so much even though I wasn’t allowed.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire**

‘Can’t see friends ... my mom took us on walks with the dog and played boardgames ... but it wasn’t the same as with friends and going out and socialising.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Wrexham**

‘I was sad all the time.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Rhondda Cynon Taf**

‘It affected my play by missing my friends because I couldn’t play with them for a while so I eventually got bored.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire**

‘I was scared, I didn’t want to go anywhere.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire**



Worry, fear and concern over COVID-19 itself created an anxiety expressed by some children and teenagers that restricted or changed the way they played and socialised. Many also worried about contracting COVID-19 and the impact it would have on their families.

‘I worry about catching covid and being poorly or making other people poorly.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Ynys Môn**

‘I’m more worried about socialising with people because I don’t want to catch covid and pass it on to my family.’

**Girl aged 11 or over from Merthyr Tydfil**

‘My family get scared and worry I will get COVID as they was very ill.’

**Boy aged under 11 from Blaenau Gwent**

‘I’m not allowed to play with my friends I live near anymore because of social distancing from my friends and my mother has health issues and I have to be really careful because I don’t want to lose her.’

**Girl aged under 11 from Wrexham**

# Conclusions

This report presents a picture of children's play satisfaction in Wales in 2022. But, more importantly, it provides the opportunity for children and teenagers' voices to be heard, highlighting:

- the importance of play in their lives
- what's good and what's not so good about the play opportunities in their local area
- how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play.

The number of responses to the *Play Satisfaction Survey* that we have been able to use for this report means that the results presented are very likely to be true for all children and teenagers in Wales. They are therefore valid for anyone interested in ensuring and promoting children's right to play. This includes the Welsh Government, local authorities, playworkers and parents.

The concept of play sufficiency that we use in Wales is rights based. Sufficiency of opportunities should be the right of all children, rather than a privilege enjoyed by a few. Local authorities in Wales should therefore consider how they can enable and uphold the right to play for every child in their area – not just enable individual children to exercise their right to play. If just one child is unable to exercise their right, the right to play is not being upheld. While the data presented here suggests that many children and teenagers in Wales have the time, space and freedom to play, many do not, with their experiences shaped by circumstances beyond their control.

## Time to play

- While most children and teenagers in Wales are able to go out to play most days, or at least a few days a week, there is a large group that might be seen as experiencing 'play poverty' in that they never, or hardly ever play out.
- Since 2019, we found that the proportion who rarely or never play out increased from 25% to 29% of all children and teenagers. Disabled children and teenagers remain impoverished with 37% saying that they rarely or never play out.
- Most children and teenagers in Wales say that they have enough time to play, but we found a continuation of a decline in this proportion in 2022 to where a quarter of children and teenagers say that they do not have enough time or would like more time to play out.

## Space to play

- Children and teenagers talked about the range of play spaces they used. Most commonly, children and teenagers play or hang out in each other's houses or gardens.
- For younger children, the survey highlighted the importance of formal play spaces – such as parks, playgrounds and skateparks – as important for them and places that they are 'allowed' to go to, and feel safe in. Yet, children (and their parents) are critical of the state of many play areas and the clear lack of investment in many areas in maintaining equipment and keeping areas clean. This is most prevalent in the most urban areas where alternatives are not readily available.

- For older children and teenagers, informal spaces – local streets, sports pitches, woods and green spaces – become more important, but also create a greater risk of negative attitudes from adults who may not easily distinguish play from anti-social behaviour.
- We found that disabled children and teenagers and ethnic minority children and teenagers feel that they have less access to play spaces and consequently play out less than other children and teenagers.
- Most children and teenagers responding to the survey said that the COVID-19 restrictions affected how they played. Children and teenagers missed playing out and the associated freedoms, but mostly they missed seeing, interacting and playing with their friends.
- Online interaction was helpful but a very poor substitute for face-to-face contact and for many children and teenagers resulted in feelings of loneliness, frustration and often sadness at a whole range of experiences that they were missing out on.

## Permission to play

- We found clear evidence that shows when children and teenagers feel safe in the spaces they play, they are much more likely to play out with consequential benefits for their health and wellbeing. As a subjective issue, safety can be about the physical state of play areas, traffic on routes to play spaces, or psychological, dependent on the benign or malign presence of adults and older children and teenagers.
- As in previous surveys, we found that parental restrictions (often with well-meaning concerns) most commonly result in children and teenagers not able to play out. Our analysis of the *Play Satisfaction Surveys* shows that the proportion of children and teenagers who are not allowed out is increasing, and in some areas, is over a half of all children and teenagers.
- We found that fewer children and teenagers are travelling independently to play spaces, and this may have an impact on their freedom. We also noted a small reduction in active travel with fewer children and teenagers walking or riding to play spaces.

