

The dawning of a play revolution



About IKEA Play Report 2024

We live in a turbulent time and children are more worried and stressed about grown-up things than they were just a few years ago. But there is an antidote – play.

At IKEA, we believe that children are the most important people in the world, meaning that we take play and a playful everyday life seriously. In this report, we delve into the role of play in relation to wellbeing today compared to five years ago and dare a guess at how it will look five years from now.

Our aim is to understand and convey the deeper layers of children's lives, emotions, needs, behaviours, and activities at home – and how that affects their play, happiness and wellbeing.

We also take a closer look at the role and perception of play at home and how children and their families live out play to connect with each other and build trust, self-confidence, empathy, creativity, and imagination.



Executive summary

This report contains the findings from an extensive international research study on play and playfulness at home, carried out by the Insights & Innovation consultancy Future Minds. Four key conclusions are at the core of the research:

The dawning of a play revolution

Parents today are carving the way for a play revolution driven by concerns for their children’s mental wellbeing and happiness in an uncertain, ambiguous, and ever-changing world. Both adults and children consider play a way forward – the key to escaping from pressure and stress and increasing happiness and wellbeing.

Play isn’t equal

Play might be a priority for a growing group of families, but the play revolution is still not very equal. Many people want more playfulness in their lives but feel that time, space, and money don’t allow it.

3 human priorities connected to play

Three human priorities are at the forefront of the play revolution: the desire for a stress-free and happy life, the wish to nurture children’s self-love and advocacy, and connection and family togetherness.

The home as the centre of the play revolution

The home is not just a place, but a vital epicenter for leading a more playful life – and increasingly so. Both children and parents see the world as a dangerous place, and they want the safe and comforting space that is their home to meet the needs for increased mental wellbeing, self-love and family togetherness. The home is where everything happens which means that it must have room for the needs of all its members.



51%

of children are happy
with the amount of time
they have to play

Source: The Family room

90%

of children say they
always or sometimes
feel happier when
they play

51%

of parents
spend more time
playing with their
children now
compared to a
few years ago

95%

of parents say that
their child's happiness
is closely or somewhat
related to how much
or how often they play

04 **Introduction**

06 **From play to playful living**

10 **4 key conclusions**

11 **The dawning of a play revolution**

17 **Play isn't equal**

21 **3 human priorities connected to play**

26 **The home as the centre of a play revolution**

32 **What's next?**

15 years of research into play

2010

The first ever IKEA play report.

Engaging parents and children from across the world to participate in a conversation around child development and play. We took 10 000 interviews across 25 countries.

2017

The follow-up.

Through a qualitative approach, we talked to 300+ individuals, aged 2-90, across China, Germany, and the US, delving into the emotional aspects of play.

2015

A broadened scope.

Exploring the importance of play not only for children but for adults, too. Almost 30,000 parents and children from 12 countries took part.

2024

A quiet play revolution.

The most recent IKEA Play Report shows that parents see play as a key to increased happiness and wellbeing – an antidote to worry and stress in dark times.

