



the GENIUS of  
**PLAY**

## **PARENTS' PLAY PERSPECTIVES**

October 2015



science

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**PLAY**

Genius of Play is a research-backed initiative to help raise awareness about the essential role of play in healthy child development among parents and caregivers.

**inspire parents  
to be great  
playmates**

**gain insight into  
how to connect  
with families**

To explore parents' current experiences with co-play and begin to address how best to tackle any barriers to co-play that might exist, PlayScience conducted a two-phase research project.

### Phase 1: Online Survey

In July 2015, PlayScience fielded a national online survey with 502 parents of children ages 2 to 10. Families were recruited to represent an even breakdown of child age and gender and parent gender, as well as a representative mix of geography, income, and ethnicity.

Parents were asked about the ways in which they play with their children. Specifically, the survey assessed several topics including *when*, *where*, and *for how long* parents and children play together, how parents see play fitting into children's development, and what concerns and barriers parents experience that keeps them from playing with their children.

### Phase 2: Expert Interviews

The insights and key findings from the online survey were shared with six experts in the kids and media space who specialize in areas including toy design, parenting, media production and distribution, and play research. These experts were asked to help identify concrete solutions for busy parents to help alleviate barriers to co-play and increase and improve parents' experience of playing with their children.



- **Play is essential...but not always a priority or top of mind.**
  - The majority of parents agree that play has many positive benefits. However, parents define play as “fun” and believe that teaching values and helping with schoolwork are more important when it comes to raising their child.
  - Attitudes influence the length of co-play. Parents who believe that teaching values is the most important aspect of child rearing engage in shorter play sessions, while those who list “play” as the most important aspect engage in longer play sessions.
- **Parents want to play more.**
  - Parents admit that they do not always have time to play with their child every day but, if they had more time, they would play with their child more. Indeed, the largest barrier to co-play is that they are busy taking care of other things.
- **Gender plays a role – Dads value play more, but Moms feel more confident doing it.**
  - Moms have more confidence during co-play. Dads more often agree that their child spends more time playing with the other parent and that the other parent is better at co-play.
  - But dads may place more value on the experience. Dads rank playing with their child as a more important aspect of child rearing than do moms.
  - Co-play tends to be gendered. Parents more often initiate co-play more with boys and say that nothing stops them from playing with their sons.

Play teaches values.

Open-ended play is best.

Reading & storytelling are key ways to coplay.

