



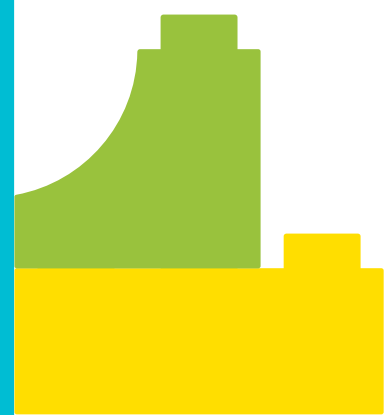
2025

# BiG START REPORT



## KEY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 in 5 parents struggle to engage in play, most commonly due to exhaustion, stress, or time constraints.
- Despite play being widely recognised as essential, 1 in 3 parents feel uninspired by playtime.
- Screen time guilt looms large, with 6 in 10 parents feeling conflicted about their child's media use.
- Social and emotional skills rank as the top priority for parents, reflecting a shift in focus toward resilience, empathy, and communication.





## FOREWORD FROM EMILY CASKA, PLAYGROUP NSW CEO

At Playgroup NSW, we know that play is fundamental to a child's development and to building strong family and connected communities. To ensure our programs continue to meet the needs of families, we commissioned this research, in partnership with LEGO Australia, to better understand how, where, and with whom children play.

With insights from over 1,000 parents, this study provides contemporary evidence on the role of play in early childhood. We will leverage these findings in our policy and advocacy discussions to champion the vital role of play in early childhood and ensure families receive the support they need.

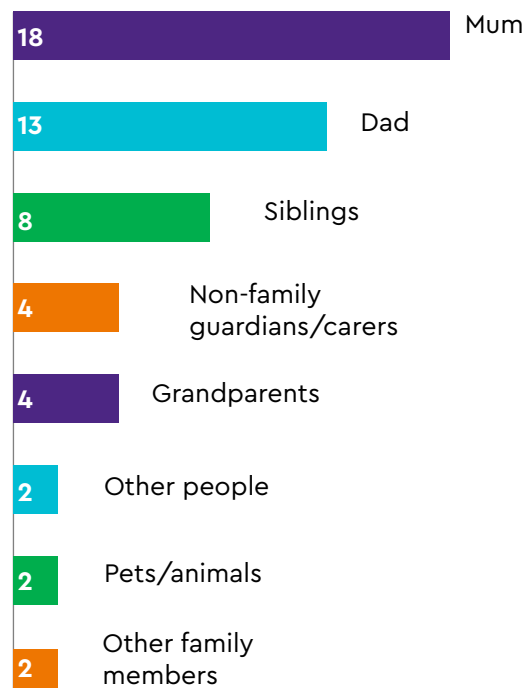
## ART OF PLAY

Play is how toddlers explore, learn, and connect with the world around them. It's at the heart of their development, providing the building blocks for everything from social skills to confidence. While play is universal, who toddlers play with and how often looks different in every household.

On average, toddlers spend 52 hours per week playing, most often with mums (18 hours), followed by dads (13 hours) and siblings (8 hours). Time with non-family carers and grandparents is significantly lower, averaging just 4 hours per week.

When it comes to daily play, dads are more likely to miss out than mums (15% vs 9%). One in seven (13%) working parents struggle to find time for daily play, while parents under 34 are less likely than those over 35 to engage in play on a daily basis (86% vs 91%).

### Average hours played per week (median)



# ATTITUDES TO PLAY

The first 2,000 days of life lay the foundation for a child's future, with play shaping the way they learn, grow, and connect. But in today's busy world, parents can feel pressure to make every play moment structured, meaningful, and perfectly planned.

Nearly all parents (96%) agree that it's important to be involved in their child's playtime, but the reality of engaging in it can feel overwhelming, uninspiring, or even frustrating. One in three parents (33%) admit to feeling bored or uninspired by playtime, while 61% of parents feel guilty about their child's screen time.

Three in ten parents (29%) doubt they add value when playing with their child. Dads (39%) are more likely than mums (21%) to feel this way, as are parents aged 18-34 (36%) compared to those aged 35 or above (23%).

These findings highlight the delicate balance of modern parenting - a tricky tension between knowing what's best for a child and feeling capable of delivering it.

# PLAY BARRIERS

Despite nearly all parents (96%) agreeing that play is important for their child's learning and development, 4 in 5 parents (80%) face significant challenges in engaging with their child's play.