## COVID-19

The 2022 survey is timely in gathering evidence from children and teenagers about the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly the associated lockdowns, impacted on their play habits and opportunities. It is also the backdrop to the other data presented in this report which may have temporarily or permanently changed children and teenager's play habits.

## Play satisfaction

The level of children and teenager's satisfaction with their play opportunities is lower in 2022 than in 2019. This may be due to COVID-19 and the associated restrictions placed on them. It will be interesting to observe whether satisfaction levels recover over the coming years.

Some groups of children and teenagers stand-out in their reporting of low satisfaction with their play opportunities. These include disabled children and teenagers and ethnic minority children and teenagers. However, as in our analysis of previous *Play Satisfaction Surveys*, the picture presented by children and teenagers across Wales is that when they are allowed out, feel safe, and able to play in the places they want to, most are happy with the choice of good quality spaces, and overall are satisfied with their play opportunities.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Methodology

### Sampling

Because the sample is opportunistic (respondents were not chosen, but chose to participate) some local authorities were over-represented and others under-represented. For example, around 1,307 responses were from Wrexham, compared to around 158 in Pembrokeshire despite their populations being similar.

Data was only provided by 17 of the 22 local authorities in Wales but only 15 were suitable for analysis. Exclusion was mainly due to non-standard surveys having been used, or where authorities had undertaken wholly qualitative research with children and teenagers.

### Data cleaning

Local authorities used the survey template with varying degrees of consistency. Once the data were cleaned and collected into a single dataset they were analysed using a statistical software package (SPSS v.25). Taking the standard *Play Satisfaction Survey*, all datasets were changed to match the same variables. This included re-ordering columns to match the order and creating new variable names. All datasets were then merged into one. For consistency, some variables were recoded and a number of derived variables were created including combining some values within fields (for example age-grouping).

External look-up tables such as ONS Postcode database products were used to identify geography such as super-output areas and link these with socio-economic variables such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). A number of variables were recalculated to enable trends across broader groupings. WIMD areas were combined into four groups (quintiles) so data is mainly reported for the least and most deprived 25% of areas in Wales.

### Sample size and confidence

In total, 6,966 responses from children and teenagers were included in a final dataset. When set in context of the whole population of children and teenagers in Wales (562,730<sup>11</sup>), the sample provides a 95% probability that the responses accurately reflect the attitudes of the whole population.

The margin of error (confidence interval) is calculated as +/- 1.14%. This means that for a specific question, if 51% of the sample picked a particular answer, we can be 'sure' that if we had asked the question of the entire population of children and teenagers, between 48.86% and 51.14% would have picked that response. Not all children and teenagers answered all questions so the number of responses analysed is included in graphs and charts. Lower responses will inevitably affect the confidence of the data and in a small number of instances data are excluded from our analysis.

### Profile of respondents

- Of those responding to the survey, 49% identified as girls, 49% as boys and 2% as 'other' or preferred not to say.
- 75% of these respondents were under the age of 11 while 25% were 11 years or older.
- Answering the question 'Do you think of yourself as 'disabled'?', 5.7% said yes (394 respondents).
- Surveys were distributed in both Welsh and English but children and teenagers were asked which language they preferred to speak. 11% preferred Welsh, 85% said English and 4% preferred another language.