Play can happen anytime, anywhere...with or without props



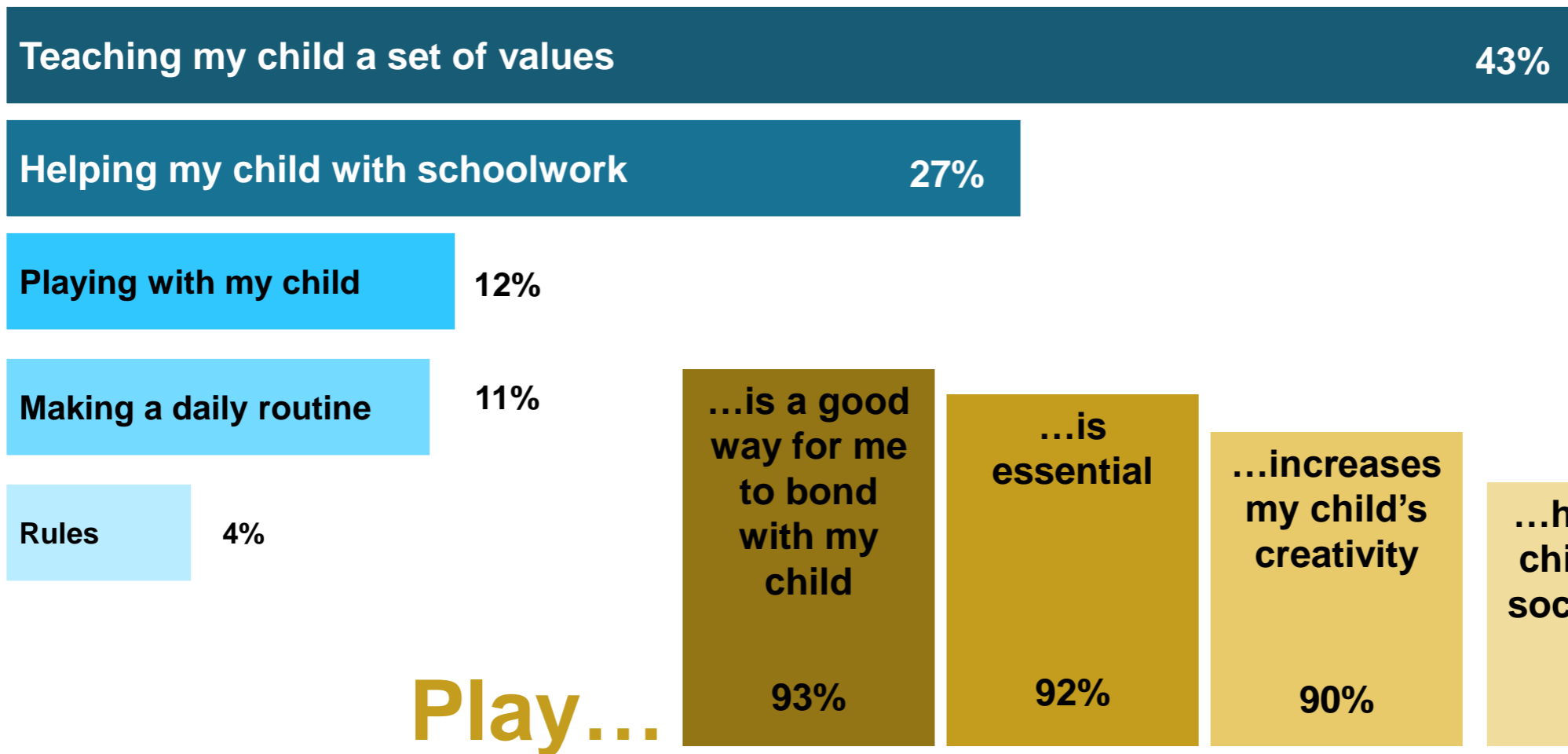
PLAY

ESSENTIAL BUT NOT A PRIORITY



The majority of parents agree that play is essential and has many positive benefits, such as allowing time for bonding and fostering children’s creativity and social skills. However, parents still believe that teaching their child a set of values and helping with schoolwork is more important when it comes to raising their child.

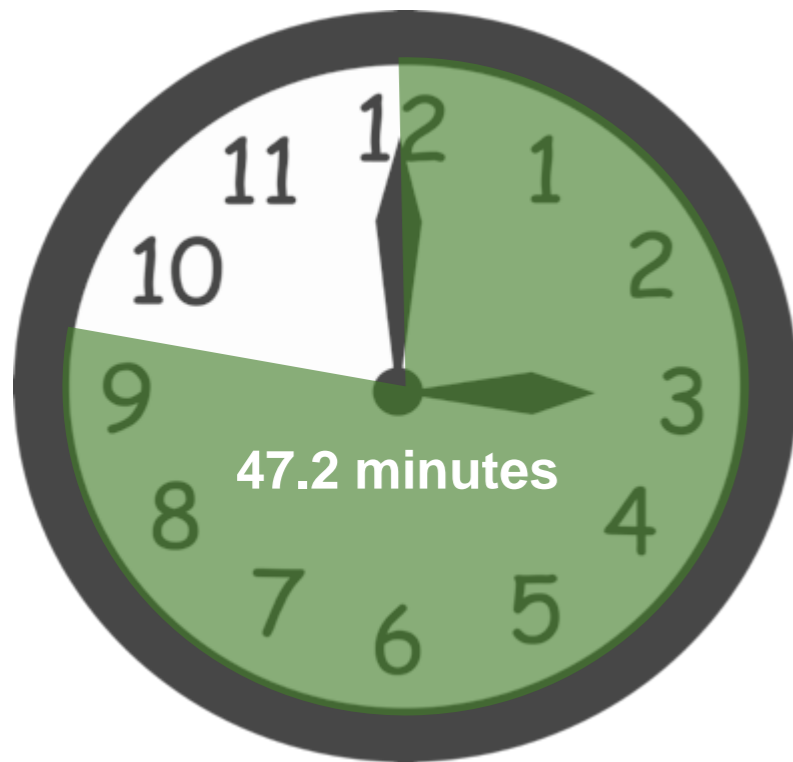
**What is the most important aspect of raising your child?**



