



Play Must Stay

A Childhood Crisis

The **Play Must Stay** campaign is based on new research with parents and highlights a tangible shift from outdoor play to indoor screen time.

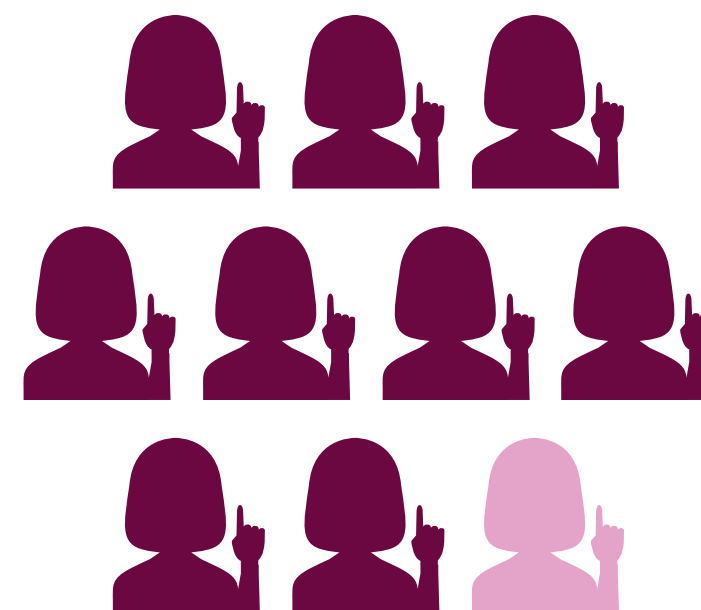
This new data is derived from a 2019 survey of over 1100 parents of children aged 2-12 across the UK via Mumsnet and commissioned by the Association of Play Industries (API).

The dominance of digital culture in children's lives has created a strong inducement to stay indoors. At the same time there is a dramatic and sustained reduction in public outdoor play provision. This is a dangerous cocktail; the overwhelming majority of UK children live in urban areas. They are being 'pulled' indoors by screens and 'pushed' away from outdoor play due to the decline in public playgrounds.

More than one public playground is closed every week

In 2016, research into the state of England's playgrounds showed an alarming decline in public play provision. Between 2014/15 and 2015/16 local authorities across England closed 214 playgrounds and when asked about future plans they revealed their aim to close a further 234. At the end of 2018, using Freedom of Information Act requests, local authorities were again asked for updates:

- By 2020/21 there will have been a decrease in spend on play facilities of 44% since 2017/18.
- Since 2014 local authorities have closed a total of 347 playgrounds across England.
- Local authorities estimate a decrease in their spending on playgrounds of £25m by 2021.



9 in 10 parents who were not close to a playground said that having access would make their child **play outside more**



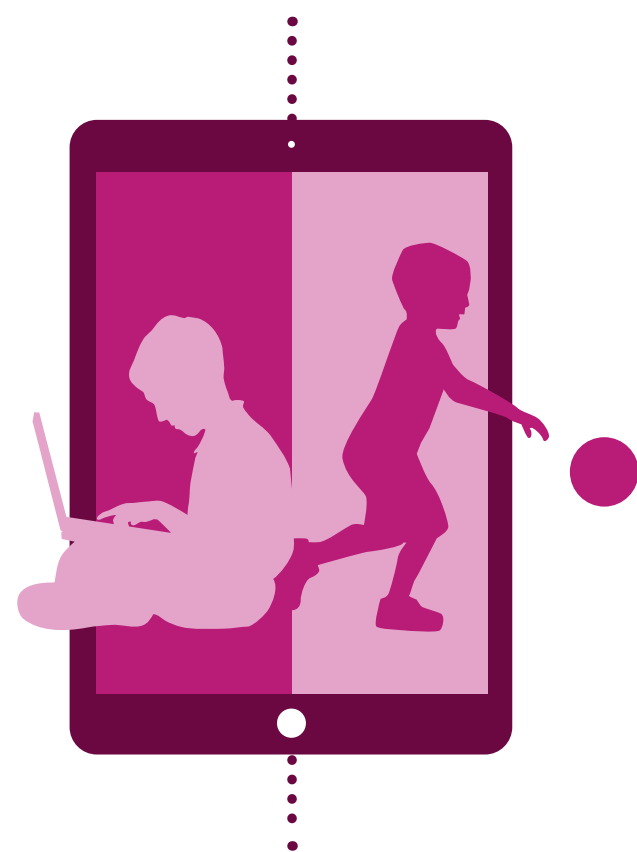
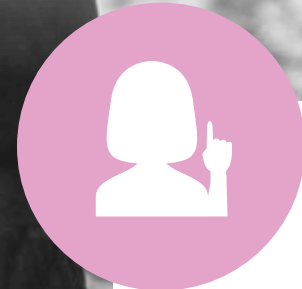
61% of parents with access to a playground said it makes their child **play** outside more



