



Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales

What children say about play in Wales: 2025

'I feel *amazing* when playing, nothing to worry about.'

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Contents

Introduction	5
Background	5
The research	6
Time to play	8
How often do children play?	8
Do children have enough time to play?	10
What children say about the time they have to play	11
Space to play	12
Where children play	12
How good are play spaces?	16
What children say about the spaces they have to play	18
Permission to play	19
Feeling safe	19
Adult attitudes	20
Being allowed out	21
Getting to play spaces	23
What children say about the permission they need to play	24
Overall satisfaction	25
Play satisfaction scores	25
Conclusions	27
Appendix 1: Methodology	28
Appendix 2: Active Healthy Kids Report Card	30
Appendix 3: What's good and not so good about play in your area?	32
Infographic	34
References	35

Acknowledgements

A big thank you again must go to all our local authority partners who shared their *Play Satisfaction Survey* data. The survey is now being used consistently by most local authorities in Wales as part of their Play Sufficiency Duty. The sharing of the survey data enables us to reliably record children and teenagers' voices from across the country and as time goes on, is providing a globally unique data-set with which we can better understand and explain the barriers to creating a play-friendly environment.

Thanks also to Dr Michaela James and Dr Hope Jones for their work on analysing the qualitative data from the *Play Satisfaction Survey* and to Alara Ridout, our placement student from Cardiff University, who assisted in cleaning the data.

Author

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This is the third analysis of the *Play Satisfaction Survey* data that David has undertaken on behalf of Play Wales.

Introduction

Since its inception in 1998, the Welsh Government has taken a rights-based approach to policy concerning children. In 2002, the Welsh Government published its *Play Policy*, the first national play policy in the world. The policy was founded on the principle that all children have a right to play. It reflects the government's commitment to ensuring that children and their needs are central to policy making and provision is made to meet children's play needs.

By valuing and increasing the quality of opportunities, it is hoped that children and teenagers will have more time, space and permission to play. Having opportunities to play supports immediate wellbeing as well as contributing to health, social, mental and emotional benefits.

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 neighbourhoods. 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. 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 since 2019, Play Wales has been investigating children and teenagers' varying experiences of play across the country. After three rounds of analysis, we are now able to show, with some certainty, how those experiences are evolving over time and in response to changing circumstances.

Our previous reports in 2019 and 2022 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 opportunities to play. Nonetheless, a number of factors show that while play is a vital part of growing up, it is not equally experienced by all. Limitations of time, space and permission impede opportunities for some children and teenagers to experience satisfaction in their opportunities to play.

In this report, we present an analysis of survey responses taken in 2024/25 from 7,924 children and teenagers where they tell us about what's good and what's not so good about the opportunities to play in their local area and how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play.

This report has been written by Dr David Dallimore, an independent policy advisor and research consultant specialising in early years childcare and play. The report is supplemented by a qualitative analysis undertaken by Dr Michaela James and Dr Hope Jones from Swansea University (see Appendix 3 for more detail). The researchers have analysed two questions from the *Play Satisfaction Survey* data from local authorities:

- What is good about play in your area?
- What is not so good about play in your area?

Background

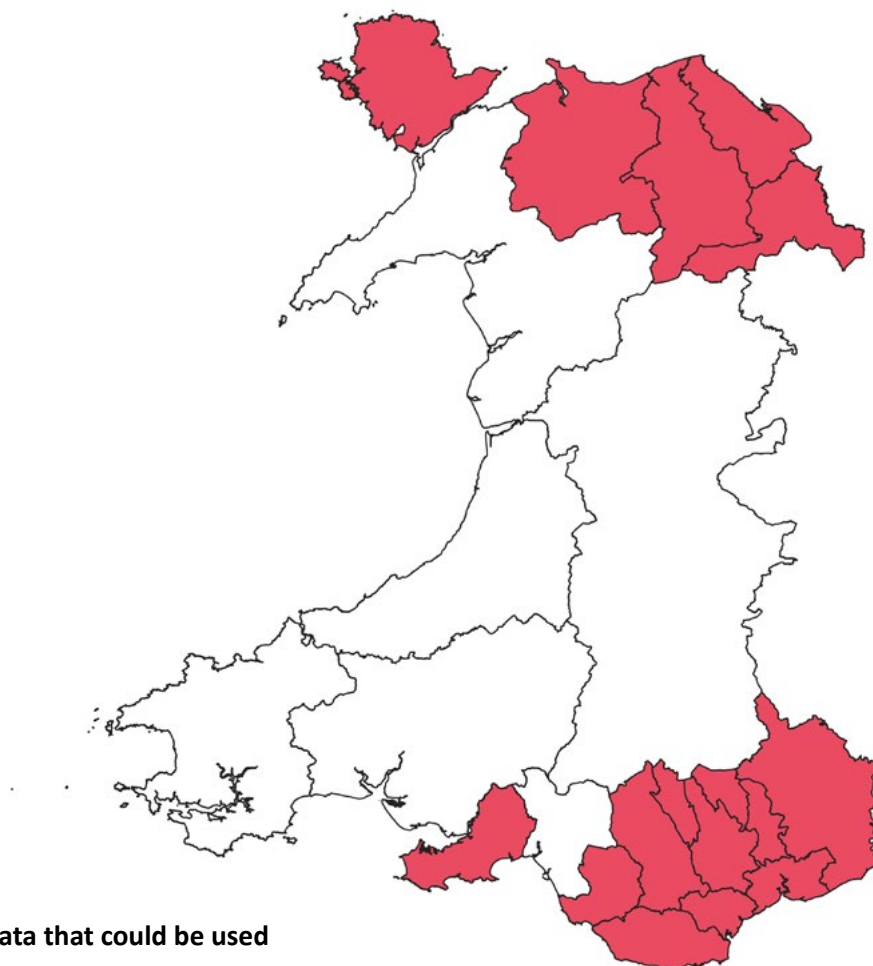
Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficiency of opportunities to play for children. The first part of the duty – the duty to assess sufficiency of opportunities to play – 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 2025, five PSAs have been completed and submitted by local authorities in Wales.

The research

to gain the views of children and teenagers about the opportunities to play 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 an information sheet, *The Play Satisfaction Survey: A guide to using it locally*² was published.

In 2025, Play Wales asked local authorities in Wales to share the results from their *Play Satisfaction Survey*. Of the 22 local authorities, 19 responded and 16 were able to provide anonymised data in a format that could be used for this report (compared with 13 in 2019 and 16 in 2022). Nonetheless, because not all local authorities used the standard *Play Satisfaction Survey* entirely, responses to some questions involve results from fewer areas.

Across most questions posed in the *Play Satisfaction Survey*, we have presented graphs and charts that break down responses to the survey questions and by characteristics including gender, disability, ethnicity, age and geography. A 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 policymakers, those responsible for ensuring play sufficiency in local neighbourhoods, playworkers and parents.

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. For children and teenagers, 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, children and teenagers 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 opportunities to play, they need:

- time to play
- space to play
- 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 opportunities to play can only exist where all three of these conditions 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

Children need sufficient time for both structured and unstructured play, with a strong emphasis on active, outdoor play to support their physical health, mental wellbeing and overall development, and playing is often the way they wish to spend their free time.³ Children associate free time with freedom, independence and choice. However, play of this nature is often limited and increasingly precious.

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* starts by asking children and teenagers how much time they spent playing out in their neighbourhoods, and then asking whether the time they had to play was sufficient.

How often do children play?



Over 70% of children and teenagers play out most days, or at least a few days each week.



Children living in rural areas say they play or hang out a bit more than those in urban areas.

In responding to the question, How often do you go out to play or hang out with friends?, 37% of children and teenagers said that they go out and play or hang out with friends most days. A further 35% play out a few days a week. However, 28% never, or hardly ever play out.

Overall, and across most of the sample characteristics, the data shows that children and teenagers are playing out slightly more than they were in 2022. This may be related to COVID-19 restrictions, as when compared with 2019, children and teenagers are still playing out less regularly in 2025 than they did in 2019. However, there are longer-term trends⁴ showing that less of children's time is being devoted to play, in favour of structured or educational activities.

The analysis of qualitative data from the *Play Satisfaction Survey* found that some older children and teenagers said that academic pressures, homework, or screen time left little room for playing outdoors or socialising with friends.⁵



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

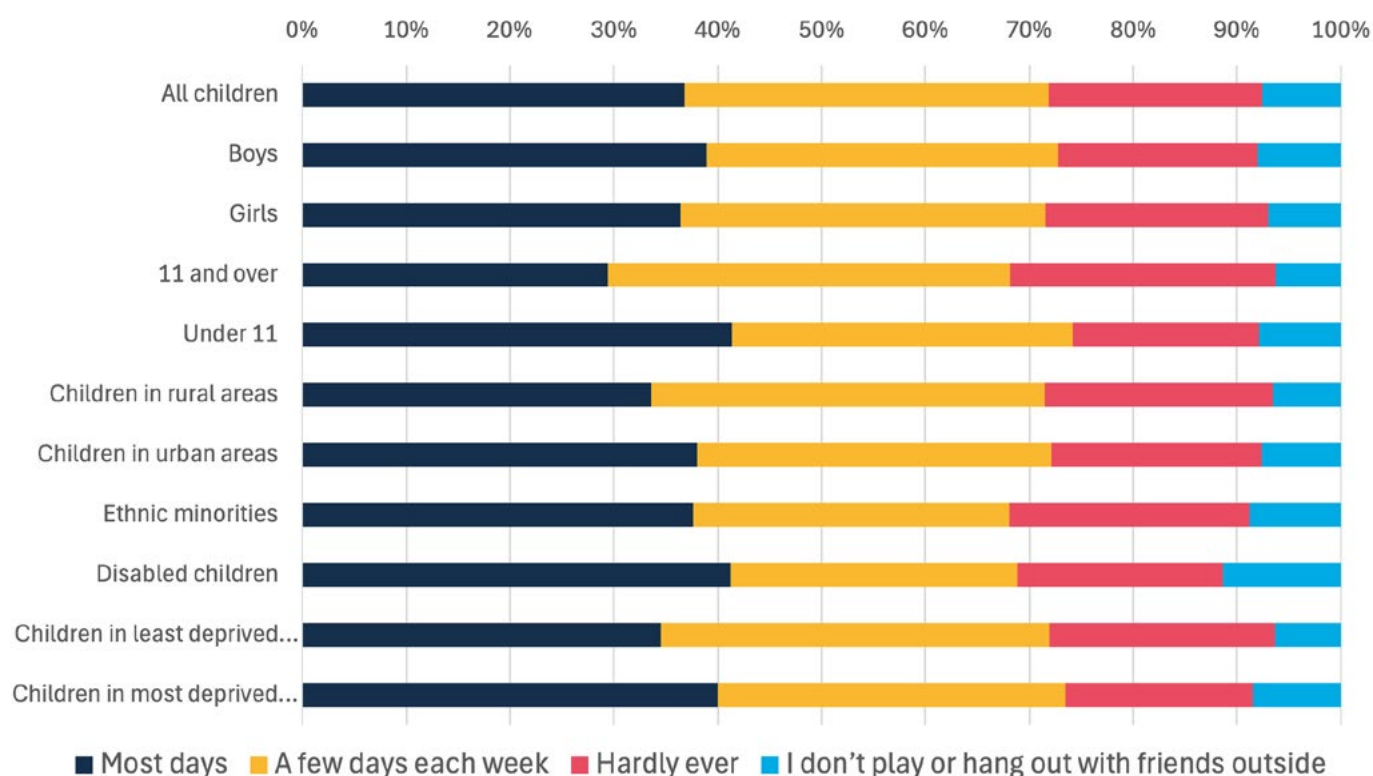


Figure 1: Time spent playing out (6,785 responses)

We can observe a small (2 to 3%) but consistent difference whereby boys say that they play out more than girls. Across all the surveys since 2019, we can see that more girls than boys also say that they never, or hardly ever play out.