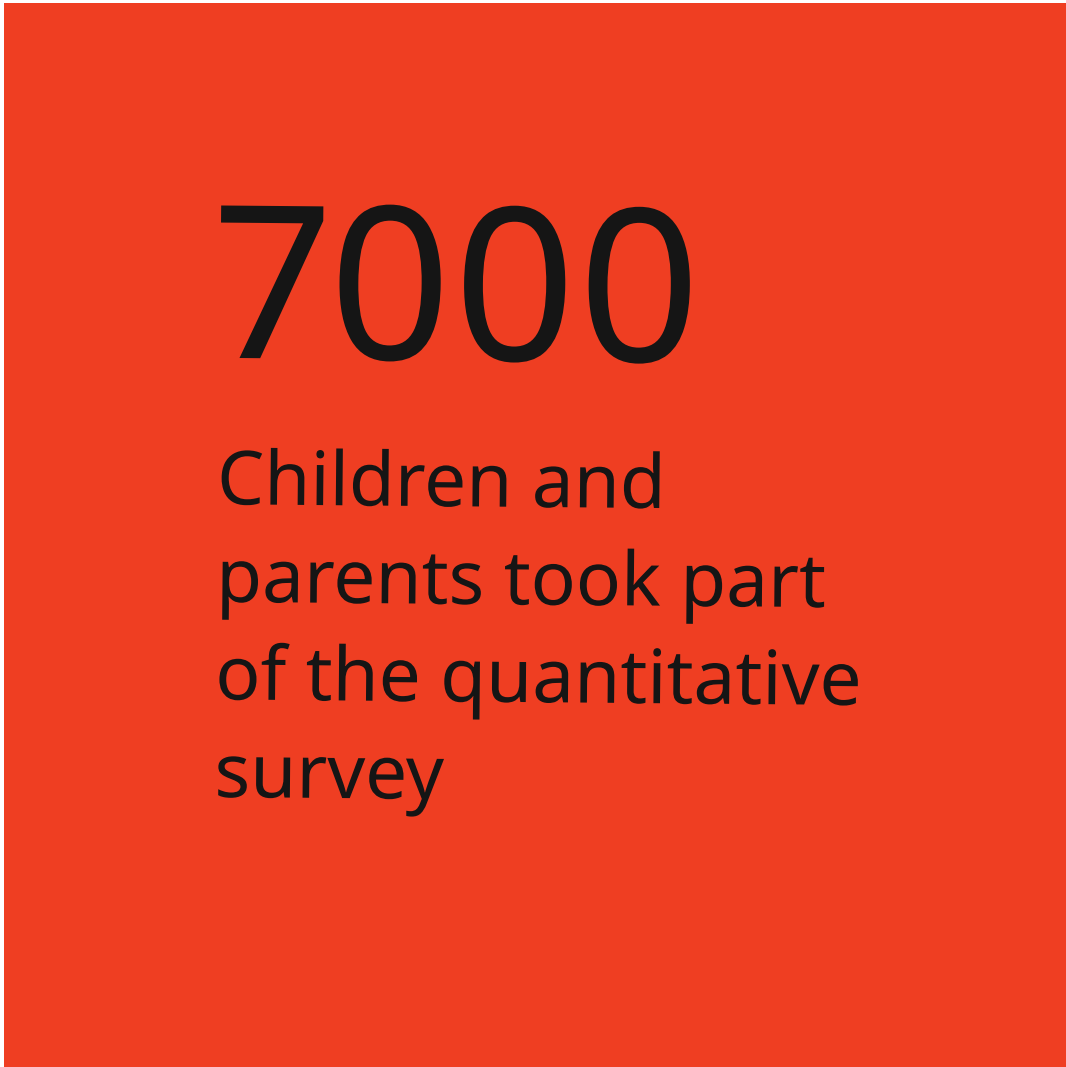
Methodology

Based on our existing knowledge about children and play, our focus has been to understand the status of play and playfulness at home. We've conducted a comprehensive exploration of children's wellbeing and happiness and the role of play through home visits, surveys with a large number of children and parents, as well as interviews with experts to look at the future of play and playfulness.

Qualitative exploration of children's lives and the role and perception of play at home:

In the summer of 2023, we conducted 36 in-depth ethnographies, lasting 3-4 hours each, in the US, China, and Germany. 36 children aged 3 to 12 and their parents participated.

Quantitative study: A syndicated longitudinal (6+ years) study to understand change over time in children's and parent's human values and priorities, including passions for play, and to reveal emotional connections to 'home'.



From play to playful living

Play can be much more than how it's traditionally perceived and it extends beyond specific activities.

Playfulness is a mindset; a way of thinking and living that defines how parents with children approach and interact with the world and their home.

It's an approach to life that's all about exploring, experimenting, creating, communicating and connecting.





“To be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as though nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise; everything that happens is of consequence. [...] To be serious is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for possibility.”

James P Carse, Author of Finite and Infinite Games

Playfulness prepares us for an uncertain future

The world faces unprecedented health, social and ecological challenges – and intense global competition. This pressure has severe consequences in the form of decreasing wellbeing; mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Despite this, traditional methods persist. In education, politics and business, we emphasise study hours, testing, and extracurriculars and undervalue the importance of play.



4 key conclusions



**The dawning
of a play
revolution**



**Play isn't
equal**



**3 human
priorities
connected
to play**



**The home as
the centre of the
play revolution**

The dawning of a play revolution

Play a new way

There's a quiet revolution on the rise, driven by parents' concerns for their children's mental wellbeing and happiness in an uncertain and ever changing world. They feel that today's system fails to give children what they really need in the future – the ability to think out of the box and constantly find their way in new situations.