## Survey responses by local authority

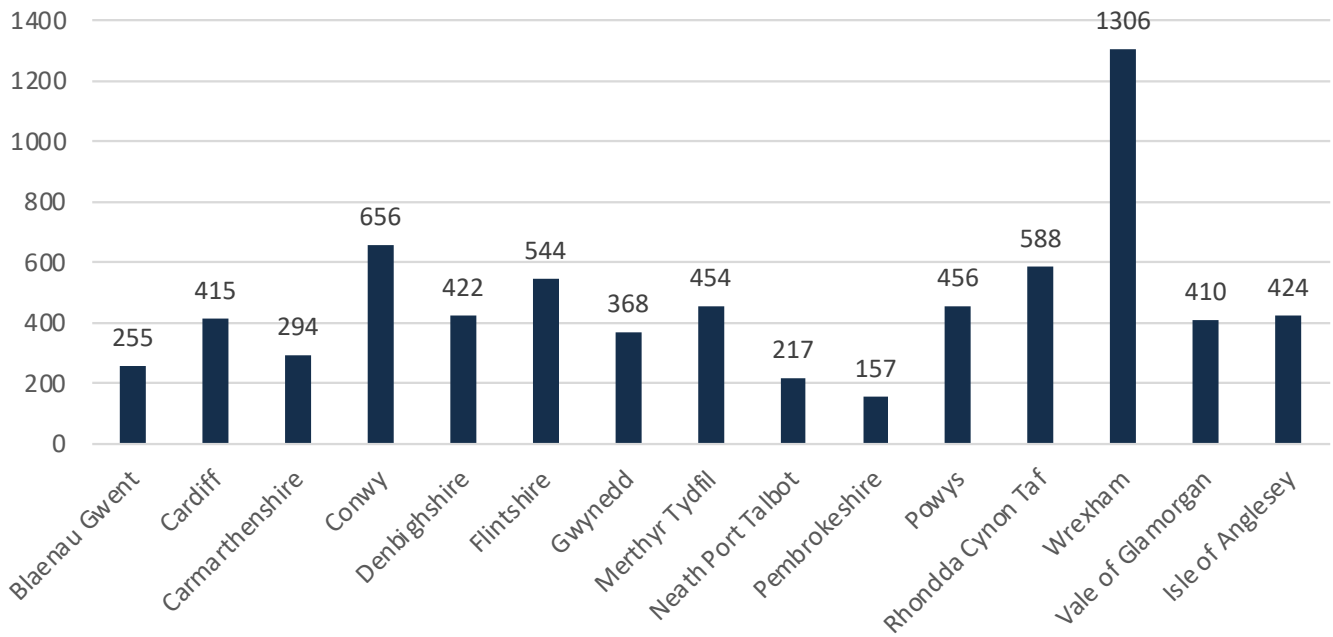


Figure 21: Respondents by local authority (6,966 responses)