37% of disabled children never, or hardly ever play out.

Also consistent across the surveys is the finding that younger children (under 11s) play out far more than older children and teenagers (aged 11 and over). In a simple linear regression analysis, age was found to be the strongest predictor of the amount of time children and teenagers played out. Interestingly, the language that children preferred speaking was also predictive of more time spent playing out, with children who spoke Welsh more likely to play out.

A higher proportion of disabled children say that they rarely, or never play out. We found that whether a child has a disability or not, was a characteristic that has a strong predictive effect on the time children spend playing out.

As we found in 2022, differences can be observed between children and teenagers living in deprived areas where they were more likely to have the freedom 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 other research⁶ 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. In Neath Port Talbot, only 18% of children and teenagers said that they played out most days. This is compared with 55% in Bridgend and over 40% in Monmouthshire, Cardiff,

Wrexham, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly. This is inconsistent with 2022 data which, for example, found that children in Cardiff were much less likely to play out. This may be due to the methods for recruiting sample participants to the survey varying with each PSA.

Do children have enough time to play?



24% of children and teenagers say that they do not have enough time to play and would like more.

Research from other parts of the UK⁷ suggests that many children may not be getting enough time for play, particularly unstructured play outdoors, with claims that time spent playing outdoors has declined

by 50% in a generation. Children's days are often filled with school, homework and structured extracurricular activities, while screen time further reduces time for outdoor play.

Similar to the findings in 2022, we found that 76% of children and teenagers in Wales said that they had 'loads', or 'enough' time to play, while 24% said that they did not have enough time or would like more time to play.

Boys, younger children and children living in rural areas were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of time they had to play – although the differences were very small. Least satisfied were disabled children, who said they needed much more time for playing or hanging out with friends. In the areas that we have data for, more respondents in Flintshire, Vale of Glamorgan and Newport said that they needed a lot more time to play, while those in Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf were most likely to say that they had sufficient time to play.

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

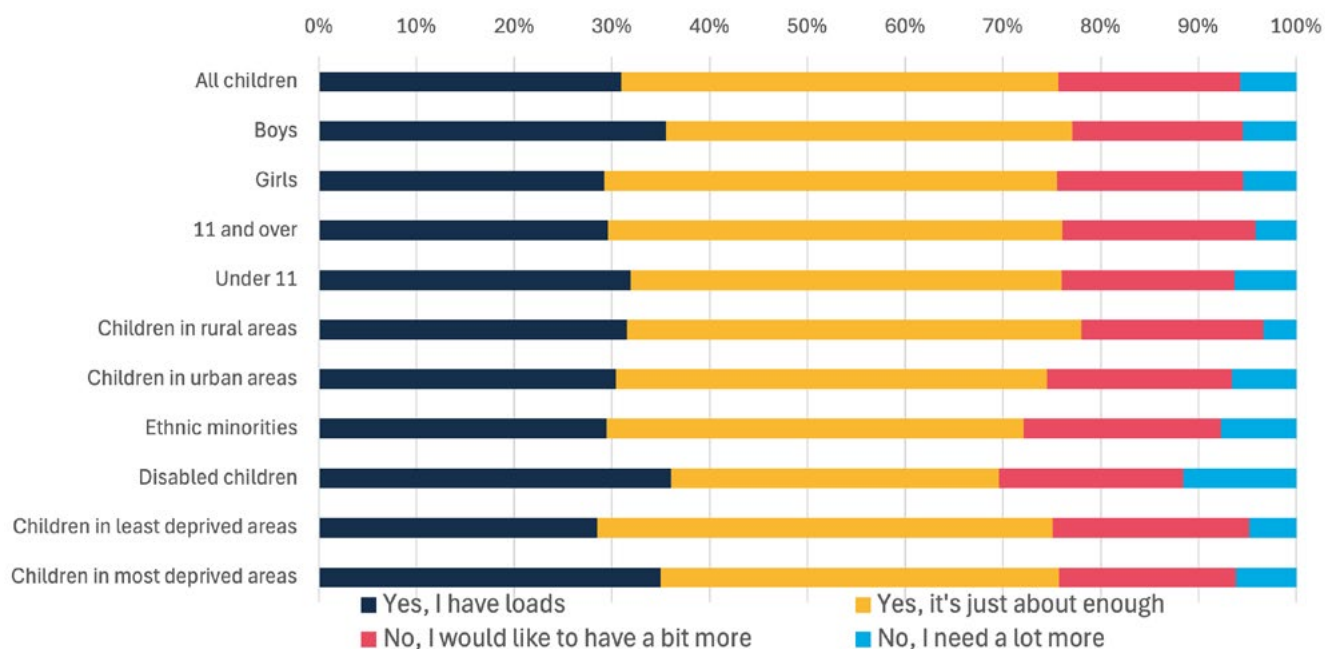


Figure 2: Time to play (6,785 responses)

What children say about the time they have to play

What children and teenagers told us about what's good and not good about the time they have to play can be summarised as follows:

What's good:

- Children enjoy **spending time with friends** in local parks or school fields.
- Some have **quiet, uncrowded spaces** for play.
- Opportunities to **mix play with hobbies**.

What's not good:

- **Busy schedules** with homework, clubs, or gaming reduce play time.
- **Weather** (rain, mud, no shelter) limits outdoor play.
- Sometimes **nobody to play with** locally.
- **Long travel or unsafe routes** to play areas reduce usable time.



'I need more time to play with my friends because I live a bit far away from them.'

Aged 10 from Flintshire

'I think I should be allowed more time to play out, at least near my house.'

Aged under 11 from Wrexham

'I think I need a bit more time playing out with besties and friends!'

Aged 10 from Wrexham

Space to play

Access to a diverse range of places to play, including traditional playgrounds, natural spaces and inclusive environments, provides rich and stimulating environments. A rich play environment is essential for children to experience a healthy and happy childhood. This also contributes to overall development, helping children to grow into healthy, well-rounded and resilient individuals.

A rich play environment links to the outcomes from play itself, including:

- enhancing physical development
- boosting mental development
- fostering social and emotional growth
- connecting with nature and the environment
- encouraging independence and risk-taking.

It is also important within the context of children's right to play that they have choices of spaces that meet their play preferences and needs.

Where children play



72% of children and teenagers are satisfied with the range of spaces where they can play or hang out.

The *Play Satisfaction Survey* asks children and teenagers about the types of places where they play or hang out (see Figure 3). Unsurprisingly, respondents of all ages most commonly play or hang out in their own houses or friends' houses, but for younger children, structured spaces – both outdoors and indoors – are consistently found to play a larger role.

For children under 11, play areas with swings, slides and other equipment to play are really important. Given that these are predominantly provided and maintained by local authorities, their importance in contributing to play sufficiency should not be underestimated. The accompanying qualitative analysis⁸ concluded that in several areas, play equipment was described as outdated, broken, or suitable only for younger children.

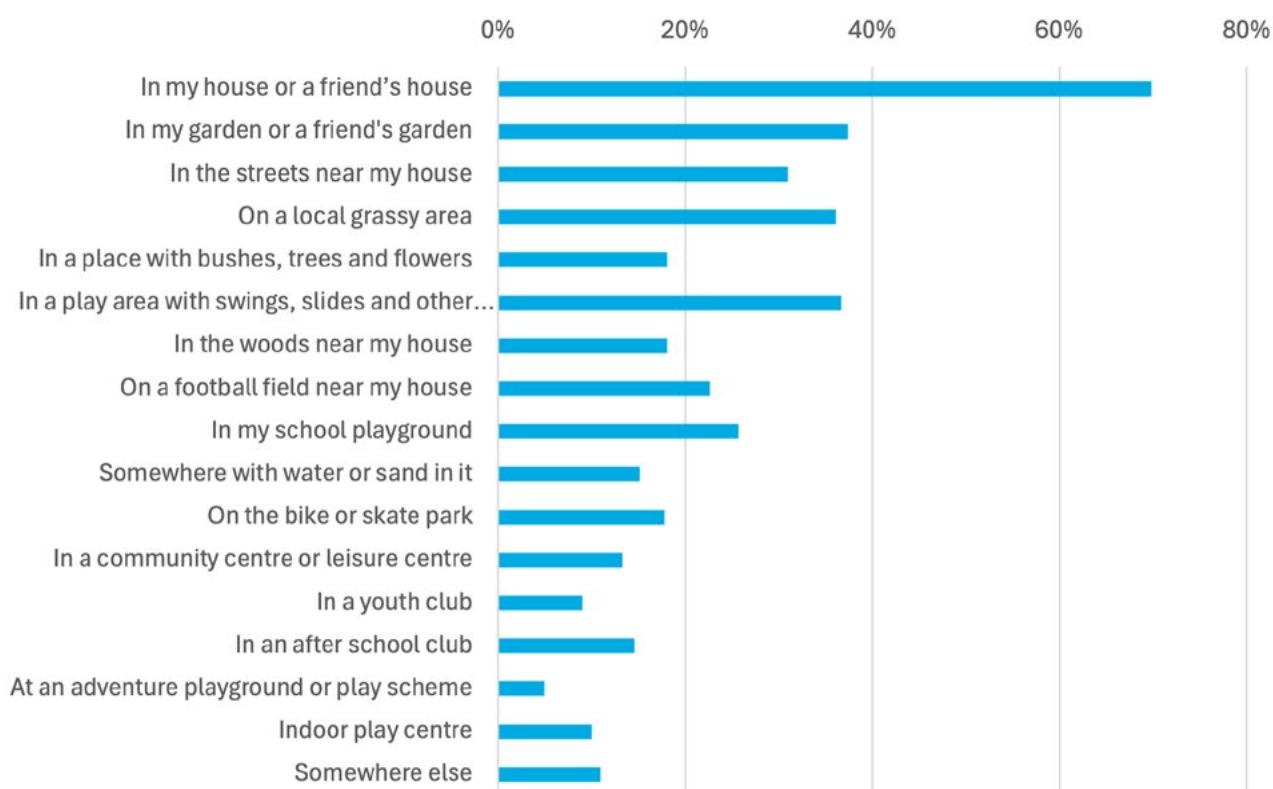


Figure 3: The places children play (5,586 responses)

Many called for investment in spaces for older children and teenagers, especially in Anglesey, Denbighshire and Caerphilly.

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 – continued to decline. In 2019, over 10% of children and teenagers said they went to youth clubs. In 2022, this had fallen to 7.8% and further to 7.6% in 2025. This is perhaps unsurprising as according to Welsh Government data, reported by YMCA in 2025, there were 62% fewer youth centres in 2024 than in 2010-11.⁹

Looking at the range of indoor and outdoor spaces where children and teenagers said they played or hung out over the last three PSA cycles, we can identify a trend towards the outdoors and away from indoor spaces (see Figure 4). While this may seem to be a positive finding, it is in part explained by data showing a move away from ‘organised’ indoor spaces such as play centres, after school clubs, youth clubs and other indoor community provision therefore indicating that children may have **less** choice of space.

This was highlighted by older children and teenagers who said that they lacked indoor spaces to hang out, especially in the winter. Over 200 responses specifically mentioned that they had nowhere to go when it was raining.

‘I don’t go out to play if it’s raining or cold. I don’t go out to play and hang out as it’s too dark; too muddy in Winter.’

Girl aged 9 from Monmouthshire

‘There needs to be more indoor activities for the winter time when I can’t play out because it’s dark outside.’

Girl aged 10 from Denbighshire

‘If it’s raining or on the weekend there is no safe dry place to hang with your friends.’

