

## Access to areas for outdoor play

The majority of parents with a child aged under 5 (88%) reported having a public park or playground within 10 minutes' walk<sup>11</sup>. There was no significant difference between deprived areas and more affluent areas. 83% of parents reported using their local playground or park often or sometimes. However, one in six parents living in the most deprived areas (17%) reported that although there was a local park, they did not use it (compared to just 5% of parents living in the least deprived areas)<sup>12</sup>. This suggests a higher level of dissatisfaction with local outdoor play facilities in more deprived areas which may be linked to the quality of facilities and to perceptions about safety.

Children's outdoor play should not be restricted to designated play areas. Other research shows that children value being able to play out on the street and in natural environments<sup>13</sup>. The Scottish Household Survey, which asked all households about local facilities, finds that 23% of households in the 15% most deprived areas have local access to an area of natural environment/wooded area, compared with 45% of those in the rest of Scotland. 36% of households in the 15% most deprived areas have access to a field or other open space, compared with 48% of households in the rest of Scotland. As noted above, recent findings from GUS show that having poor quality local green spaces is associated with children having high 'screen time' at age 6<sup>14</sup>.

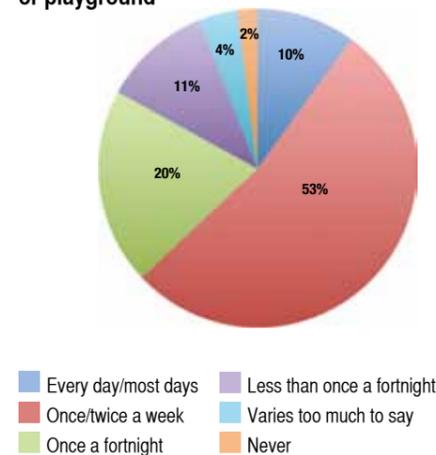
## Frequency of outdoor play

Around one in ten parents reported that they took their child to a park or playground every day or most days. Just over half reported that they did this once or twice a week. Around 2% said that they never took their child to a park or playground. These proportions did not vary between families living in deprived areas and those in more affluent areas.

Just over half of 6-year-olds play outside every day (including during playtime at school). This is similar to the proportion who did so at age two. 62% of parents report that their 6-year-old child has an opportunity to visit a green space at least once a week whilst 51% of children in the 15% most deprived areas have this same opportunity<sup>15</sup>.

Previous findings from GUS<sup>16</sup> show the seasonal impact on the frequency of outdoor play. For example, amongst children aged just under 4, 89% played outside every day in July but only 21% played outside every day in January.

Frequency of visits to a park or playground



### References

<sup>1</sup>Play Scotland (2012) *The Power of Play: an evidence base summary*  
<sup>2</sup>Play Scotland (2012) *The Power of Play: an evidence base*  
<sup>3</sup>Bromley,C (2009) *Growing Up in Scotland – the impact of children's early activities on cognitive development* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>4</sup>Bradshaw et al (2008) *Growing Up in Scotland : Year 2 Report* Section 7.3 Parent-child activities  
<sup>5</sup>Bradshaw et al (2008) *Growing Up in Scotland : Year 2 Report* Section 7.3 Parent-child activities  
<sup>6</sup>Bromley,C (2009) *Growing Up in Scotland – the impact of children's early activities on cognitive development* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>7</sup>Bromley,C (2009) *Growing Up in Scotland – the impact of children's early activities on cognitive development* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>8</sup>Bradshaw, P (2011) *Growing Up in Scotland – Changes in child cognitive ability in the pre-school years* Edinburgh, Scottish Government