Play has become a social currency and for the first time in many years, a group of parents actually prioritise spending more time engaging in play with their children. Many more, though, still dream of spending more time connecting through play. But too many chores and other activities prevent them from reaching their dream.

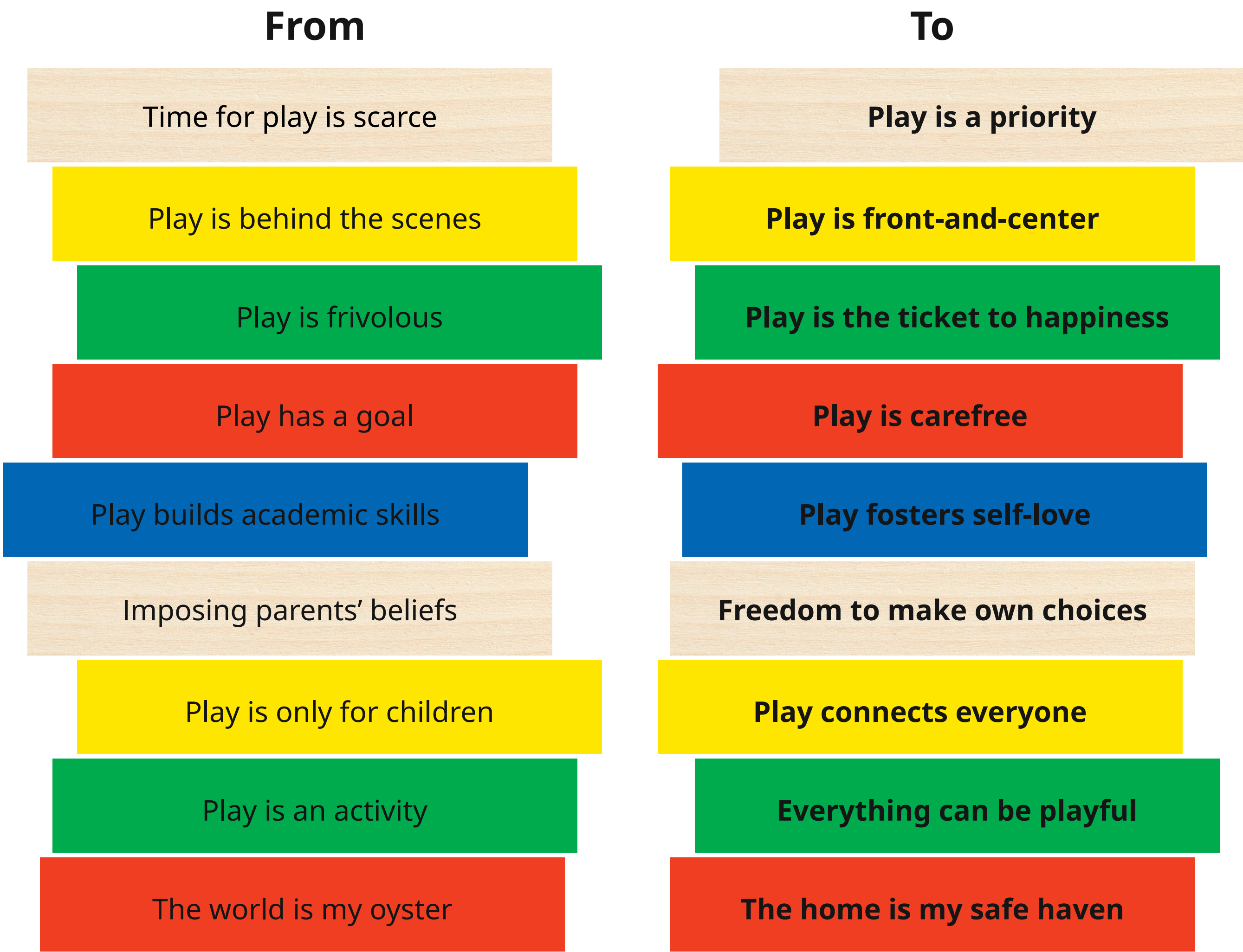


An emerging cultural shift

The way that play and playfulness is perceived by children and families and how it relates to the home has changed over the past 3-5 years – and will continue to gain more power as we move toward 2030.