**Play...**

**Message to parent (specifically Moms) how play can and should teach values**

Parents who believe that teaching their child a set of values is the most important aspect of child rearing (the top response among parents) engage in shorter play sessions, while those who list “play” as the most important aspect of child rearing engage in longer play sessions.



Parents who view teaching values as the most important



Parents who view play as the most important

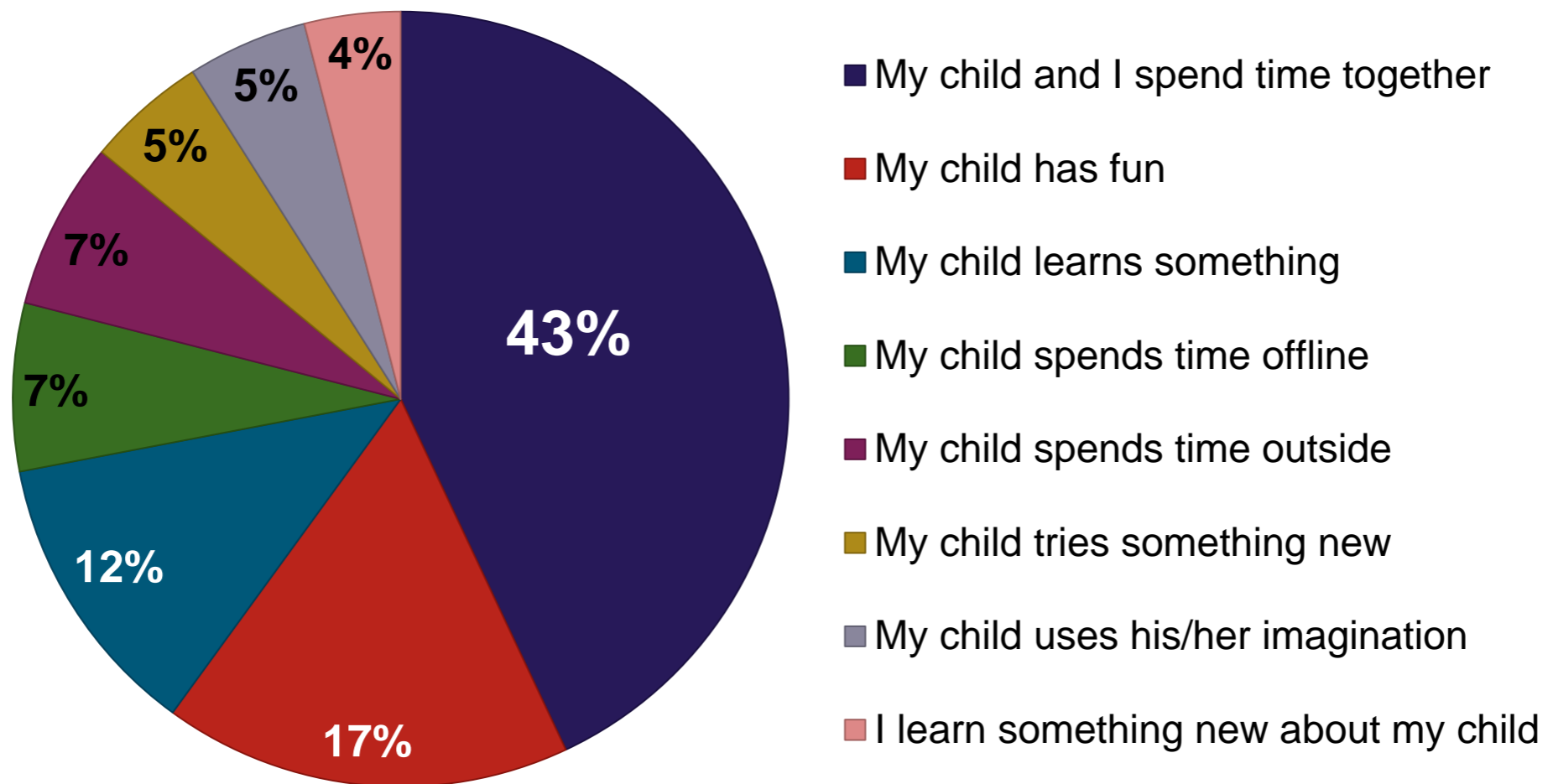
Although dads are slightly more unsure about *how* to play with their child, they may view the activity as more important. Dads rank playing with their child as a more important aspect of child raising than do moms, and they tend to have longer sessions when they play with their child (52.2 minutes vs. 46.9 minutes).

