

Let's Play!

By Faye Williamson

The National Confectionary Company has released the results of their 'Let's Play' survey. The survey posed questions relating to unstructured play – activities that children create on their own without adult guidance.

Almost half of all parents (46%) allocated one or two hours of free time per day to their children, and 26% allocate over two hours.

Parents identified many barriers to encouraging more unstructured play such as:

- An overall lack of time (25%)
- Home and school (22%)
- TV/Computer games (11%)
- Extracurricular activities (11%)
- Parent's work (8%)
- Weather (6%)
- Social pressures (5%)
- Children's lack of motivation (5%)
- Access to natural play environments (4%)
- Money (3%)

When asked to consider the benefits of unstructured, imaginative play, parents highlighted the following advantages for children:

Improves their imagination and creativity	97%
Allows them to be kids and to ultimately enjoy and have fun	91%
Builds confidence and independence	85%
Improves social skills	72%
Builds motor skills	70%
Reduces stress	67%
There are no real benefits for kids in having more imaginative play	1%

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When asked to what extent they agree or disagree with certain statements about unstructured play:

- Over 96% of parents surveyed agreed that “imaginative play fosters and builds creativity and allows your child's imagination to control the mood or play”.
- 69% agreed that “imaginative play allows your kids to play whatever they want and whenever they want with no restrictions”.
- Almost 79% disagree that “imaginative play is completely unstructured and give you no sense of control over your child's play behaviours, creating too much freedom for them”.

Parents offered the following activities as types of imaginative play their children take part in:

- Free drawing, painting or arts and crafts (92 %)
- Outdoor Activities (91%)
- Playing at the local park (84%)
- Hide and Seek (81%)
- Dress-ups (73%)
- Climbing Trees (43%)

The survey results showed that mums are the major initiator of imaginative play (81%), followed by dad (8%). Grandparents, teachers and the children themselves all tied at 3%.

Almost all respondents (97%) said they would welcome a children's playground in their local area that is more suited to nurturing imaginative play, and 70% do not believe there are enough playgrounds where children can make the most of their imagination. ■

