

# Shifting play experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic: Family responses to pandemic restrictions

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Link to article: <https://tinyurl.com/ShiftingPlayCOVID>

## Background

Play is an important element of children's development. Pandemic closures and restrictions shifted the focus to experiences in their home. It's important to understand how families supported play during the pandemic.

This study describes how families responded to the public health restrictions throughout the pandemic and the impacts on children's play.

## Key Findings

### Facilitating play within the family home

Participants organized activities, crafts, toys or screen time for their children to prevent boredom. This allowed some participants to balance other responsibilities, such as working from home.



Especially during the first wave of the pandemic, participants described children's social play through interactions with parents and siblings. The type of parent-to-child play varied among participants, ranging from reading together to playing outside.

### Opportunities for social play beyond the family home

The creation of social bubbles outside of school and child care provided opportunities for social interaction and play. However, some participants still felt hesitation, especially when case numbers increased.

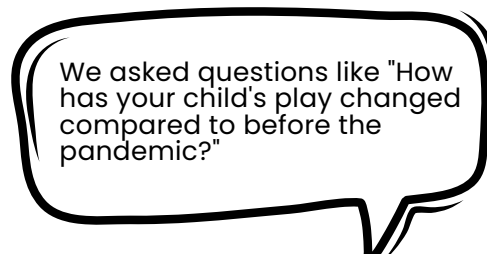


Over half of the participants did not feel comfortable enrolling their children in extracurricular activities at some point during the pandemic. Influences on their decisions to enroll or not included: restrictions and concern for children's social, emotional, and developmental needs.

## Methods

Families in NS, NB, and PEI that completed a survey early in the pandemic were invited to participate in a telephone interview in July and November 2020, and April 2021.

Families were asked a series of open-ended questions related to their answers in the survey.



### Shifting play in the outdoor environment

Most participants prioritized outdoor time when possible, playing in the backyard, parks, walking in the neighborhood or hiking.

Although there were parks and playground closures in Mar-Jun of 2020, outdoor social play was perceived as a safer option than indoor social play, as parents felt there was less risk of potential transmission of COVID.



## Conclusions

During the first three phases of the pandemic, families encountered a difficult balance of managing work, household and caregiving responsibilities, and changing restrictions.

In some ways, children's play experience changed within the home, as well as with others outside the home as families were faced with difficult decisions.