<sup>9</sup>Parkes et al (2012) *Growing Up in Scotland – Overweight, obesity and activity* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>10</sup>Parkes et al (2012) *Growing Up in Scotland – Overweight, obesity and activity* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>11</sup>Bradshaw, Jamieson et al (2009) *Growing Up in Scotland – Parenting and the Neighbourhood Context* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>12</sup>Bradshaw, Jamieson et al (2009) *Growing Up in Scotland – Parenting and the Neighbourhood Context* Scottish Government, Edinburgh Table 2.4  
<sup>13</sup>Play Scotland (2012) *The Power of Play: an evidence base*  
<sup>14</sup>Parkes et al (2012) *Growing Up in Scotland – Overweight, obesity and activity* Scottish Government, Edinburgh  
<sup>15</sup>Source: Additional analysis of GUS Sweep 6 data.  
<sup>16</sup>Bradshaw et al (2008) *Growing Up in Scotland: Year 2 Report* Section 5.3.7 Outdoor activity  
<sup>17</sup>Scotland's People *Annual Report: Results from 2009/2010 Scottish Household Survey* Scottish Government, Edinburgh

Links to Getting it Right for Play documents <http://www.playscotland.org/getting-it-right-for-play/>



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# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PLAY?

## Briefing for Play Scotland

Play is crucial for children's healthy development. A growing body of evidence supports the view that playing, throughout childhood, is not only an innate behaviour but also contributes to children's quality of life, their well-being and their physical, social and cognitive development<sup>1</sup>. The right to play is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Play Scotland are campaigning for a Statutory Right to Play to be included in Scotland's new Children and Young People Bill.

Growing Up in Scotland collects information about where children play, what they play, who they play with, how often they play, at what age they are allowed to play outside independently and about parents' attitudes towards play and physical activity. This Briefing brings together findings from the study relating to children's play, both at home and outside. It adds to the body of evidence recently published in a review by Play Scotland<sup>2</sup>.



## About the study

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) is a major longitudinal research study following the lives of over 10,000 children across Scotland from infancy through to the teenage years and beyond. Launched in 2005, the study provides a wealth of information to support policy making and the planning of services. It also provides a useful evidence base for practitioners and a resource for academics and students. Families taking part in the study are being interviewed regularly to capture crucial data about the experiences of children in Scotland today.

### Topics covered by GUS include:

- Child health and development including cognitive development; social, emotional and behavioural development; and motor skills
- Diet and physical activity
- Play, including outdoor play
- Local neighbourhoods
- Access to and use of services
- Parenting styles and attitudes
- Family circumstances and change
- Parental health and well-being



For more information or to read the detailed research findings please visit our website:

[www.growingupinscotland.org.uk](http://www.growingupinscotland.org.uk)





## Playing at home

GUS collects information about the 'home learning environment' – how children are playing at home. By the age of 22 months:

- 79% of children looked at books or were read to every day
- 58% recited rhymes or sang songs
- 52% ran around or played outdoors
- 28% did some drawing or painting
- 30% played at recognising colours, shapes or numbers<sup>3</sup>

However children from less advantaged households did these activities less often than children from more advantaged backgrounds.

For children aged nearly 2 years, almost all main carers (mothers in the vast majority of cases) report that they play with their child once a day or more<sup>4</sup>. For children aged nearly 4, 87% of mothers report playing with them once a day or more. Partners (fathers) report playing with their children slightly less often, which may be due to greater employment and longer working hours. 71% of partners who feel they have 'plenty of time' with their child play with them more than once a day compared with 49% of those who feel they have 'nowhere near enough time' with their child<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of the importance of the various home learning activities, 'running around or playing outside' was the activity rated as most important by parents, with 84% rating this as very important<sup>6</sup>.

Children who had experienced more frequent home learning activities during their first 3 years had better cognitive development at age 3 than those who had experienced activities less often. After controlling for other factors such as socio-economic status, the frequency of home learning activities remained significant, suggesting that the play environment at home can moderate – although by no means eradicate – the effect of socio-economic disadvantage on cognitive ability<sup>7</sup>. A further report from GUS which looked at changes in cognitive ability between the ages of 3 and 5 recommends that strategies to improve children's early success at school by supporting cognitive development should focus both on the quality of pre-school education *and* the home learning environment<sup>8</sup>.