Boy aged 14 from the Vale of Glamorgan

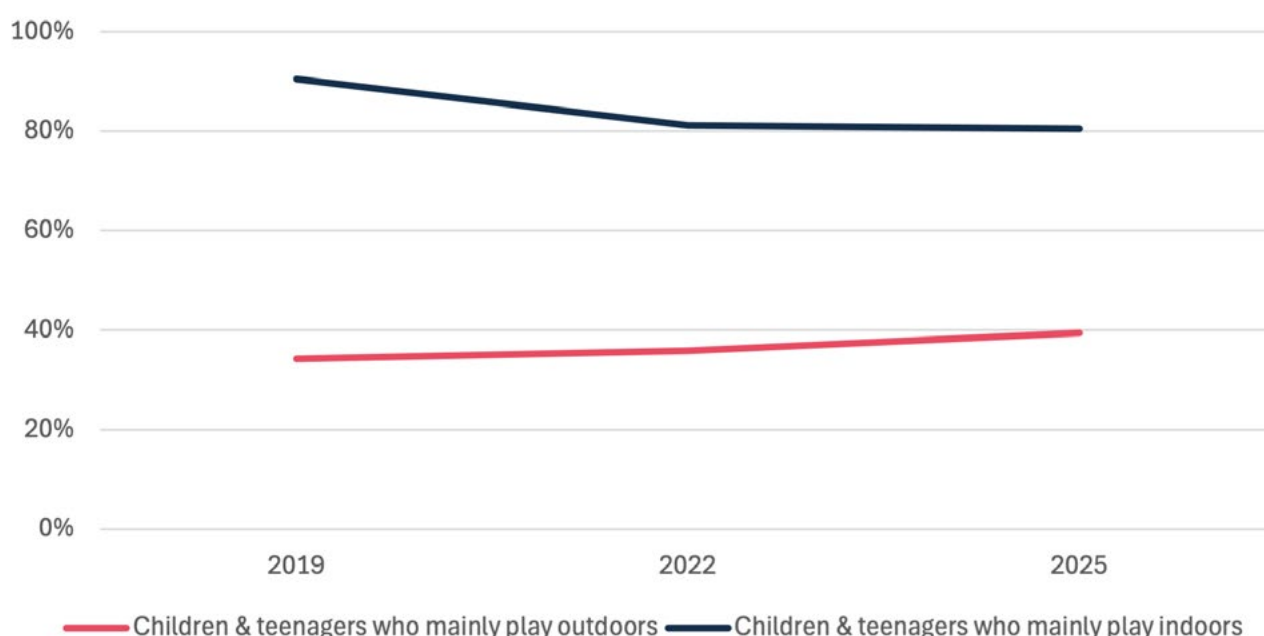


Figure 4: Trends in indoor and outdoor play 2019 to 2025

This trend can also be seen when we calculate the average number of different spaces children and teenagers identified as places where they play. We found that boys use a greater variety of play spaces than girls, as do younger children, and particularly those living in more deprived areas. There was less disparity between disabled children and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children than found in previous surveys.

By local authority, the average number of play spaces identified varies widely across Wales. Those in Bridgend, Swansea, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf identified the greatest number of play spaces, while Flintshire, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan identified the least.

Children and teenagers were asked whether they are able to play in all the places they would like to. Of the children and teenagers surveyed, 32% said they could play in all the places they wanted to (24% in 2019 and 30% in 2022) and a further 40% (33% in 2019 and 38% in 2022) said that they could play in some of them, indicating steady increase in their perceived freedom to play where they wanted.

There was little change in the proportion who said they were very restricted and could play in hardly any places (8% in 2019, 12% in 2022 and 8% in 2025) or those who said that only a few places were available to them (21% in 2019, 20% in 2022 and 20% in 2025).

As found in previous surveys, there is little difference across different characteristics, for example age, gender, location. There are few differences in satisfaction with choice of play spaces, although the survey again showed that older children and teenagers feel less restricted and have greater choice. Disabled children (and their parents) continue to feel that their choices are much more limited, with 13% saying that they could hardly play anywhere.

'My son doesn't really have anything suitable as he's in a wheelchair, we go to [an] ALN [Additional Learning Needs] session where there are too many running around. He cannot walk much he just had a kidney transplant. He cannot be changed safely on changing rooms as they only cater for babies. Not anything suitable in this area or local areas we have driven as far as Merthyr.'

Parent of a boy aged 7 from Rhondda Cynon Taf

'Nowhere disabled friendly – parks haven't got disabled friendly equipment so I can't play.'

Boy aged 10 from Blaenau Gwent

'There's nowhere I can play or hang out safely by myself as I use a frame to help me walk and there's nothing for disabled people anywhere close or that I know of.'

Girl aged 13 from Newport

'Nothing for someone with my needs. No where I can go independently. I have been kicked out of places because of my Tourettes.'

Boy aged 14 from Cardiff



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

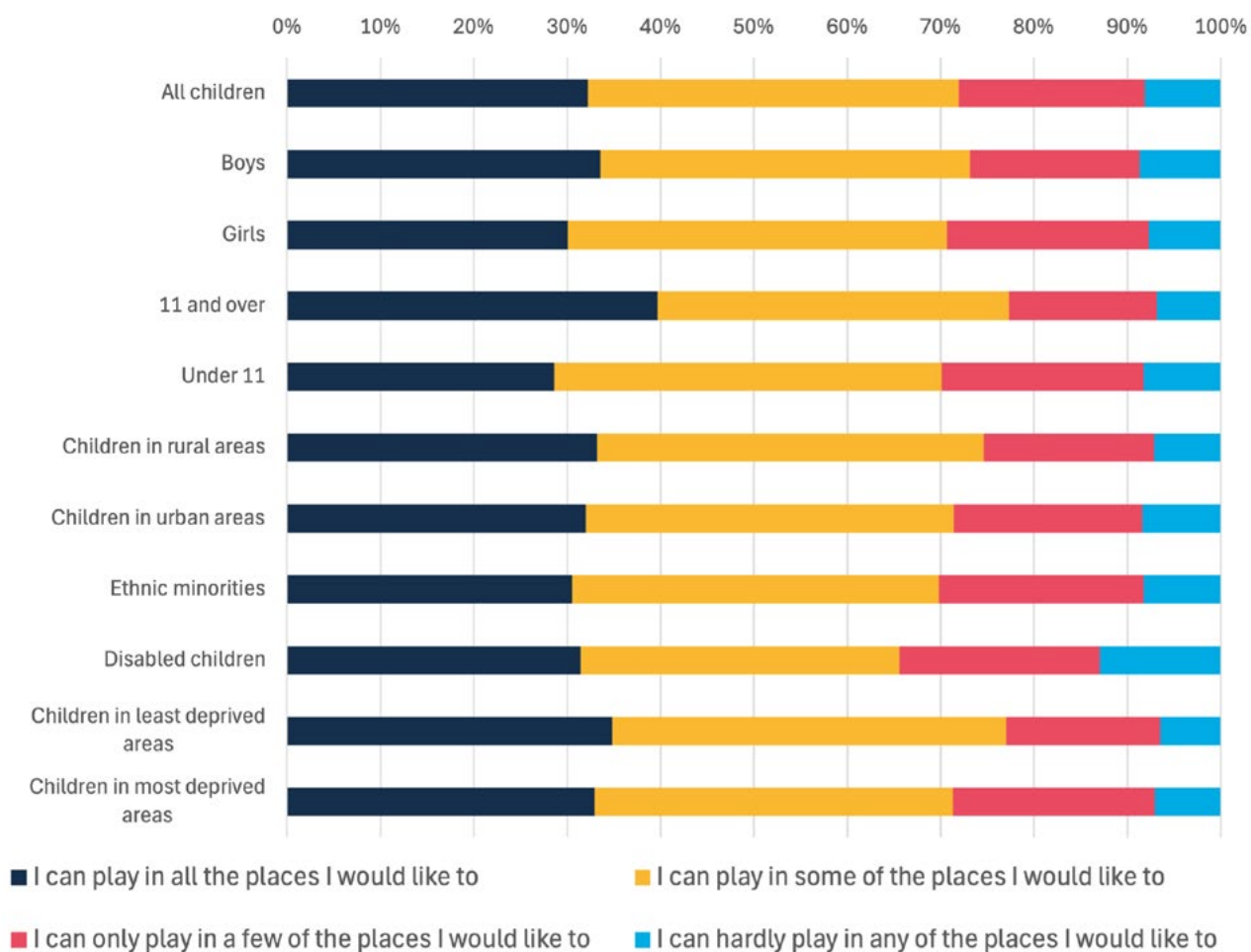


Figure 5: Freedom to play (7,097 responses)

The qualitative analysis of the *Play Satisfaction Survey* data¹⁰ found that many children and teenagers enjoy having access to parks, fields and natural environments that are safe, fun and close to home. These spaces allow for play, physical activity and social interaction. Local authorities such as Flintshire, Swansea and Denbighshire were frequently praised for their natural surroundings and accessible parks.

‘Lots of parks near me and there’s lots of football fields and parks and more fields so I have a lot of fun out.’

Boy aged under 11 from Swansea

‘My area is good for hanging out because there are multiple safe areas in my area such as shops, parks and even a cafe.’

Aged 13 from Flintshire

‘It’s great new park better park and a skatepark and a rugby field. Lots of swings and lots of nature ducks in the lake and wonderful middle.’

Boy aged under 11 from Denbighshire

‘My local park. There is a lot of space and loads of fun items there, also it is very close to my house so I can get there quickly and whenever I want. Also there is a skate park quite close to my house so I can also go there.’

Aged 10 from Flintshire

In several areas, play equipment was described as outdated, broken or suitable only for younger children. Many called for investment in spaces for older children and teenagers, especially in Anglesey, Denbighshire and Caerphilly.¹¹

‘The play area is rubbish and there’s nowhere for older kids to hang out.’

Boy aged 13 from Anglesey

‘99% of it is for like 3 or 6 year olds to play at and maybe add some more stuff for older kids to play on or hang out.’

Aged 11 from Flintshire

‘Some of the areas for hanging out sometimes could be difficult to get to because of mud or fallen trees, in the park there is more play equipment for younger kids and almost none for slightly older kids.’

Girl aged 13 from Flintshire

‘Due to anti-social behaviour our equipment gets broken, burnt and vandalised and is then not replaced. Lot of rubbish, glass, spray cans are around the village and play areas – regular cleans are needed.’

Girl aged 13 from Caerphilly

‘Some of the equipment in the park is broken and there’s litter, need more bins. Some information should be given about not littering and the impact on the environment.’

Girl aged 10 from Bridgend

How good are play spaces?



88% of children and teenagers say that they can do all, or at least some of the things they like in the spaces where they play or hang out.

Analysis of qualitative data from this survey, and previous surveys, suggests a mixed picture of the quality of play spaces in Wales. There are inclusive, innovative designs in some areas, while others face issues of inequality in access, underfunding and vandalism. Public playgrounds are particularly crucial for children in urban areas and those without gardens, providing their primary opportunity for outdoor play and exercise. Yet, budget cuts to local authorities have clearly led to a decline in maintenance, leaving many existing spaces in disrepair and with missing equipment. The decline in quality and access to play spaces impacts children’s physical and mental health, potentially contributing to rising childhood obesity rates and mental health issues.

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

As in 2022, most (88%) said that the places where they play are good where they can do all, or some of the things they want to. The proportion of children

and teenagers who said that they ‘weren’t good’ or were ‘just rubbish’ also remained at 12%. Disabled children expressed the greatest dissatisfaction (17%) with the quality of play spaces while higher than average proportions of older children and teenagers (15%) were also critical of the spaces they had available for play.



How good are the places you play in?