“Why can’t we just let kids be kids for goodness sake!? They will soon enough become grown-ups with lots of chores and demands.”

Thea, mother of Annabell



Source: The Family room

Play as a cure

Children today increasingly worry about grown-up things and childhood innocence is plummeting. Also, looking at the 15 years of research we have conducted, we see that children are more stressed now.

On the other hand – a significant proportion of parents and children see play as a ticket to improving mental health and increasing happiness.

Parents consider play a carefree space children can escape into and just be children. A space where they can forget the everyday pressures and stress for a while. And a space that can improve their happiness and wellbeing.



Source: The Family room

Biggest post-pandemic changes in children’s emotional priorities, 2023 vs 2019.



- Having enough money**
- Escaping pressure and stress**
- Getting involved in a cause I’m passionate about**
- Having fun together as a family**



- Exploring the world**
- Showing who I am and what I care about**
- Being creative**
- Doing something new and exciting**



“It’s timely to think about the role of play in the world right now as we are all living in what often feels like an ‘unfun’ world. For the parents of kids growing up in this unfun world, I think there’s a strong urgency to make life more fun for them.”

Emma Worollo, Playfulness Consultant & Gen Alpha Innovator

Playtime as a priority

We've already mentioned the shift in how play and playfulness is perceived by children and their families. There are clear signs that play is not only tied to happiness, but that parents are also starting to prioritise it in practice.

The most important thing for an increasing number of parents is the happiness and wellbeing of their children; not their educational skills, as was the case a few years ago.

Families also prioritise spending more playtime together now than a few years ago. Still, more than half of all parents would like to have more time to play with their child. Too much home work, TV, and after-school activities are the main causes preventing it.

59% of parents are very happy with the amount of time their child has to play

54% of parents would like to have more time to play with their child

51% of children are happy with the amount of time they have for play

51% of parents spend more time playing with their kids now compared to a few years ago

21% spend more time playing together as a family now compared to a few years ago



The society sets the stage

Many families want to get more playfulness into their lives but are hindered by factors like low income, long work hours, cramped living conditions and the perception that there's little time for free play, especially in a system where children compete for top educational outcomes.

Also, parents have very different views on play, from believing and engaging in free play to setting strict boundaries. It's the grown ups and the society as a whole that set the stage for play and playfulness at home, not the children.



“If children are given time and space to engage in play they will become more capable of coping with and solving the big and complex challenges they will face in their lives. The future will require them to respond to uncertainty and change with creativity and imagination, more than ever before. We need to provide more opportunities for play and value its importance, to nurture good mental health as well as support a sustainable future for the world”

Helen Dodd, Professor of Child Psychology

The things that get in the way

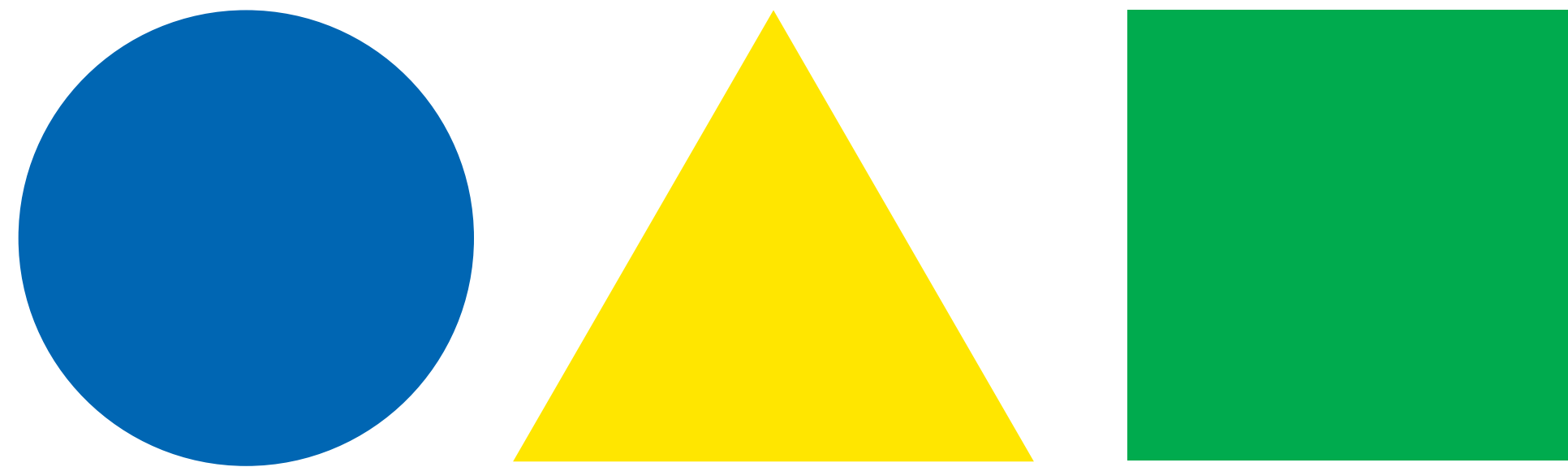
So, we know that there are many everyday realities that can make a playful life feel distant. Thin wallets and living in small spaces are two, just like the notion that there are other activities that need to come first. Many times, it's not a lack of will that make parents avoid playing with their children. Sometimes it's simply a wavering confidence.

