

PLAY, LEISURE AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

- ⊕ Being able to spend time with friends is very important. The decline in play, recreational and leisure activities had a severe impact on the physical and mental health of many children and young people.
- ⊕ There was not enough of a focus in the COVID-19 pandemic response on protecting children and young people's rights to rest, and to leisure and recreational activities.
- ⊕ Many children and young people spoke about feeling lonely and trapped, particularly during lockdown when they couldn't go out and meet friends. Those without an outside space found this particularly difficult
- ⊕ Not being able to socialise with friends or take part in sports or recreational activities meant that there were few opportunities to deal with stress. Even when restrictions began to ease, many felt great anxiety about social contact because they – or family members – were shielding.
- ⊕ While efforts were made to organise activities and events for children and young people using online platforms, this was not a substitute for in-person play, recreation and leisure activities and many have felt judged and scapegoated when they have met up with friends in public spaces.



"I don't think the government truly realises how harsh it was on us children/teenagers. These are the years where we interact and gain the most friendships and experience more things, but COVID-19 halted it rather suddenly."

(Young person, Young Life and Times Survey)

WHAT GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- ⊕ Consult with children and young people and prioritise opening the venues and services that are important to them. Parks should be kept open and children and young people facilitated to meet there safely, and without being demonised.
- ⊕ Overcome social isolation by increasing the provision of facilities, programmes and events appropriate to different ages. Children and young people should be responsible for deciding how this is spent.
- ⊕ Set up a 'social incentive scheme' for children and young people, providing them with free access, vouchers or discounts for many activities.
- ⊕ When schools are open, ensure that safe extracurricular activities like sports, orchestra, choir, clubs and drama start up again. There should more emphasis on balancing schoolwork and wellbeing.
- ⊕ Recognise the importance of key social occasions that have been missed by children and young people. Try to make sure that these can happen and find ways of marking those that have been missed in lockdown.