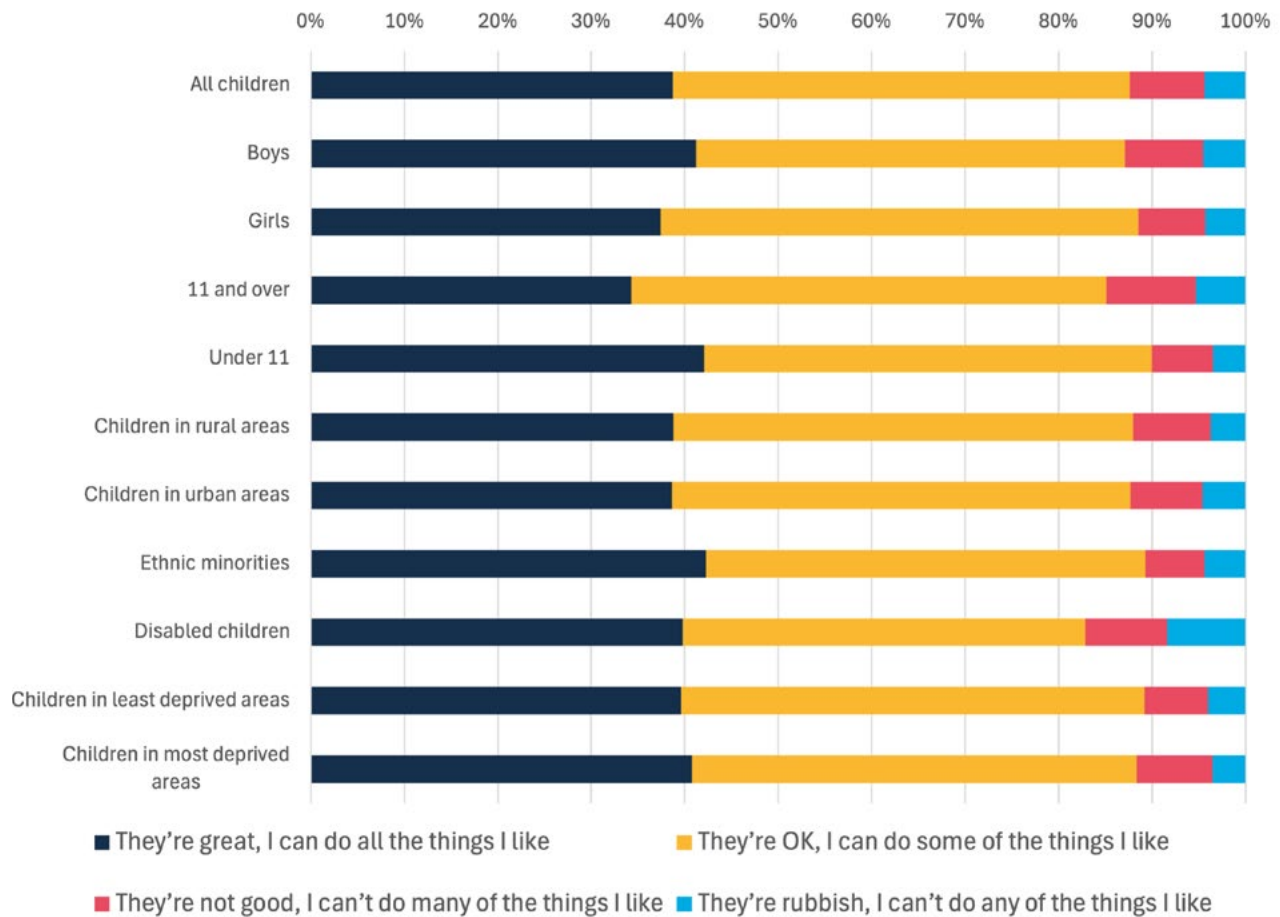


Figure 6: Quality of play spaces (7,046 responses)

Over 90% of children and teenagers in Bridgend, Conwy, Caerphilly, the Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Wrexham, Swansea and Denbighshire said that the places they played-in were 'great' or 'okay'. The proportion who said that places were 'not good' or 'rubbish' was highest in Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot and Newport.

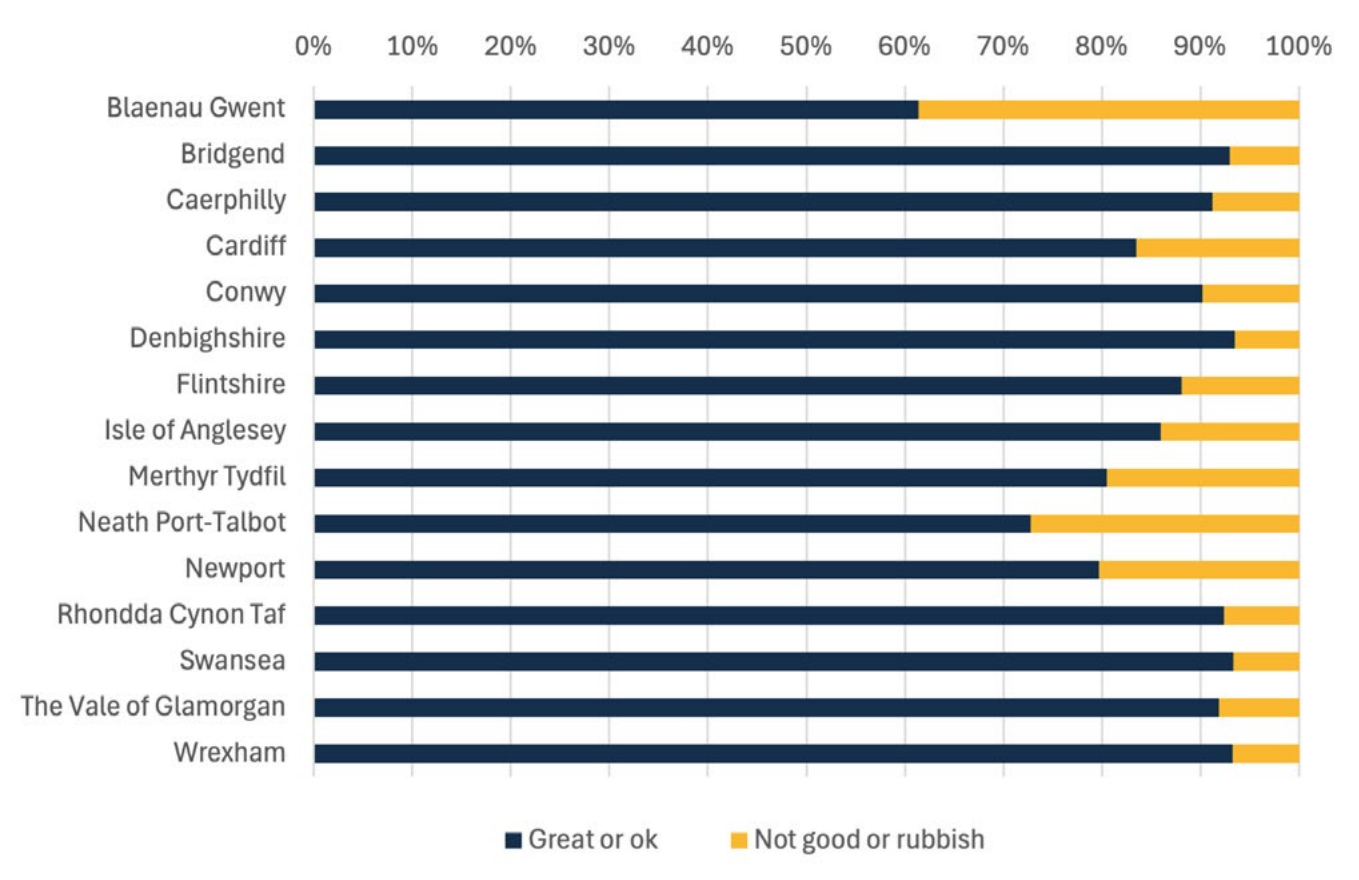


Figure 7: Quality of play spaces by local authority (7,056 reponses)

What children say about the spaces they have to play

What children and teenagers told us about what's good and not good about the spaces they have to play or hang out can be summarised as follows:

What's good:

- Many areas have **open spaces, fields, woodlands and beaches** for play.
- Access to **parks, football/rugby pitches and skate parks**.
- **Safe, maintained equipment** in some locations.
- Spaces to **meet friends and hang out**.

What's not good:

- Some parks are **boring or lack equipment** (for example, no climbing frames).
- **Poor maintenance** – rubbish, broken glass, damaged play structures.
- **Safety hazards** – main roads nearby, dangerous surfaces, muddy playing fields.
- Lack of **suitable play areas** for older children.

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



Nearly 90% of children and teenagers say that they always, or mostly feel safe when they play or hang out.

The 2025 *Play Satisfaction Survey* asked children and teenagers how safe they felt in the places they play. Results were consistent with the previous surveys and also across most of characteristics (such as gender, age, ethnicity, location). Responses around safety were relatively consistent, with over 85% of children and teenagers always, or usually feeling safe when they were out. Only 6.5% said that they never felt safe, although this was higher than the 4% found in 2022. As previously reported, disabled children feel far less safe than their peers with over 10% saying they never feel safe and a further 10% saying that they never play out.

The qualitative analysis of the *Play Satisfaction Survey*¹² supports our data in finding that safety was a really important issue. Children mentioned worries about bullying, drug use, harassment and unsafe roads. In Newport, Conwy and Blaenau Gwent particularly, children highlighted how these issues prevent them from playing freely or accessing spaces they enjoy.

'I don't always feel safe. Sometimes I feel scared of the adults in the area. I cut my knee on glass. I stay away from certain parks because there have been incidents in the past or I feel unsafe.'

Aged 10 from Flintshire

'There are always teenagers and they make me feel unsafe. There are lots of glass on the floor.'

Girl aged 10 from Conwy

'There is a lot of traffic that speeds everywhere and there is no safe way to get to the park across the busy main road from my friend's house this needs to be safer.'

Girl aged 10 from Blaenau Gwent

'Ebbw Vale is safer than the other areas but we don't have anything for teenagers. So we end up in play parks and everyone tells us off because they are meant for little kids. Where do the teenagers go then?'

Boy aged 14 from Blaenau Gwent

'The amount of kids who ride motorbikes over the green areas and sell drugs where I can see and they have big dogs and never clean up after them.'

Girl aged 12 from Blaenau Gwent

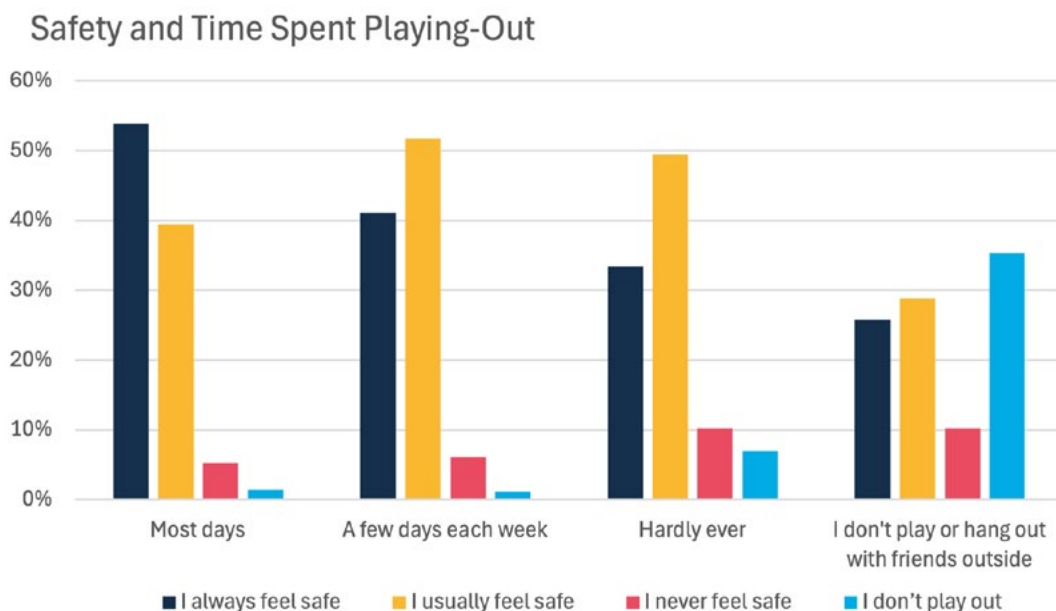


Figure 8: Time spent playing out and feelings of safety (7,214 responses)

Figure 8 illustrates the relationship between how much time children and teenagers play or hang out and their feelings of safety. Those who always feel safe are also most likely to play out most days, or a few days each week. Conversely, those who never feel safe are also those who are least likely to play out most days. This is more pronounced for girls, for disabled children, and for older children and teenagers.