Message to parent that play is good for them as well as for their child.  
Give parents time-based recommendations (e.g. “5 Minute Play Breaks”)



Almost half of parents agree that just spending time together is the main point of playing with their child. Having fun and learning something are a distant second and third place.

Most important thing about child's play



**Play is the way that children really fall in love with learning.** Judy Ellis

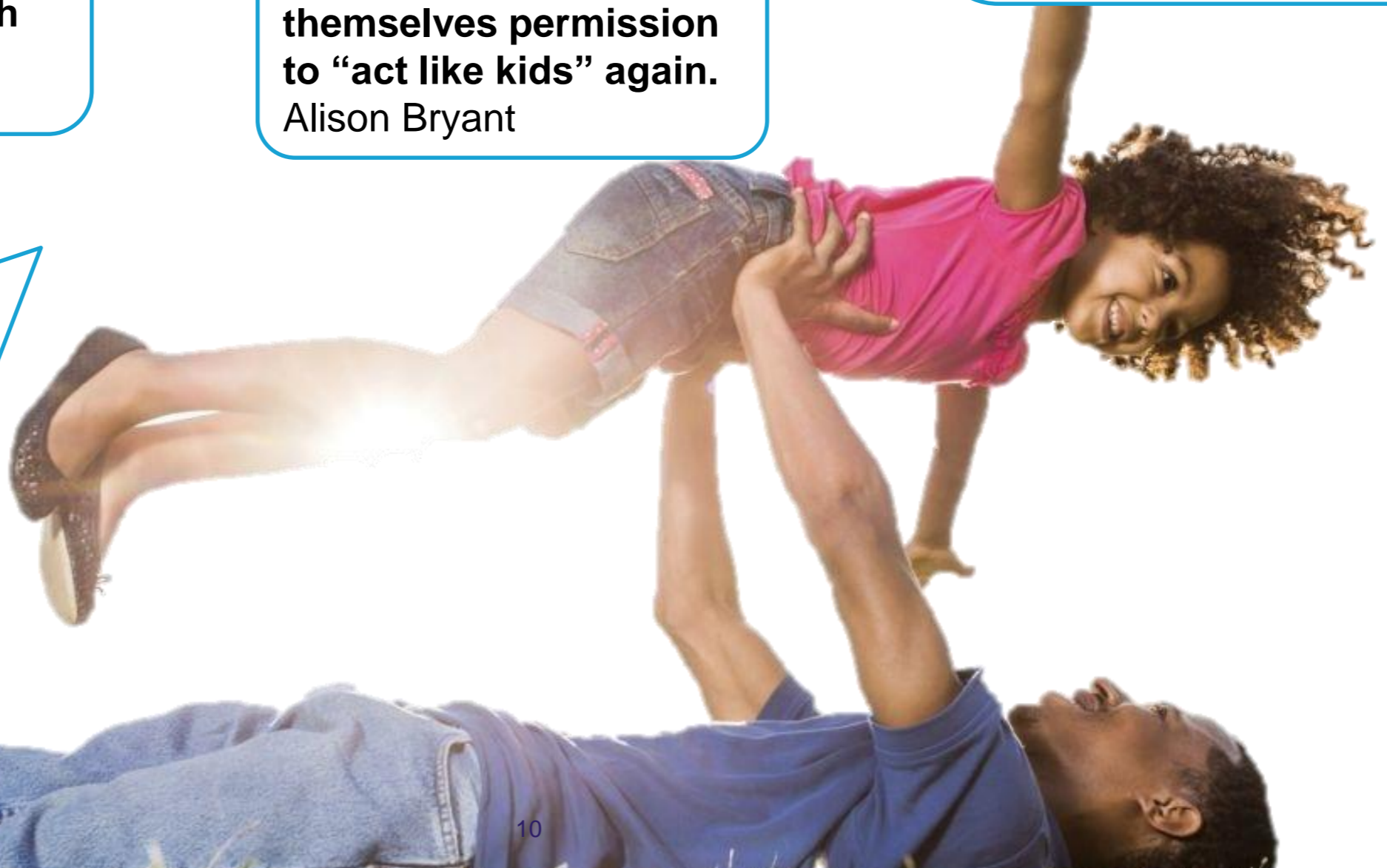
**It's really about creating those moments that say to the kid, "I'm here with you."** Stephan Gass