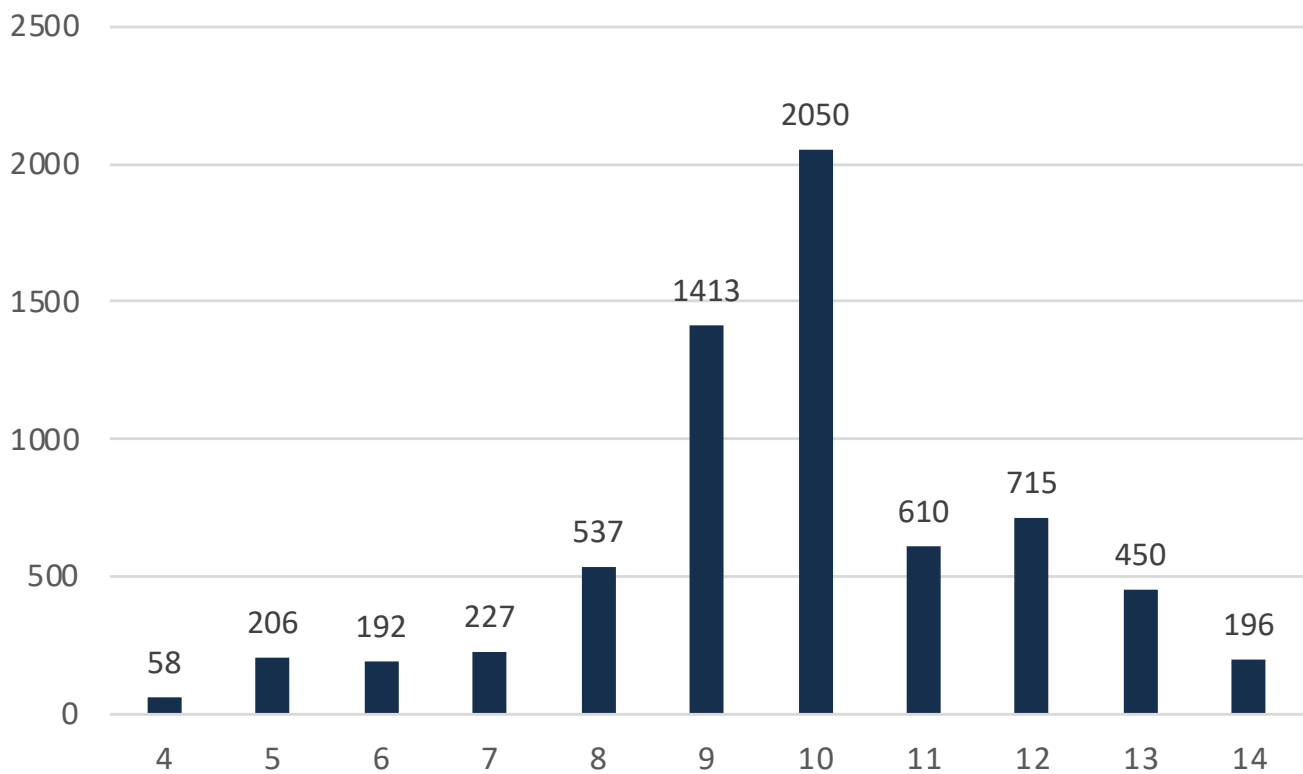


Figure 22: Respondents by age-group (6,654 responses)

## Survey Respondents by Age Group

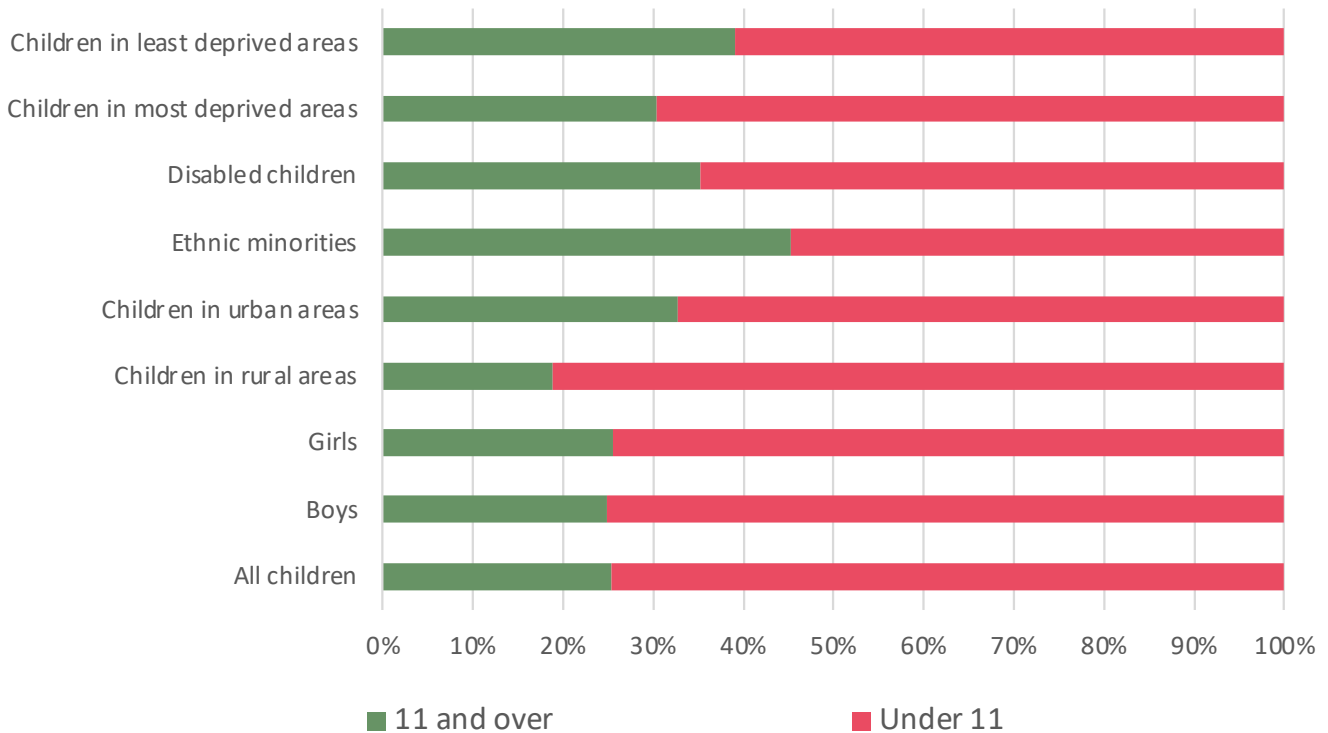


Figure 23: Respondents by age-group and relevant characteristics

### Data limitations

As is clear in Figure 22, some local authorities focused their surveys on children in Year 5 of primary school to enable more accurate longitudinal data to be gathered to provide evidence of changing attitudes and sufficiency. While this is likely to provide more robust data over time, as Wendy Russell and colleagues point out in their 2019 report on the Play Sufficiency Duty<sup>12</sup> there is also an argument for extending the age range to gather the full range of views. Notwithstanding, analysis of such a large dataset has the potential to highlight issues that are common across Wales.