In response to the question, What are grown-ups like when you are playing or hanging out?, 86% of children and teenagers said that adults were great, or at least okay with them when they were playing out (88% in 2022). Of the children and teenagers surveyed, 14% said that some, or all adults were grumpy with children playing out (12% in 2022), with disabled respondents (16%) and older children and teenagers (18%) saying that adults didn't like, or hated them playing out.

Adult attitudes



Adult grumpiness is experienced more by older children (18%), disabled children (16%) and boys (16%).

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.¹³

Responses to this question were found not to have changed significantly since 2019 and comments support the findings of other studies¹⁴ 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.

By local authority, children in Neath Port Talbot, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil reported the highest levels of adult grumpiness towards them (over 20%) compared with the fewest in Bridgend and Swansea (under 5%).

'I think older people need to stop being so grumpy when kids have fun I think it's only right to be grumpy at it if their being loud next your house.'

Girl aged 13 from Merthyr Tydfil

'The rubbish and the road men and they scare most of us. And there is grumpy parents threatening us to call the police and that makes me scared.'

Girl aged 10 from Cardiff

'Up in the area by me, especially in summer time adults are drinking and using drugs and don't feel safe.'

Boy aged 13 from Neath Port Talbot

'Two doors down from me there's an elderly lady who is always grumpy and never lets me and my friends play near there and she threatens us to pop our ball.'

Boy aged 10 from Denbighshire

'Gangs hanging around, teenagers on motorbikes and being dangerous. Adults shouting if we are in crowds on the field playing football. Being branded naughty because there are a few of us just wanting to play football.'

Boy aged 14 from Blaenau Gwent

Being allowed out



74% of children and teenagers say that they are allowed to play or hang out on their own or with friends.

Research¹⁵ suggests that while parents aim to foster their children's development through play, they often grapple with balancing the need for supervision and protection against the benefits of autonomous exploration and risk-taking. Parents' concerns are often about physical injuries, stranger danger and antisocial behaviour, which often lead to limiting children's to play, particularly outdoors. Lack of perceived neighbourhood safety, limited community involvement and fear of judgment from other parents can further restrict children's play with parental anxiety also transferred to children themselves. This is evident in children and teenagers' responses to a number of survey questions highlighting the significant proportion who do not play or hang out outside their homes and gardens, or the homes and gardens of friends.

When asked whether they were allowed to play or hang out, we found that 25% are not allowed to play out on their own or with friends. Fewer girls than boys are allowed out, younger children are allowed out less than older children as are ethnic minority and disabled children. While the proportion of children not allowed out has fallen since 2022 (26%), it is the same as found in 2019 (25%).

The 2025 data did not show the link found in 2022 between deprivation and permission to play where those in the most affluent areas were most restricted. This finding may have been related to the COVID-19 restrictions in 2021/22 when the survey took place.

The 2025 *Play Satisfaction Survey* did concur with the 2022 data that those living in rural areas are allowed out much more (82%) than those living in towns and cities (72%). From a *multiple regression analysis*, rurality was also the only factor that had a positive *predictive* effect on whether children had permission to play out on their own or with friends. Multiple regression analysis analyses the influence of one independent variable on a number of other dependent variables. Multiple regression helps to predict an outcome (like whether children are allowed out to play) based on several influencing factors (such as gender, ethnicity or where they live). It therefore enables forecasting and predictions to be made.

'I only go to football and rugby training. To be safe I'm not allowed outside with friends.'

Boy aged 9 from Neath Port Talbot

'Sometimes I can't play as Mum and Dad have to work so I can't go to the Parks I am not allowed out on my own.'

Aged 9 from Cardiff

'I think there should be more cctv cameras because our estate is big for bad guy watch so my mum and dad don't let me go walk on my estate alone so I mostly have to play in my garden.'

Girl aged 12 from Wrexham

'Not allowed out without adult as the area is not safe.'

Aged 12 from Newport

'My mam won't let me out because of teenagers.'

Boy aged 8 from Rhondda Cynon Taf

'Drug dealing going on. Too afraid to play out.'

Girl aged 14 from Newport

'I'm not allowed to play outside on my own because of the bigger kids who hang around. It's not safe for me.'

Girl aged 8 from Blaenau Gwent

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

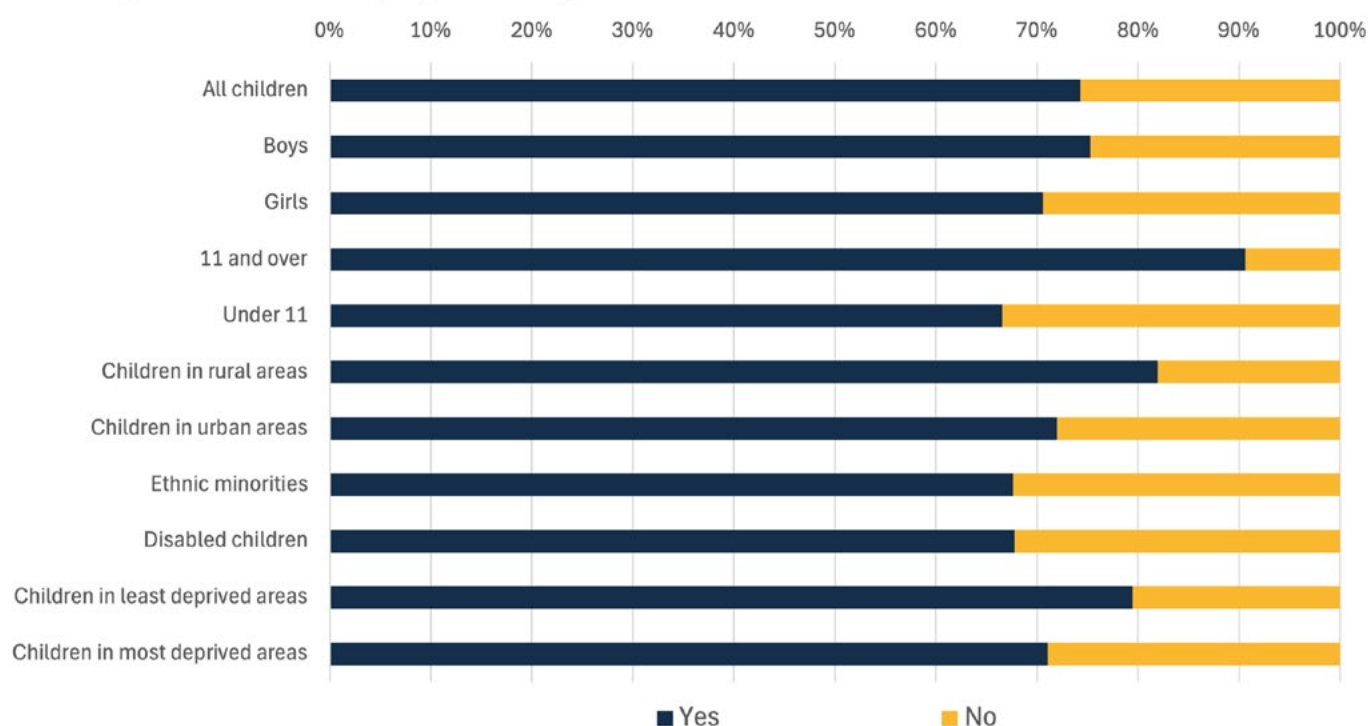


Figure 9: Permission to play (6,784 responses)

There was wide variation between local authorities. As in 2022, Merthyr Tydfil had the highest proportion of children who are allowed out to play on their own or with friends (95%), while in Swansea, 62% of children responding said that they weren't allowed out.

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

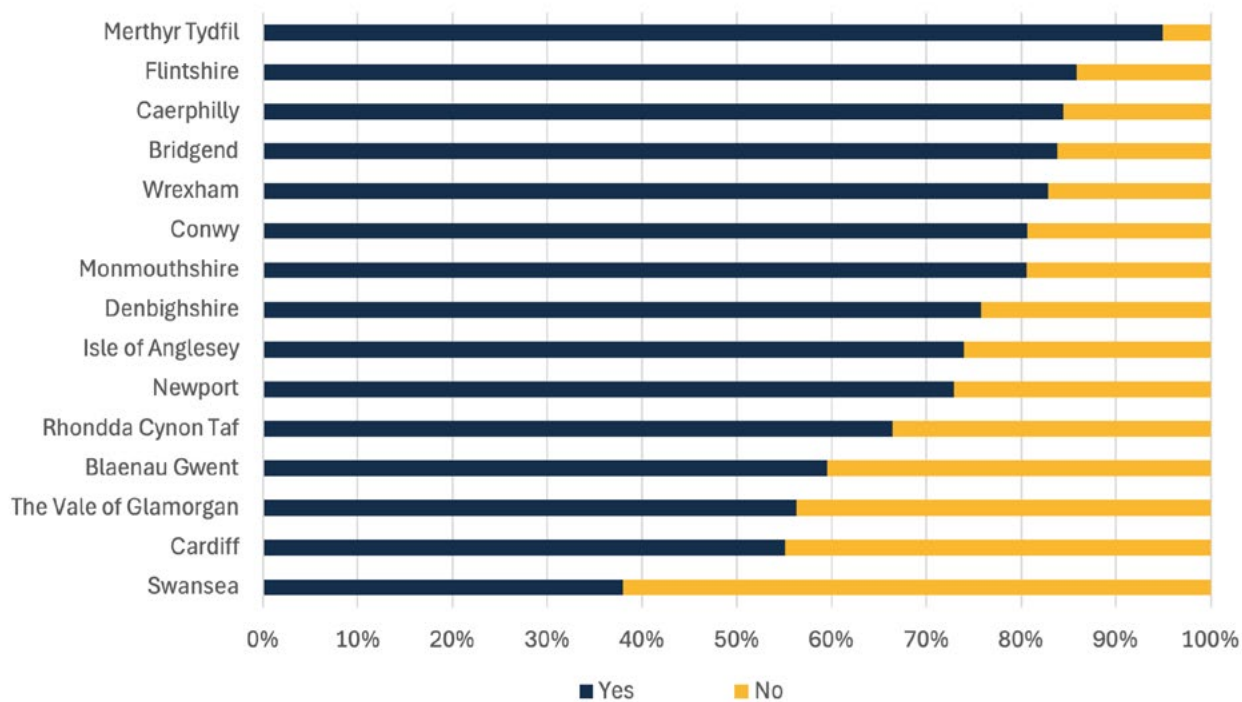


Figure 10: Permission to play ranked by local authority (6,784 responses)

Getting to play spaces

Children’s lack of independent mobility can leave them dependent on parents or other caregivers to take them to spaces where they can play, which would otherwise be inaccessible due to distance, obstacles such as major roads and traffic, or a general concern about leaving the home without an adult. Children’s time to play is therefore often dependent on their parents’ time, which in turn is highly precious. As a result, many time-poor parents have to balance their many other responsibilities with finding time to enable their child to play.