"Play is an opportunity to share your love as a parent. And I guess that's why sometimes it's hard. It's like if I don't play right, then I'm not being able to express my love as a parent. And so that's what gets difficult."

Janet, mum to 9-year old Johan

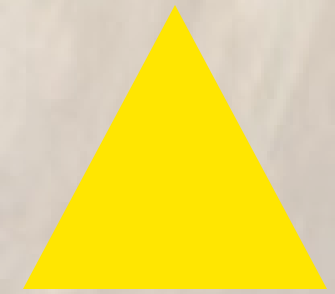


3 human priorities connected to play

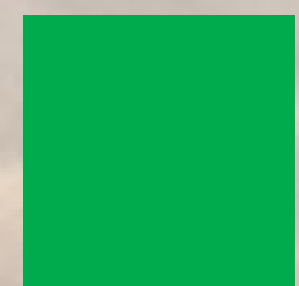




**A desire for a stress-free
and happy childhood**



**A wish to boost children's
self-love and advocacy**



**A call for social and
emotional connection**

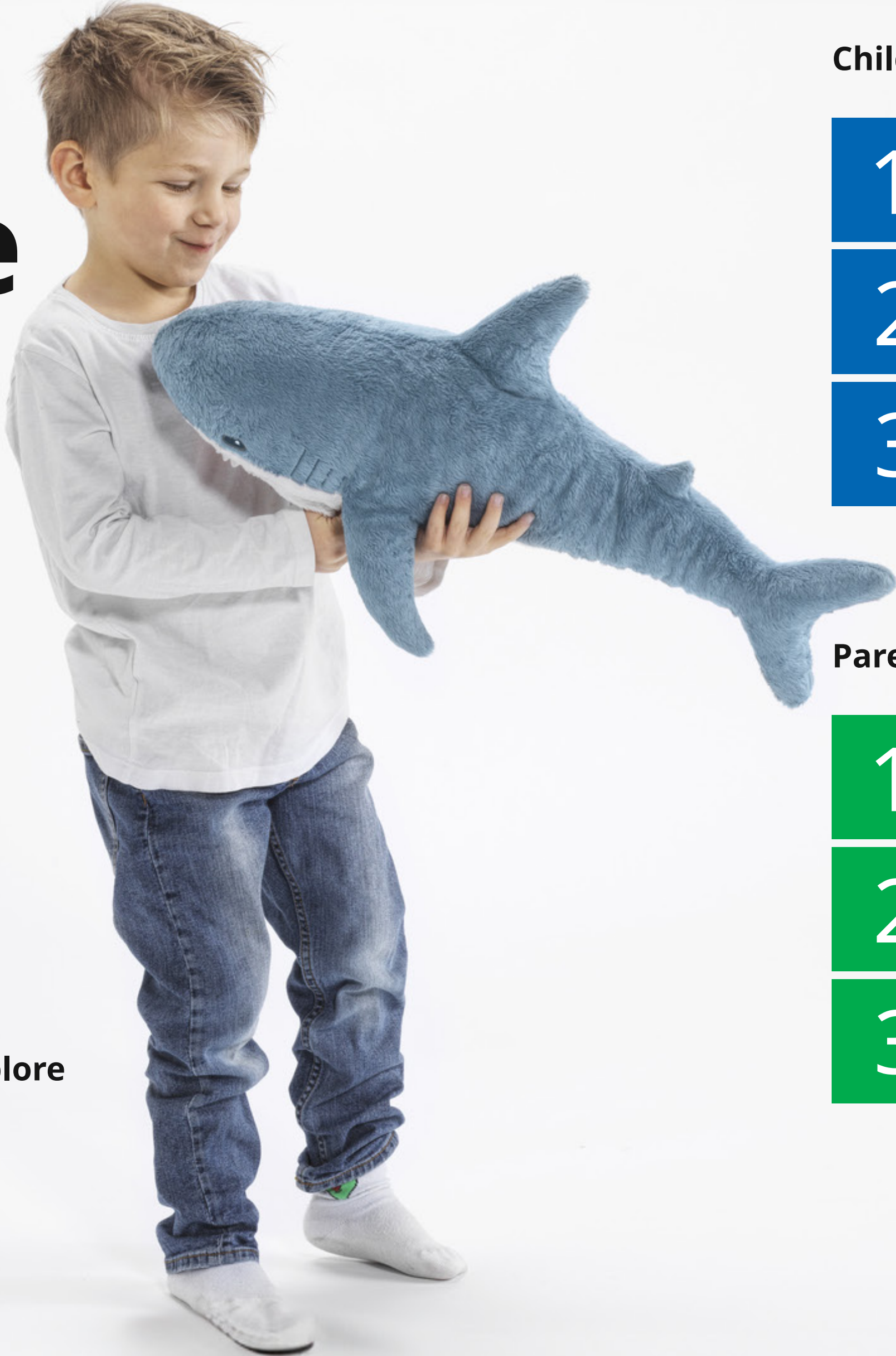
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A desire for a stress-free and happy childhood