### Analytical approach

As Wendy Russell suggested in a 2006 report<sup>13</sup>, opportunities for children and teenagers to play away from the eyes of adults can be restricted across three domains and as such, these domains have been used in assessing factors that impact on play sufficiency in this report.

The domains are:

- **Time:** children's 'free' time (both objective and children's subjective perception) when they can become immersed in playing.
- **Space:** how public space can support or constrain children's ability to play as well as access to designated spaces for play.
- **Permission:** children's subjective experiences of time and space, including factors such as a sense of freedom, permission, belonging, fear and harassment, as well as the increasing adult appropriation and control of play.



## Appendix 2: Active Healthy Kids Report Card

Data from the 2019 *Play Satisfaction Survey* was used to contribute to the *Active Healthy Kids Report Card for Wales 2021*<sup>14, 15</sup>. The Report Card is an advocacy tool providing a lens over physical activity behaviours and influencing factors of children and young people within Wales. The Report Card recognises that active play, particularly outdoors, contributes to overall physical activity.

### Active travel indicator

From the 2022 survey, active travel data can be drawn from responses that children and teenagers gave about how they travel to play spaces and to school and includes those who walked or rode either on their own, with friends or with an adult. This is set out in Figure 24 and by local authority, in Figure 25. The proportion of children and teenagers actively travelling to play spaces showed a small decline, from 73% in 2019 to 69% in 2022. However, the proportion actively travelling to school rose from 42% to 45%.

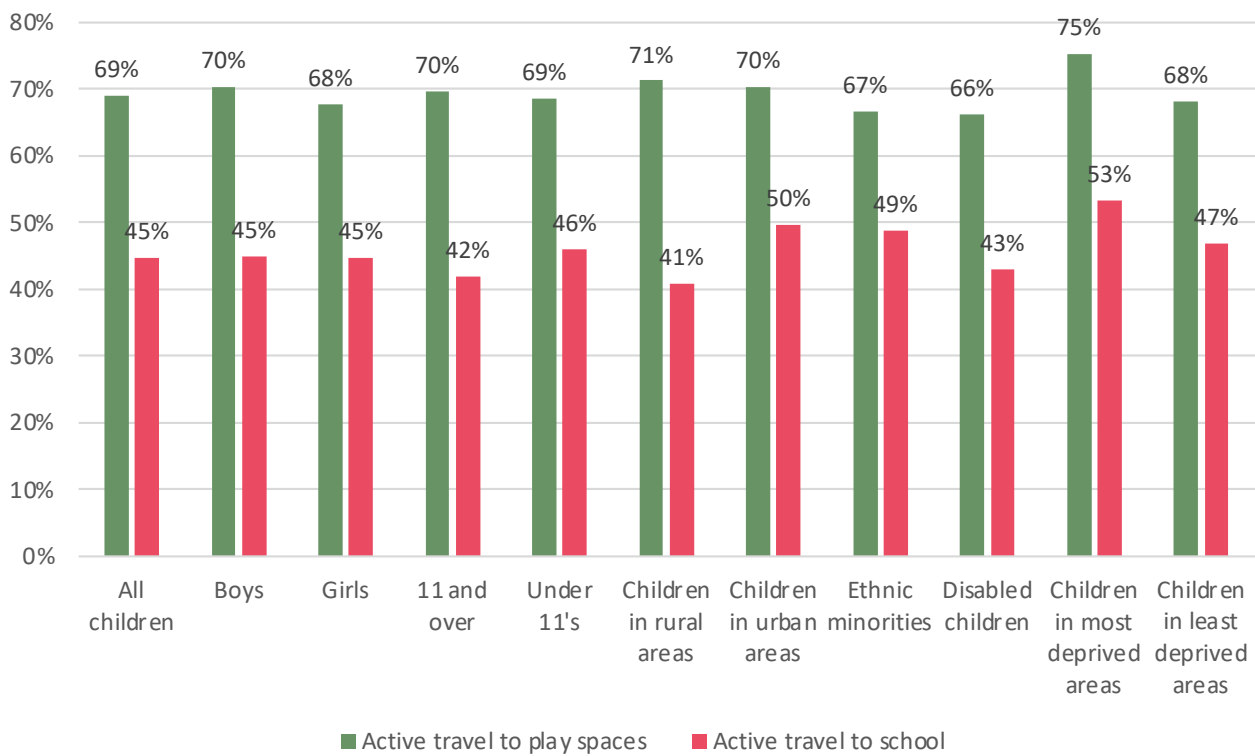


Figure 24: Active travel to play and to school 2022 (6,228 responses)