**Pausing after you ask a question or pose a problem gives kids a chance to reflect and respond. It's a "playful" way to engage kids in a process.** Angela Santomero

**Follow the children's lead. You are not the director of their Play but the supporting cast member.** Nancy Shulman

**Parents should give themselves permission to "act like kids" again.** Alison Bryant

**You want the time you spend playing, however brief, to be a time when your attention is completely on your child...Put the devices down!** Dana Points



Stephan Gass, President of The Gass Company, tells us how **play teaches values, such as honesty, fairness, teamwork, respect, following rules, and sharing.**

We all know that just telling a kid to do something often doesn't stick. But when presented in context, which is what play provides, a child learns and understands the reasoning, and repercussions, behind an idea.



Benjamin Franklin (not one of the experts we interviewed) said:

*“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”*

**Play engages.**

Judy Ellis, Chair, FIT Toy Design Department, reminded us that **play is not only the way kids learn, it's also a way that parents can learn about their children.** Discovering what toys and activities pique a child's interest and watching how they engage can reveal aspects of your child much the way a good book slowly unfolds its plot. Play not only tells you about your child's strengths and interests, it also exposes fears and fantasies.

**Play is a priority because for every parent, their child is a priority.**

**Our staple are storybooks.**





Nancy Schulman, head of the Early Learning Center at Avenues The World School, sees **play as a way to teach resilience by creating challenges within a child's reach.**

**Play is not boring.  
Play is setting  
your own agenda.**

Think of how children play on climbing bars, placing one hand over the next to get across the span. Kids do it again and again until they succeed. They fall, and get right back up to try again. Play lets you fail, without feeling like a failure. In today's "fail fast" entrepreneurial world, learning resilience can never come too early.

**It's really okay to  
fail. In fact, it's  
essential to fail.**

ME TOO!