‘I cannot really play out because there is no one to play with so my mum or dad would have to drive me but that would be a pain.’

Aged 10 from Flintshire

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

Of the children and teenagers responding to the *Play Satisfaction Survey*, 52% said that they are able to walk or ride on their own or with friends to where they play, while 46% rely on an adult to either walk or drive them. The proportion of children and teenagers travelling independently had fallen from 55% in 2019 to 50% in 2022 so again, the 2022 rate may have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

We found very similar patterns to 2022 in the 2025 data. Older children and teenagers (65%), boys (55%), those living in rural areas (58%) and in more deprived areas (56%) were all more likely to travel independently to play. Ethnic minority children (54%), girls (52%) and younger children (52%) 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.

What children say about the permission they need to play

What children and teenagers told us about what's good and not good about the permission they need to play can be summarised as follows:

What's good:

- Some areas **feel safe**, with adults nearby or small neighbourhoods where children are known.
- Presence of **youth clubs or supervised activities**.

What's not good:

- Parents often **restrict freedom** due to safety concerns.
- Perception of **unsafe environments** (traffic, strangers, drug use, broken glass).
- Children feel **watched or overly controlled**, leading to frustration.
- Perceptions of **dangerous individuals or antisocial behaviour** in some public spaces.



Overall satisfaction



71% of children and teenagers say that their opportunities to play are good, or great.

Children desire play that:

- is self-directed
- offers opportunities for exploration and challenge
- fosters social connections
- is supported by caring adults
- has ample time dedicated to it.

Providing such opportunities to play is crucial for children's overall wellbeing, development and happiness. Probably the most important question asked in the *Play Satisfaction Survey* is therefore, Overall how good are your opportunities for playing and hanging out?. This can be taken to reflect children's play satisfaction.

In 2025, we found that of the 6,724 children that responded to the question, 71% said that their opportunities to play were 'great' or 'good'. This was a small (and therefore statistically insignificant) rise from 70% in 2022 but was still a considerable drop from the 84% that we recorded in 2019.



Play satisfaction scores



Children and teenagers who say that they don't play or hang out with friends outside are less satisfied compared with those who say that they do.

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 other relevant factors. Scores recorded between 2022 and 2025 are very similar. In 2025, the average 'score' was 3.9 compared with 3.88 in 2022.

As illustrated in Figure 11, we found little difference in satisfaction between boys and girls. There was greater difference between those living in deprived or less-deprived areas than we found in 2022. Children and teenagers in rural areas are still more satisfied than their counterparts in urban areas, although the margin is less. As in 2022, younger children are more satisfied than older children and teenagers, while disabled children and teenagers were still by far, the least satisfied with their opportunities to play.

Through multiple regression, we investigated whether factors such as gender, rurality, disability, ethnicity and deprivation (independent variables) could help us predict play satisfaction (dependent variable). We found that only the deprivation ranking of where children live provided a reliable predictor of play satisfaction.

In Figure 11 we have compared satisfaction scores by factors that represent the time, space and permission to play from 2022 and 2025. There is a high degree of consistency in these results, which means that we can be more certain of the findings. The results show that those children and teenagers who play out most days, who feel safe and who are allowed out to play are more likely to be satisfied with their opportunities to play.

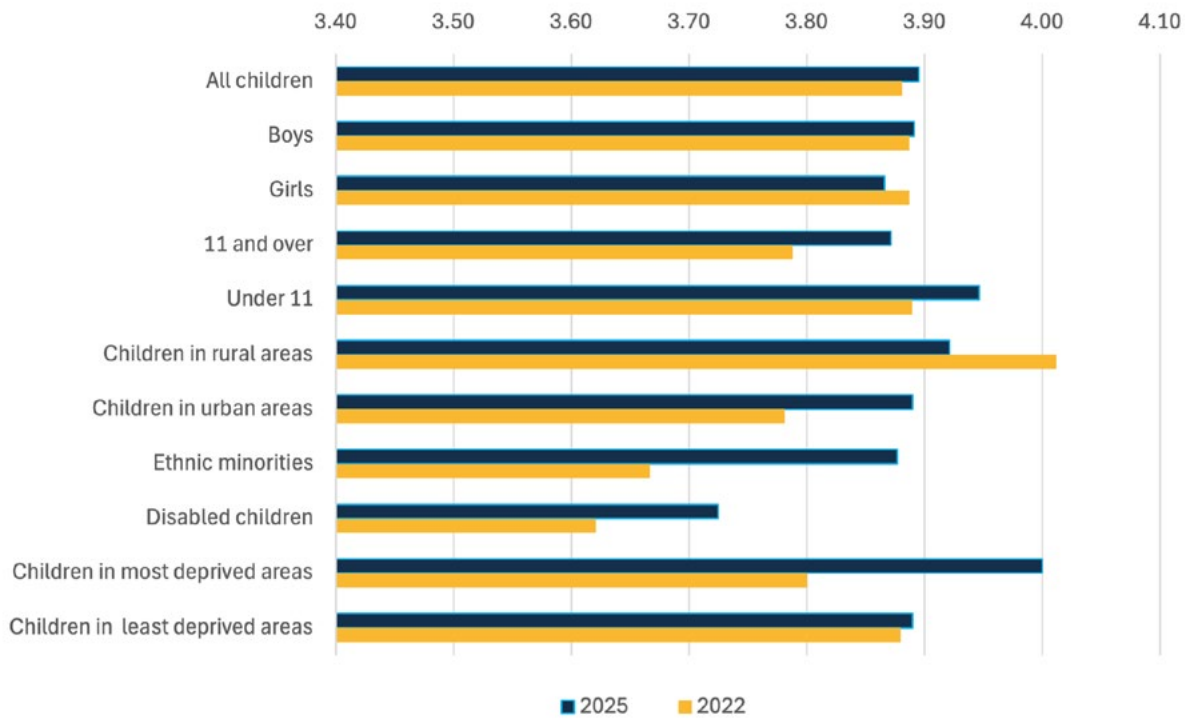


Figure 11: Play satisfaction scores (6,582 responses)

Of the local authorities that asked about play satisfaction, there was large variation in scores. Children and teenagers in Neath Port Talbot and Blaenau Gwent were the least satisfied with their opportunities to play, while those in Caerphilly and Flintshire were the most satisfied.

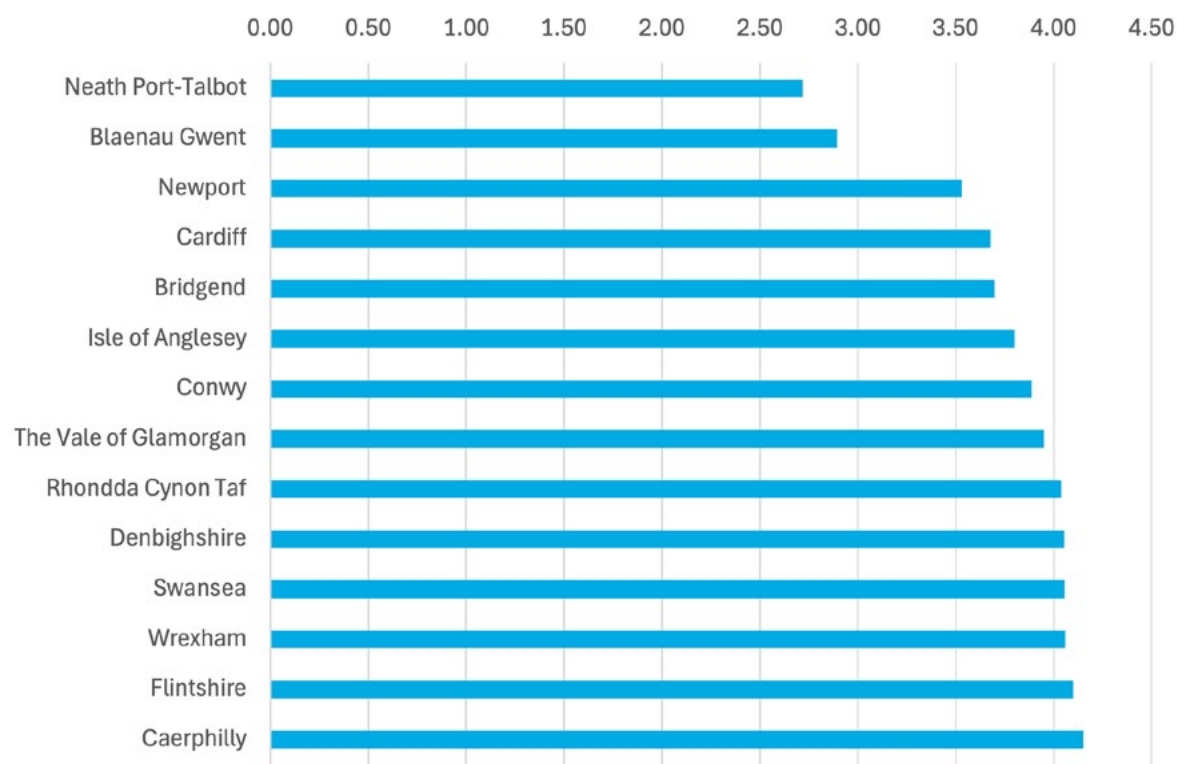


Figure 12: Average play satisfaction scores ranked by local authority (6,582 responses)

Conclusions

This 2025 report, based on the voices of 7,924 children and teenagers across Wales, offers a compelling and nuanced insight into their lived experiences of play. It confirms that while the majority of children value and enjoy their opportunities to play, significant disparities continue to limit equitable access to play for all.

Children overwhelmingly say that play is essential for their happiness, development and social life. They thrive when they have **time, space and permission** to play – three interconnected domains that underpin meaningful and fulfilling play experiences. However, the findings show that these foundations are not consistently available to every child in Wales.

Time to play remains constrained for many. Although a majority of children play out regularly, one in four still say they do not have enough time. Academic pressures, digital distractions and family routines often displace unstructured outdoor play. Older children, disabled children and those in urban or less deprived areas report less time and opportunity to engage in regular, independent play.

When it comes to **space to play**, 72% of children say they are satisfied with the range of places available – but access and quality vary widely. Playgrounds and structured outdoor spaces remain vital, especially for younger children, yet many are in disrepair, lack inclusivity or cater poorly to older children and teenagers. The decline of indoor spaces, such as youth clubs, is particularly concerning, especially in poor weather and for those seeking safe spaces to socialise.

Children in rural and deprived areas often have greater access to outdoor spaces, but this is counterbalanced by issues of maintenance, accessibility and inclusivity – especially for disabled children, who remain the most excluded group in terms of opportunities to play.

Whether granted by parents, neighbourhoods, or through feelings of safety, **permission to play** is perhaps the most significant barrier. While most children report feeling safe and being allowed out to play, a notable 25% are not permitted to play independently. Safety concerns, adult disapproval, antisocial behaviour and environmental hazards frequently prevent children from playing outside. Again, disabled children, girls and ethnic minority children are disproportionately affected.

Overall satisfaction with opportunities to play has declined from 84% in 2019 to 71% in 2025. This downward trend signals a need for urgent attention from policymakers, local authorities and neighbourhoods.

The consistent message from children is clear: they want more time, better spaces and greater freedom to play.

The findings from this report reaffirm the importance of maintaining a **rights-based approach to play policy**, as pioneered by the Welsh Government. Yet, realising the right to play in practice demands more than policy statements. It requires coordinated action, sustained investment and meaningful inclusion of children's voices in local planning and provision.