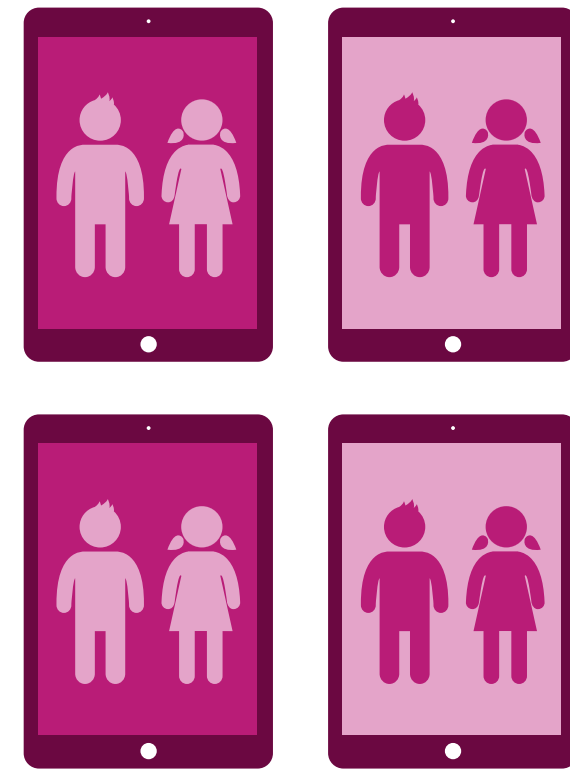
53% of parents said their child would be more **active** if they had more access to playgrounds

The Play Must Stay campaign is therefore calling for:

- **urgent** and **sustained investment** in public play provision
- a **dedicated** Cabinet Minister for Children & Young People to help drive investment in playgrounds before it's too late



Almost half
of parents said they
find it difficult to
persuade their child
to **leave their
screen**



Almost half
of parents overall said
their child prefers
screen time **over
other activities**



There is marked decline
in outdoor play by the
age of 8 – **69%** of
10-12 year olds
prefer screens
over outdoor play

In one of the most densely populated, urbanised countries in Europe, with ever-shrinking opportunities for children to play outdoors, public playgrounds play a crucial role in improving children's movement levels and, in turn, their physical and mental health. Playgrounds uniquely provide a safe, traffic-free environment in and around our towns and cities and for many children they represent their only chance for outdoor play.

We are in danger of extinguishing one of the primary ways children can benefit from movement. The provision of safe, accessible and stimulating community playgrounds is not a luxury; for millions of children they are essential to their current and future health.

When a playground is closed, it is usually lost for good. For policymakers, the funding of public playgrounds should be a priority because they are both prevention and cure; playgrounds fulfil a unique role in improving children's movement, social interaction, fitness and physical and mental health.

Playgrounds Matter

As a resource to foster the positive mental and physical health of children – through movement and outdoor play – the role of public playgrounds should not be under-estimated. For a relatively modest investment the health of children could benefit greatly for years to come. Policy should reflect the reality which is that, in a heavily urbanised and digitally dominated society, public playgrounds really do matter and **Play Must Stay**.



By 2020/21 there will have been a **decrease** in spend on playgrounds of **44%** since 2017/18



35% of parents have experienced **closure or neglect** of their local playground



Only 34% of those with children aged 10-12 said that they would be happy to for their child to play **unsupervised** in their local playground