



British Psychological Society- Time to Play

Introduction

School-play offers benefits to children's well-being and is essential for their social development. Despite the wealth of psychologically-informed evidence which demonstrates the value of play for school children, time assigned for play in the school day has been eroded in recent years.

Research from [University College London's Institute of Education](#) has shown that between 1995 and 2019, the amount of break time afforded to children between the ages of 5 and 7 had reduced by 45 minutes per week. More recently, the pandemic, and the consequent school closures, has left many children without the opportunity to play at all.

The Government's strategy for pandemic recovery presents an opportunity to re-evaluate priorities for children in school and to put play first to protect the mental well-being of school children. It is more important now than ever before to make sure school is a space that fosters flourishing of children and allows for their social development.

Call to Action

The next stage of the Government's recovery plan includes a review of time spent in school and college, the findings of which are to be set out this year. As part of this review, we urge the Government to:

- Put back an additional 10 minutes of play in the school day, restoring the playtime eroded and reversing the negative impact on children's wellbeing and development;
- Amend the Department for Education's Ministerial responsibilities to require the Ministers to be responsible for the provision and sustainment of school playtime;
- Prioritise unstructured play in school and in pandemic recovery.

Benefits of Play

The removal of playtime can have serious implications for children's development as demonstrated by the [research from the UCL institute of Education](#), which highlighted that break times are not only an opportunity to get physical exercise but provide valuable time to make friends and to develop important social skills- experiences that are not necessarily learned or taught in formal lessons.

The erosion of play can also generate further inequalities amongst children, as it has more profoundly negative impacts on children with less access to play stimulation at home, for reasons such as a lack of available space.

Parental Support for Play in the School Day

The prioritisation of play not only aligns with the psychological evidence, it has the support of the vast majority of parents. A survey by the British Psychological Society (BPS) has revealed that 96% of parents said playtime in the school day was very important, and 79% said play was more important than or equally as important as academic catch-up for their children post-pandemic.