Both children and parents prioritise the carefree, liberating, and light-hearted side of play and playfulness.

“I want her to find her own passions”

Jing, 8-year old Hua’s mum wants her to explore her passions and interests through play



Children’s top 3 emotional play priorities

- 1 Having fun with my friends
- 2 Kidding around and laughing
- 3 Just being a kid

Parents’ top 3 emotional play priorities

- 1 Having fun together as a family
- 2 Fostering my child’s imagination
- 3 Making memories together

Source: The Family room

▲ A wish to boost children's self-love and advocacy

Parents want their children to love and express themselves. When it comes to parent's passion points, self-love jumps out as a big category.

There is a sense that the world is an unstable place with many potential truths. And in a world like that, the best thing you can give your children is the ability to stand up for who you are and what you believe in.

Children want more advocacy. Whereas parents want to foster their children's self-love and self-expression, children want more freedom and autonomy. Play is virtually the only space where children make their own decisions. This is where they have the power to set the rules, and where they want to take things.



A call for social and emotional connection

Children and parents share a growing need for social and emotional connection and they seek it within the safe walls of their home. Board games are a classic go to option when families come together – even if it sometimes causes conflict.

Overall, many lack social activities at home that transcend ages and interests and go across generations. At times, online dance games or other physical online games can be the solution. The threshold is low enough for everyone to participate – and the children are often better at it than their parents.





A safe haven

The past few years have taught children that the world is hostile and dangerous, and they've become increasingly worried about adult concerns like the economy and the health of loved ones. Children and parents alike want the safe and comforting space called home to meet their needs for increased mental wellbeing, self-love, autonomy, and family togetherness.

With that, the notion of the home is also changing. Parents would love to design more playful living spaces. But often they don't know how.