A play-friendly Wales is one where every child, regardless of age, ability, background or location, has access to safe, engaging and appropriate spaces to play and grow. This report provides the evidence needed to make that vision a reality, and reminds us that listening to children is not just good practice, but a legal and moral imperative.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Sampling

Data were requested from all 22 local authorities across Wales. No information was received from Gwynedd, Powys and Pembrokeshire. Of the 19 remaining councils, data from Torfaen, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire was not included due to non-standard surveys having been used, where data was incompatible, 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. The data were cleaned and collected into a single dataset. Taking the *Play Satisfaction Survey*, all datasets were aligned to create a set of consistent variables. This included re-ordering columns to match the order and creating new variable names. 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 to 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, 7,924 responses from children and teenagers were included in the final dataset. When put in context of the whole population of children and teenagers aged five to fourteen in Wales (342,822¹⁶), a 2.2% sample was achieved and provides a 95% probability that the responses accurately reflect the attitudes of the whole population.

Profile of respondents

- Of the children and teenagers responding to the survey, 48.7% identified as girls, 49.9% as boys and 1.4% as other or preferred not to say.
- 75% of these respondents were under the age of eleven (75% in 2022) while 30% were aged eleven or older (25% in 2022).
- Answering the question, Do you think of yourself as disabled?, 6.4% said yes (5.7% in 2022).
- Surveys were distributed in both Welsh and English but children and teenagers were asked which language they preferred to speak. 5.5% preferred Welsh (11% in 2022), 85% said English (85% in 2022), 1.5% said Welsh and English and 5% preferred another language.
- Ethnicity data was provided by 71% of respondents. Combining categories into the ONS simplified five category list, we recorded the following sample:

White	4,968	87.8%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	225	4.0%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	214	3.8%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	149	2.6%
Other ethnic group	103	1.8%

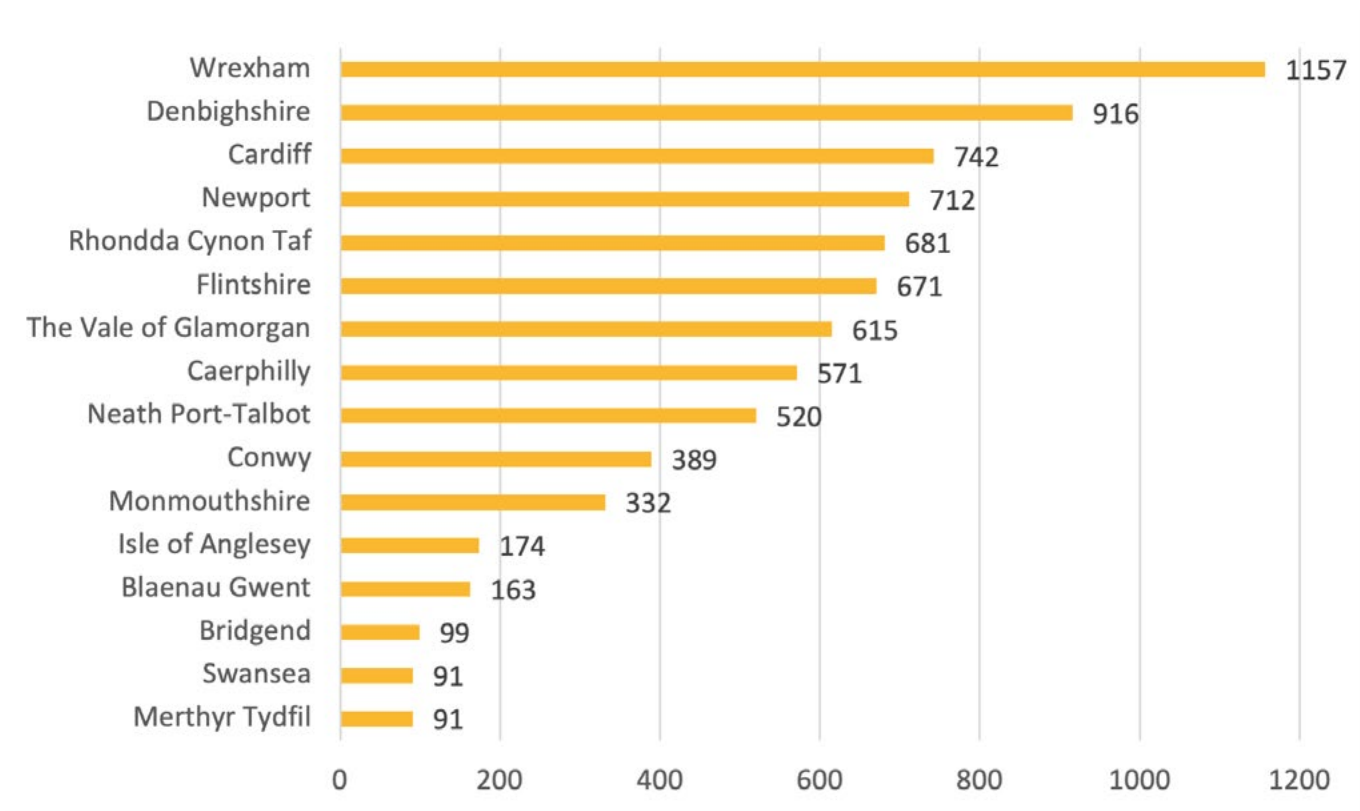


Figure 13: Play Satisfaction Survey sample by local authority (7,924 responses)

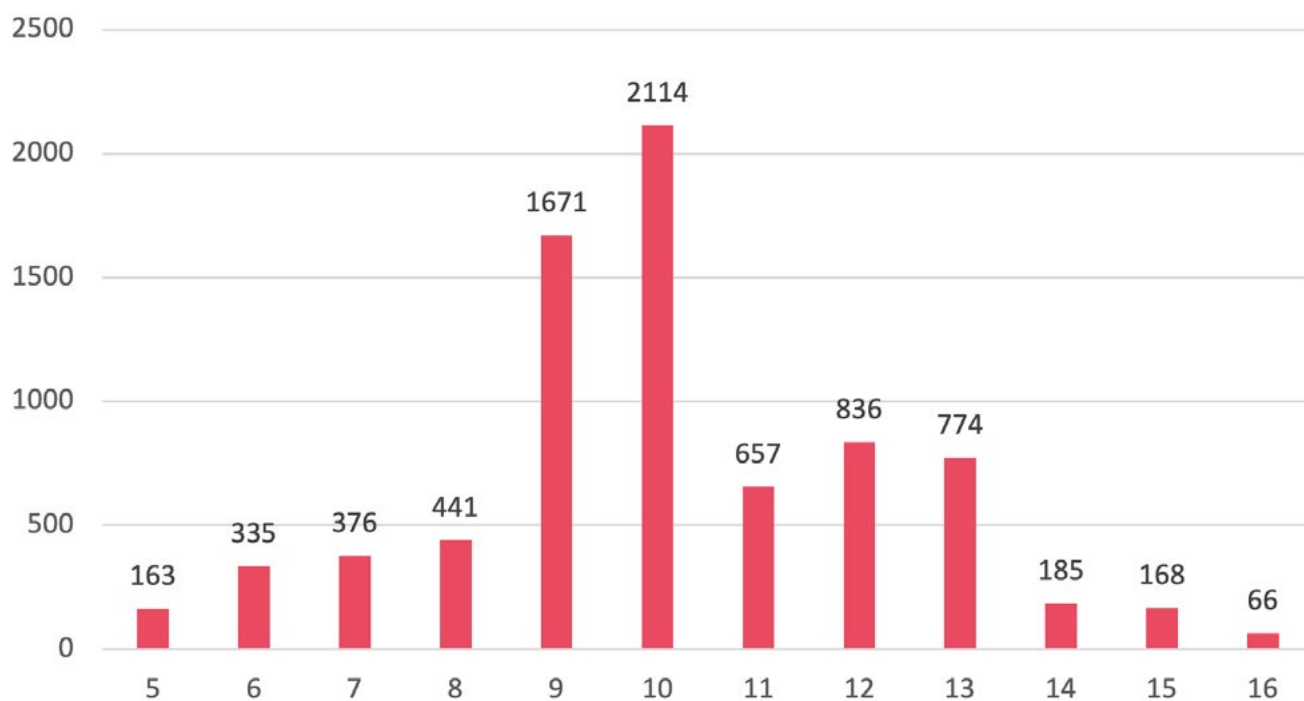


Figure 14: Play Satisfaction Survey sample by age-group (7,564 responses)

Appendix 2: Active Healthy Kids Report Card

Data from the previous *Play Satisfaction Surveys* have been used to contribute to the Active Healthy Kids Report Card for Wales.^{17,18} The Report Card is an advocacy tool providing a lens over physical activity behaviours and influencing factors of children and teenagers within Wales. The Report Card recognises that active play, particularly outdoors, contributes to overall physical activity.

Active travel indicator

Active travel data can be drawn from responses that children and teenagers gave in the *Play Satisfaction Survey*. It also includes 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 15 and Figure 16. The proportion of children and teenagers actively travelling to play spaces showed a small increase from 69% in 2022 to 70% in 2025. But, this was still lower than the 73% found in 2019. However, the proportion actively travelling to school continued to rise from 42% in 2019, to 45% in 2022, and to 47% in 2025.