76% healthy weight 13% overweight  
2% underweight 9% obese



## Obesity and activity

At age 6, 22% of children in Scotland are overweight (including obese) and 9% are obese. 15% of children age 6 exercise for less than the recommended level of 60 minutes daily. 31% of children have 3 or more hours of screen time (in front of a TV, computer or games console) on a typical weekday.

A report published in 2012<sup>9</sup> considers the parental factors and the neighbourhood factors that might limit a family's ability to pursue a healthy lifestyle. The factors associated with a greater likelihood of children being overweight at age 6 are: mothers being overweight or obese, children snacking frequently on sweets or crisps at toddler age, skipping breakfast at age 6, not eating the main meal in a dining area of the home and low parental supervision. Low child friendliness of the neighbourhood was identified as a further risk factor for unhealthy weight. Perceptions of 'child friendliness' need further investigation but may be linked to perceptions of risk and/or quality of the local area, adult attitudes towards children playing outside and possibly signage (No Ball Games etc).

Factors associated with high screen time included greater social deprivation and poor quality local green spaces. These findings suggest that better access to places where children can be physically active, including attractive green spaces, may increase activity levels and reduce sedentary behaviour<sup>10</sup>. In addition, interventions to encourage parents and children to share a similar active lifestyle should be adopted. This would include the provision of quality local services and facilities that families want to use.

## Perceptions of risk

Table 1 below indicates that the majority of parents feel quite positive about the local availability of safe and pleasant places for children to play. However, parents living in the 15% most deprived areas were much less likely to feel positive. Table 2 shows that parents living in deprived areas were more likely than others to disagree that it is safe for their children to play outside during the day.

Data from the Scottish Household Survey 2009/10 shows that most parents think children should be aged 9 or 10 years before it is safe to let them play outside in parks and other outdoor spaces without supervision. Parents living in the 15% most deprived areas were more likely to say that children should be older (age 10) while parents in rural areas were more likely to say that slightly younger children (age 8) could play outside safely without supervision. The SHS also shows that people living in the least deprived areas of Scotland are more likely to say it is safer for children to walk or cycle to play areas on their own than those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland<sup>17</sup>.



During 2012 and 2013, the children taking part in GUS (at age 8) are being asked directly whether their parents let them play outside unsupervised. The findings from this round of data collection will be available during 2014.

**Table 1 – How do you feel about the availability of places round here that are safe and pleasant for children to play?**

| % respondents            | All  | 85% least deprived | 15% most deprived |
|--------------------------|------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 most positive feeling  | 24.3 | 27.9               | 6.6               |
| 2                        | 21.6 | 23.6               | 12.1              |
| 3                        | 23.4 | 23.5               | 22.7              |
| 4                        | 13.1 | 11.6               | 20.7              |
| 5                        | 7.0  | 5.4                | 15.2              |
| 6                        | 4.9  | 4.0                | 9.3               |
| 7 least positive feeling | 5.6  | 4.0                | 13.5              |

(average of 2.94 on 7 point scale, with 1 most positive, 7 least positive)

Weighted N = 3633

Source: Additional analysis of GUS data Sweep 6 (children aged just under 6)

**Table 2 – Is it safe for children to play outside during the day?**

| % respondents              | All  | 85% least deprived | 15% most deprived |
|----------------------------|------|--------------------|-------------------|
| strongly agree             | 20.0 | 22.2               | 9.1               |
| agree                      | 57.0 | 56.9               | 57.5              |
| neither agree nor disagree | 12.9 | 12.3               | 15.9              |
| disagree                   | 8.4  | 7.4                | 13.6              |
| strongly disagree          | 1.7  | 1.3                | 3.9               |

Weighted N All = 3657

Source: Additional analysis of GUS data Sweep 6 (children aged just under 6)