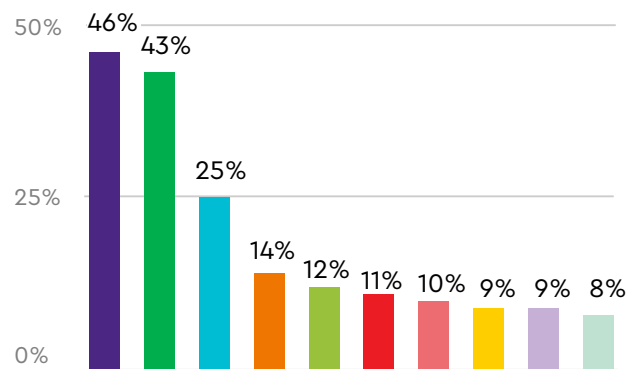
The most commonly cited obstacles include feeling tired, stressed, or overwhelmed (46%) and a lack of time (43%).

For 1 in 4 parents (25%), the struggle lies in finding fresh play ideas—a challenge particularly relevant for families juggling multiple children, where play inspiration often takes a backseat to daily responsibilities.

Mums are more likely than dads to cite stress and exhaustion (53% vs. 38%), while older parents (35+) report stress and exhaustion as a barrier (52%) compared to their younger counterparts (41%). While play looks different for every family, this disparity suggests that traditional caregiving expectations still weigh more heavily on mums, with many struggling to carve out meaningful playtime alongside their daily responsibilities.

When asked what would enable more play, mums (64%) were more likely than dads (45%) to state 'fewer distractions'. This presents an opportunity for more spontaneous, pressure-free moments where fun isn't scheduled, but simply happens naturally rather than as another item on an already full to-do list.

## Challenges to playing with toddler



- feeling tired, stressed, or overwhelmed
- a lack of time
- struggle with finding play ideas or activity suggestions
- find playtime uninteresting
- managing other siblings
- a lack of play resources or toys
- difficulty engaging their child
- struggle knowing how to play
- physical difficulties
- feel play is a waste of time



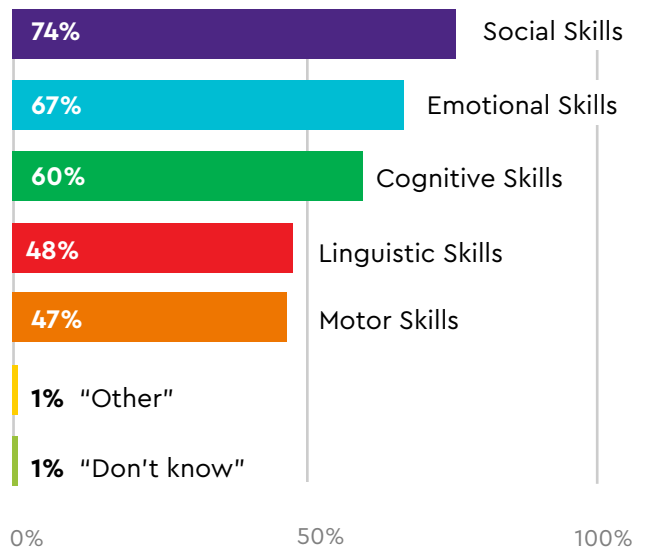
## SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

When it comes to early childhood development, parents' priorities in 2025 are clear: social and emotional skills matter most.

74% of parents ranked social skills as a top priority, followed closely by emotional development (67%) and cognitive skills (60%). Comparatively, motor (47%) and linguistic (48%) skills ranked lower, reflecting a shift away from traditional academic milestones toward broader emotional intelligence and interpersonal capabilities.

This shift is significant. In a world often focused on academic milestones, parents are increasingly recognising that the key building blocks for the future are empathy, communication, and resilience - skills that are enabled to grow naturally through open-ended, playful discovery.

### Most important skills to teach toddlers



## BUILDING A BIG START

Today's parents are juggling more than ever - wanting to make play a priority for toddlers, but often feeling stretched for time, energy, and ideas.

The way we parent is changing, but one thing stays the same: Play helps little minds grow big. As parents and caregivers navigate the competing demands of modern life, they need tools, resources, and support to help them reconnect with play in ways that feel joyful - not forced.

Because at the end of the day, small moments of play don't just build happy toddlers, they build happy families.

Playgroup NSW and LEGO Australia are committed to translating the results from this research into actionable strategies that will enhance our programs and services, ensuring we continue to better serve children and families by fostering growth, creativity, and development in supportive and engaging environments.



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