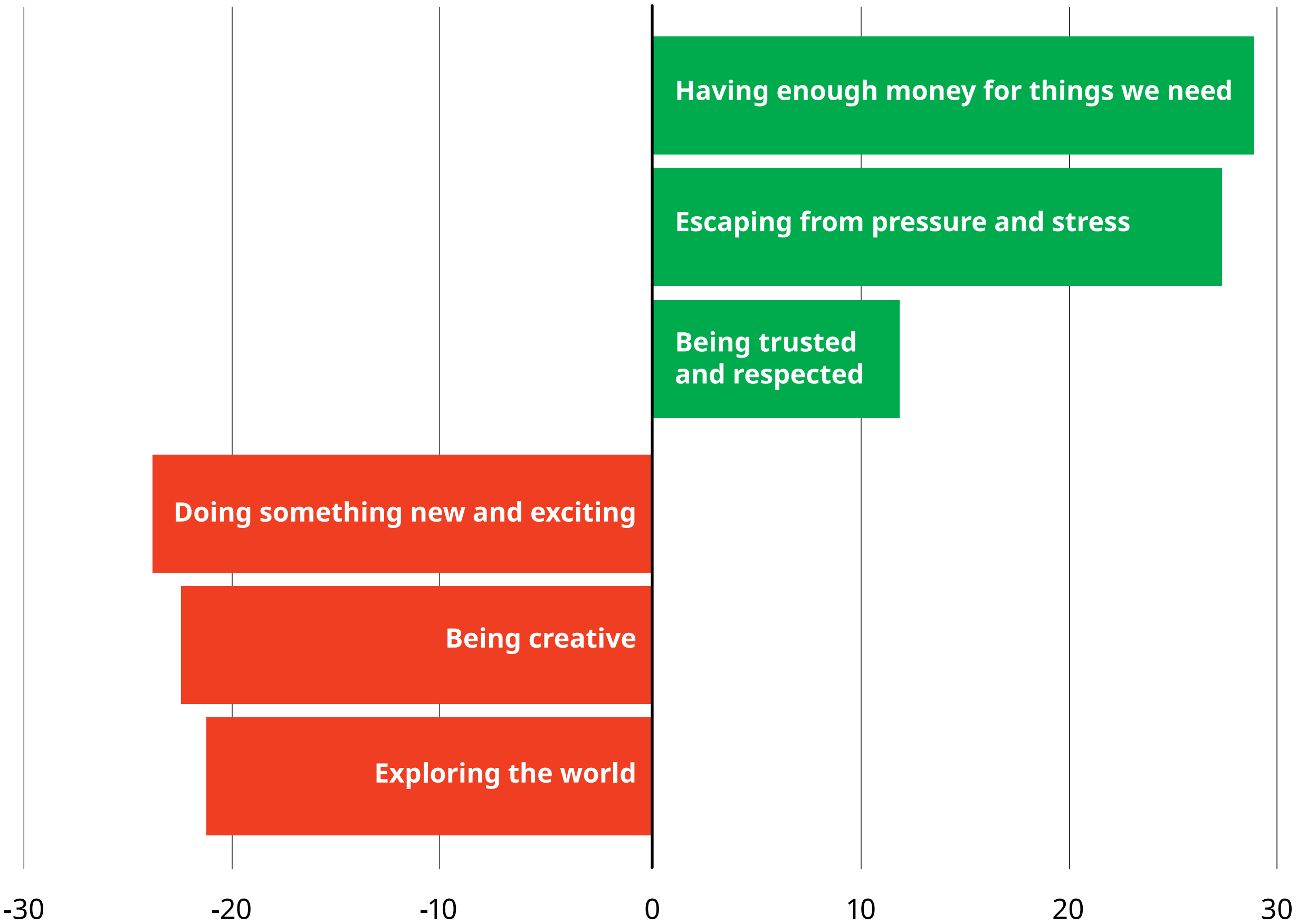


Children are wary of the world beyond their doorstep

As previously mentioned, a global pandemic and a world of unrest have caused children to see the world as a dangerous place. During Covid, they’ve seen their families struggle with finances, health, and mental wellbeing, and children have adopted many of the concerns that are normally reserved for adults.

As a result, the home is becoming the epicentre for the play revolution.

Changes in Kids Passion Points Importance since 2019



Source: The Family room

Everything can be used for play

When space is scarce, the bed often becomes a centrepiece and gets multiple functions, such as a gaming hot spot, sofa, workspace, dinner area, and play space.

And everyday objects can be as fun as traditional toys and games.



Outdoor play indoors

Children are less and less physically active and spend more and more time indoors.

Most families spend a significant part of their everyday lives inside – and a lot of it in front of screens. As a reaction to this, families are bringing traditional outside play inside.