## % of children travelling independently to play

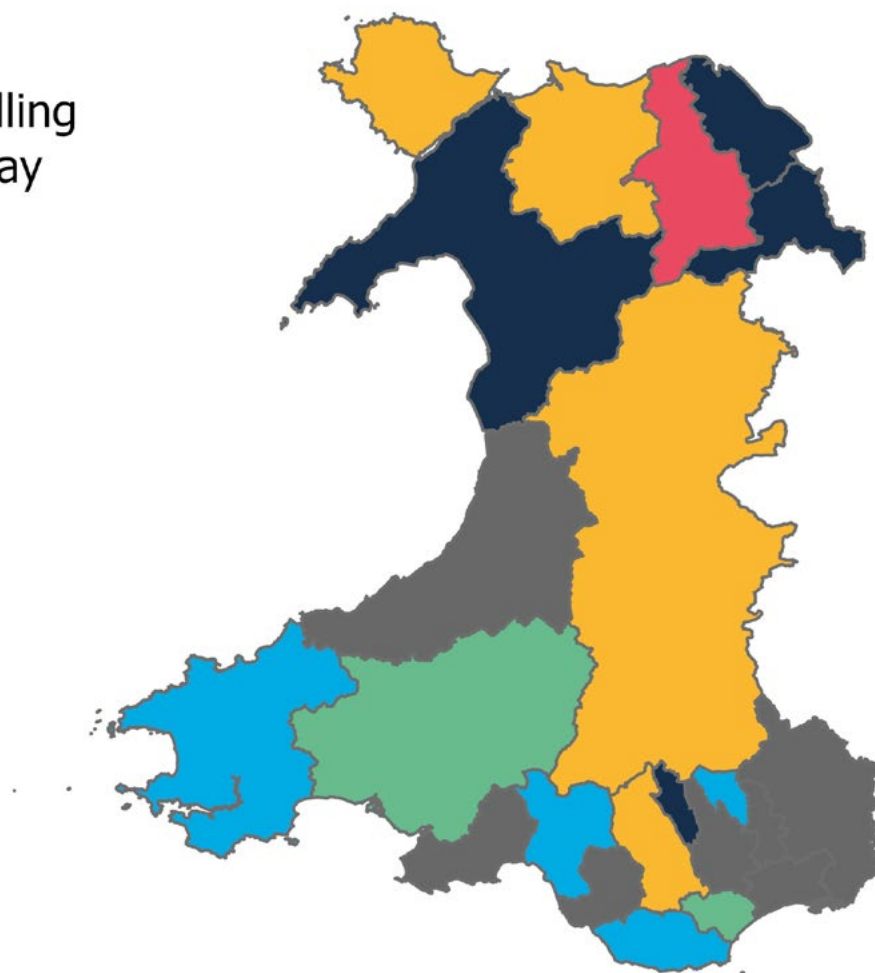
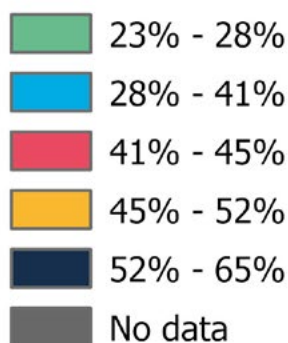


Figure 25: Independent travel to play space by local authority

### Active Play indicator

The benchmark 'percentage of children and young people who report being outdoors for several hours a day', drew information from the *Play Satisfaction Survey* question, 'How often children go out to play or hang out with friends?'. In 2019, 42% of children aged 5 to 17 years reported that they played-out most days while 33% of children reported playing outside a few days per week. In 2022, we found that fewer children – 38% aged 5 to 17 years reported that they played-out most days, while again, 33% of children reported playing outside a few days per week.

### Family and Peers and Community and Environment indicator

This indicator drew upon data from the 'What are grown-ups like when you're playing or hanging out?' question from the *Play Satisfaction Survey*. In 2019, children and teenagers reported that 46% of adults were 'great and happy with children playing out', with another 43% stating that adults were 'OK and alright about children playing out'. In 2022, results were similar with 46% of adults 'great and happy with children playing out', and 42% stating that adults were 'OK and alright about children playing out'.

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- <sup>7</sup> The proportion of surveys in Cardiff completed by parents may have had a bearing on this finding.
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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.