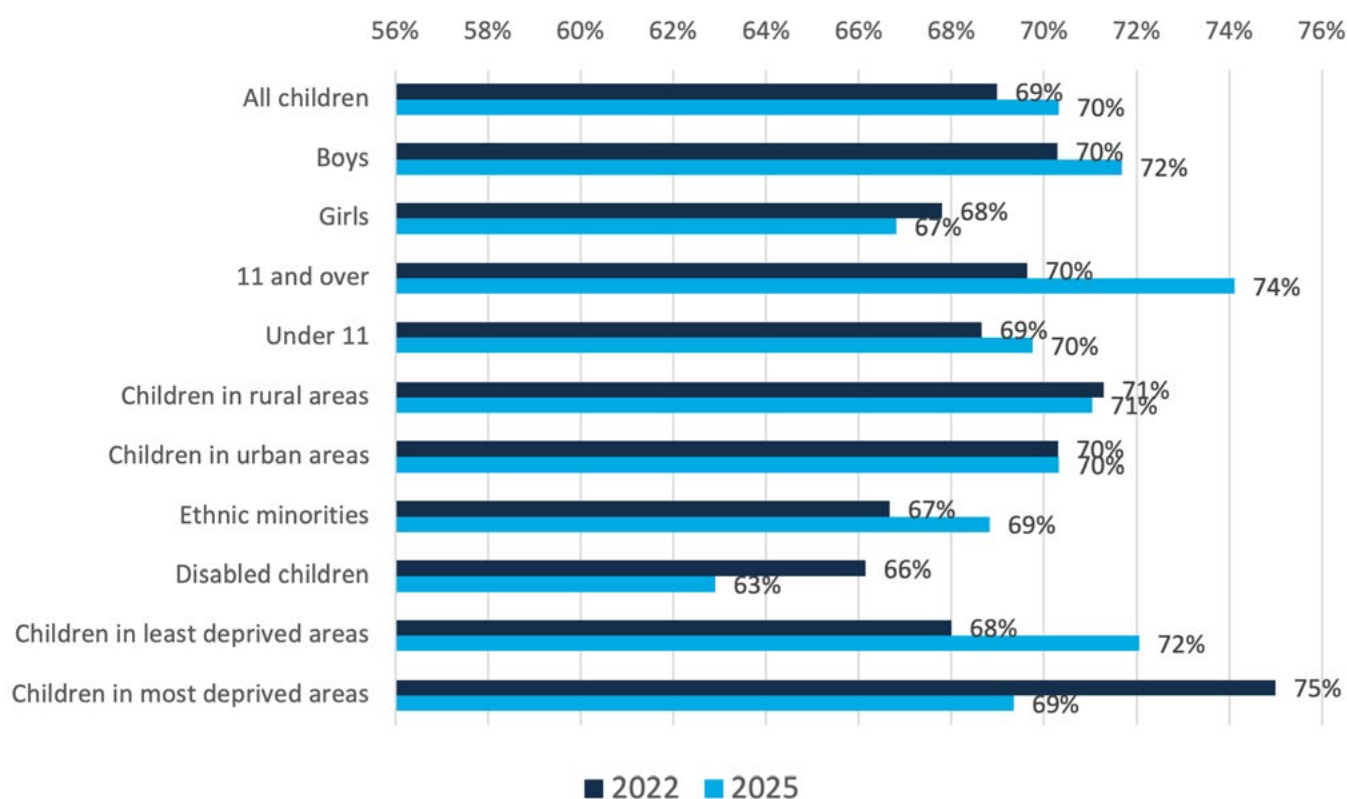


Figure 15: Active travel to play 2022 and 2025

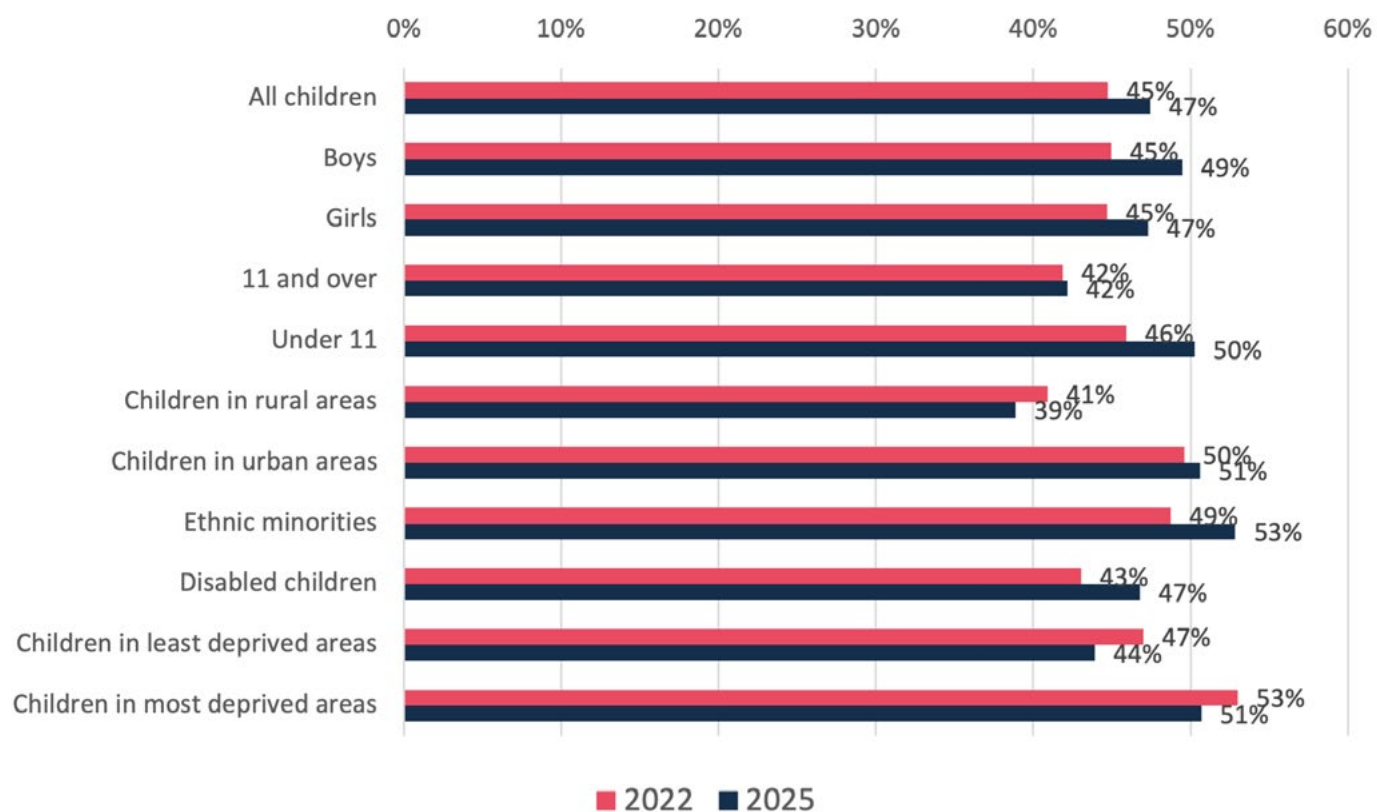


Figure 16: Active travel to school 2022 and 2025 (6,668 responses)

Independent travel is calculated slightly differently, focusing on those who say they travel on their own or with friends to get to play spaces – rather than with an adult. Across Wales, 52% of children and teenagers travel to play spaces independently. In Figure 17 however, we can see a wide range in the proportion of children and teenagers who travel independently across different areas.

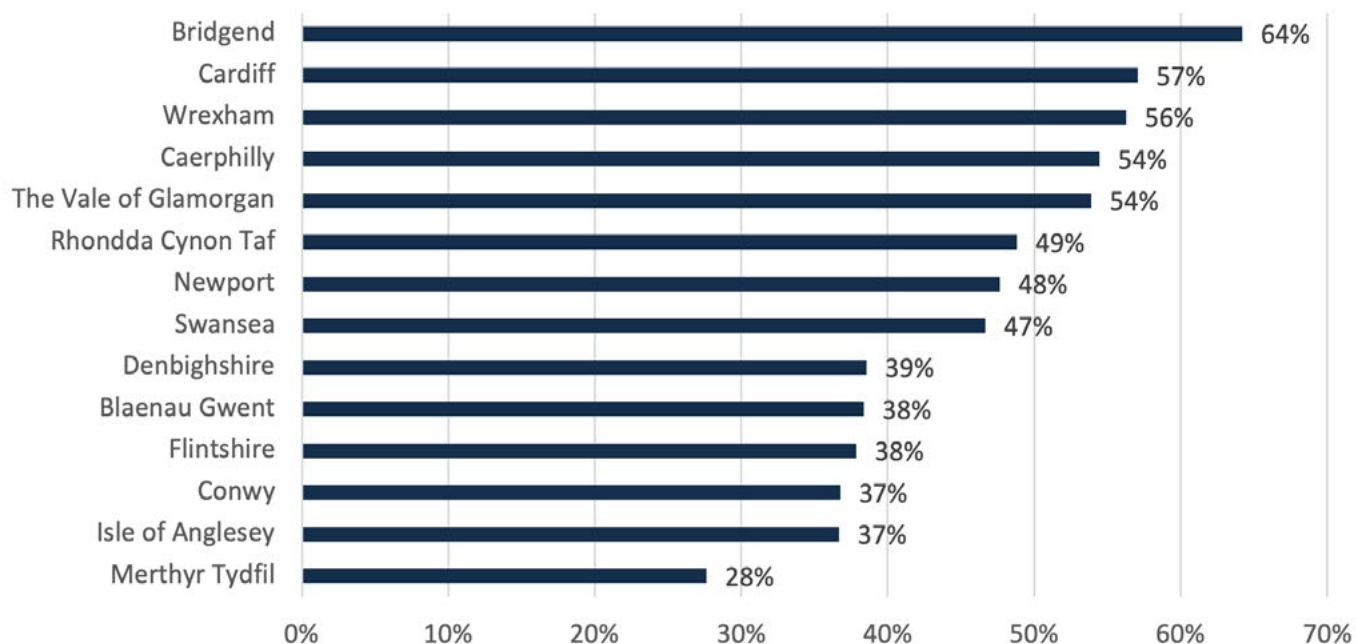


Figure 17: Independent travel to play spaces by local authority

Appendix 3: What's good and not so good about play in your area?

As mentioned in the introduction, this report is supplemented by a qualitative analysis undertaken by Dr Michaela James and Dr Hope Jones from Swansea University. The researchers analysed two questions from the *Play Satisfaction Survey* data from local authorities:

- What is good about play in your area?
- What is not so good about play in your area?

Here is a selection of quotes from children about what's good and not so good about their opportunities to play.

What's good?

Green and open spaces

Many children enjoy having access to parks, fields and natural environments that are safe, fun and close to home. These spaces allow for play and social interaction.

'There is lots of trees to climb and lots of space to play.'

Girl, aged 10

Opportunities for play

Children particularly value spaces where they can play freely and creatively, often with little to no adult intervention.

'LOADS of space and a lil den made out of trees (football pitch and a park as well!).'

Boy, aged 10

Friendship and socialisation

A strong theme was the importance of friendships in enabling play. Children appreciated being able to hang out with friends, often referring to secret dens, bike rides and local hangouts.

'I like it because I've got friends on my street that knock for me and don't leave me out and we go to the field or woods or street.'

Child, aged 10

'There are lots of people we know that we can go to if we ever needed help.'

Girl, aged 15

Feeling safe

In several areas, children described their areas as safe for play, due to low traffic, good lighting or familiarity with neighbours.

'It's good because it's very big and good for children, it's very safe, it's the most of safe even my mum and dad like it!'

Child, aged 13

'I am close to my friends and there are lots of people with cameras on their houses for safety.'

Girl, aged 8

What's not so good?

Safety

Safety was the most frequently cited issue. Children mentioned worries about bullying, drug use, dog fouling, poor maintenance and unsafe roads that prevent them from playing freely or accessing spaces they enjoy.

'There are lots of people taking drugs everywhere. Even in the parks.'

Girl, aged 11

Improvements needed to existing equipment

In several areas, play equipment was described as outdated, broken or suitable only for younger children. Many called for investment in spaces for older children and teenagers.

'The swings are very rusty and feels like it will break when going high.'

Boy, aged 9

Lack of opportunities

Some children expressed frustration at the lack of things to do and by long travel distances, and a lack of designated or teen friendly areas led to feelings of being unwelcome.

'Anywhere we go, we get judged. I don't really want to play on swings and slides.'

Boy, aged 13

'Nothing that interests me. It's all sports activities and I don't enjoy sport.'

Boy, aged 13

Barriers to inclusion

Children with additional learning needs (ALN) highlighted that many spaces and opportunities are not inclusive. Responses also revealed inequalities in access to safe and accessible play opportunities for disabled and neurodivergent children.

'I have no interest in sports and there's no youth club available locally for SEND children.'

Boy, aged 13

Lack of time

A few older children expressed that academic pressures, homework, or other activities left little room for outdoor play or socialising with friends.

'Homework, and other priorities like gym and just don't have enough time to.'

Girl, aged 15



What children say about play in Wales

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales

National headlines 2025

We asked children and teenagers in Wales to tell us what's good and what's not so good about the opportunities to play in their local area. They told us how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play.



7,825

children and teenagers questioned.

5,477

children and teenagers play out most days, or at least a few days each week.

But, **37%** of disabled children are more likely to never, or hardly ever play out.

"There is nowhere for me to go because I can't walk much and I am in my wheelchair."



5,634

children and teenagers are satisfied with the range of spaces where they can play or hang out.

"There's a LOT of space and a lot of friends and secret dens."

But, **23%** of disabled children and **15%** of ethnic minority children say they don't feel safe when they play or hang out.

1,095

children and teenagers said adults are grumpy about them playing out.

Adult grumpiness is experienced more by these groups:

● **18%** are older children

◆ **16%** are disabled children

▶ **16%** are boys



"Older people need to stop being so grumpy when kids have fun."

The picture presented by children and teenagers across Wales is that they are allowed out, feel safe, and able to play in the places they want to, and overall are satisfied with their opportunities to play.

However, there is still room for improvement. Some groups of children and teenagers stand-out in their reporting of low satisfaction with their opportunities to play. These include disabled children and teenagers and ethnic minority children and teenagers.

Compared to boys, more girls, especially younger ones -

36%

aren't allowed out to play on their own.



"Parents are uneasy about us going out alone without adult supervision."

www.play.wales

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