“I think there’s an appetite amongst today’s generation of parents to consider the principles of playfulness when designing home spaces. For most people they don’t want that to be snobbish or ‘perfectly’ curated or to feel like they have committed their whole life to homeschooling. Instead it’s about shared space that facilitates all kinds of playful moments that matter to the family.”

Emma Worollo, Playfulness Consultant & Gen Alpha Innovator

What's next?

We live in challenging times. In the wake of a pandemic and amid global unrest, climate change and growing inequalities, children are increasingly worried and stressed. Luckily, both parents and children turn to play as a cure. They know it has the power to boost mental wellbeing and happiness – and they want to make room for more of the same.

At IKEA, we believe that children are the most important people in the world and that home is an important playground. We are committed to integrating children's rights into everything we do - especially the right to play and be heard! So we continue to involve them in developing our children's products and range.

But play can be so much more than how it's traditionally perceived, and it extends beyond specific activities.

Playfulness is a mindset; a way of thinking and living that defines how people approach and interact with the world and their home. It's an approach that's all about exploring, experimenting, creating, communicating and connecting.

It's learning for and through life - and that means it's good for adults, too. So we also continue to bring a playful mindset and twinkle in the eye to all parts of our offer to create products and solutions that trigger the imagination, encourage jumping and crawling and climbing, and bring smiles to peoples' faces.

IKEA Play reports



Play more together at home!

2010



Say yes to play!

2015



A spark of play everyday

2017

Thank you to all the children and experts

36 children across 3 countries

Sean, 11 year old: is all into LEGO, and he is also really artistic

Gretchen, 9 year old: is crazy about sports and competition

Mia, 7 year old: tells imaginative, vivid stories, and draws and paints

Tyrone, 6 year old: is still recognising his passions

Jamie, 8 year old: doesn't have space to play outside.

Kimmy, 11 year old: collects Pokemon cards and plays video games

Gideon, 5 year old: plays dress-up endlessly

Sadie, 11 year old: is an inventive, precocious child

Ginny, 3 year old: loves to play outside, and has a huge yard to play in

Zed, 3 year old: jumps, runs, and kicks balls around the apartment

Ian, 10 year old: is very bubbly and outgoing

Leo, 6 year old: is a very energetic child who loves monster trucks and cars

Aia, 4 year old: is an active and energetic child

Hella, 6 year old: is a shy girl, who is into pretend play, reading, drawing

Estrella, 3 year old: is a very lively, and imaginative child

Mani, 3 year old: is always exploring and experimenting

Pen, 8 year old: is very attached to her mum and loves to play with slime

Patrick, 5 year old: is a patient big brother, helping his brother stay calm

Mia, 7 year old: is a very confident, bubbly girl

Emily, 11 year old: is lively, outgoing and plays basket ball

Sami, 10 year old: for Sami, play is about releasing energy, and gaming

Flynn, 6 year old: play as a way to escape the stress, pressure from school

Lenn, 12 year old: is thoughtful and intelligent and plays with his brother

Eli, 10 year old: is alone a lot but would love to have friends and play soccer

Weiwen, 7 year old: doesn't have much to play with

Lillet, 3 year old: is inventive and likes pretend play with her little sister

Andy, 10 year old: the only time he has to play is in the bathtub at night

Louisa, 4 year old: is a shy girl who loves to read and draw

Xingxing, 4 year old: is very outgoing and energetic

JueJue, 5 year old: is completely into dress-up and pretend play

Duoduo, 8 year old: is into boxing, toy weapons and plays online games

Xixi, 11 year old: is into arts and crafts and drawing

Ricky, 7 year old: loves to play a lot of board games with his little sister

Helen, 11 year old: is fun, creative, and independent

Yiyi, 5 year old: has diverse interests; magic cards, animals collection

Tuantuan, 7 year old: is a small scientist at heart

Global experts and front-runners

Emma Worolla, Playfulness Consultant & Gen Alpha Innovator

Aidan Kohn-Murphy, Founder of "Gen Z for change", "Gen Z's expectations

Ting Zhang, Expert in children, families and play

Eric Baumgarten, Director, MIT Media Lab

Melissa Cash, Co-founder and CEO of Pok Pok

Allison Bryant, Head of Insights at Sesame Workshop

Yuri Zuzuki, Partner at Pentagram – How to design for playfulness

Helen F. Dodd, Professor of Child Psychology

7000 children and parents taking part in the quantative study