PARENTS WANT TO PLAY MORE

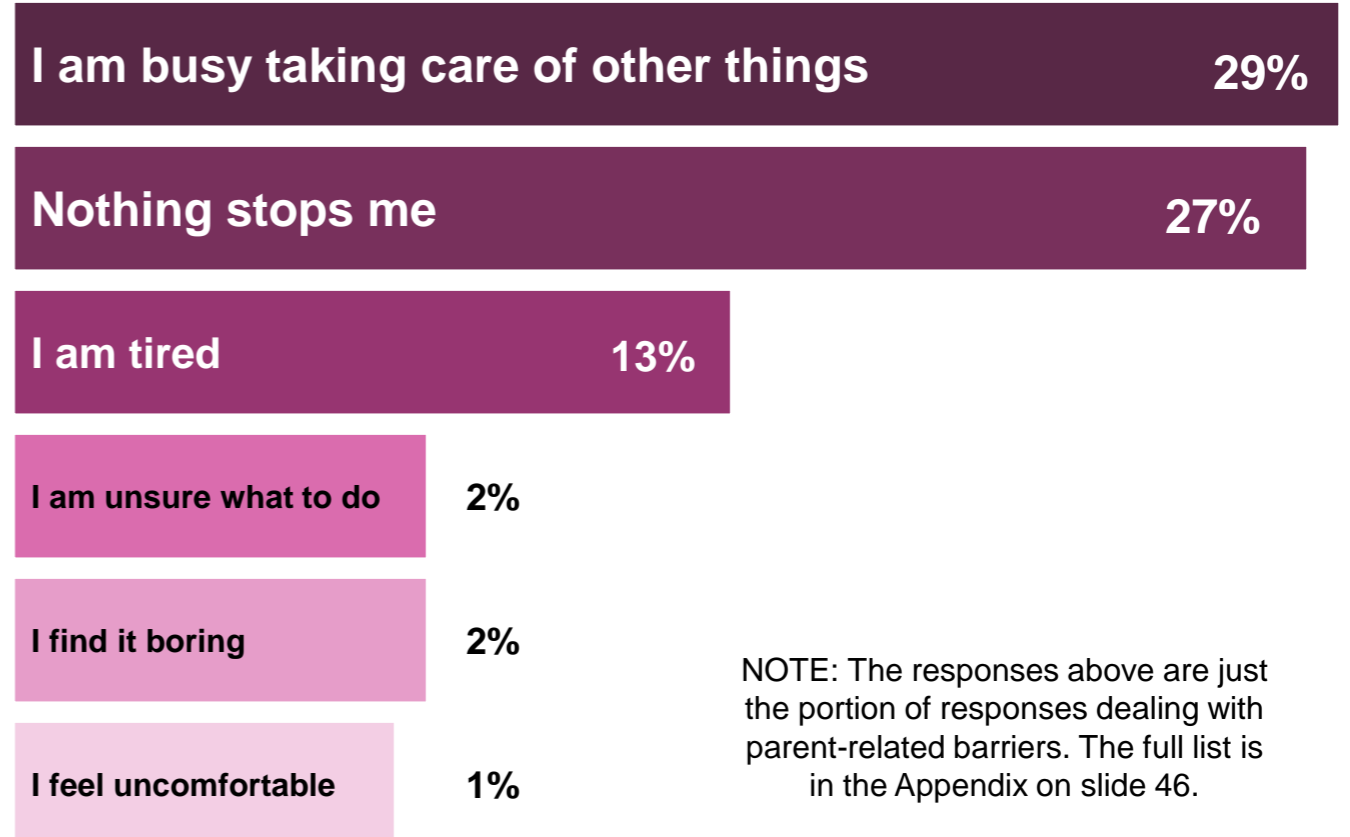


Parent-child co-play sessions tend to last just under an hour (49.5 minutes). However, parents admit that they do not have time to play with their child every day but, if they had more time, they would play more.

Interestingly, parents say that they do not feel uncomfortable playing with their children. Rather, the largest barrier to co-play, when one exists, is that they are busy taking care of other things. Feelings of discomfort and uncertainty rank very low on parents' lists.



## What stops you from playing with your child?



NOTE: The responses above are just the portion of responses dealing with parent-related barriers. The full list is in the Appendix on slide 46.

When asked to define “play,” parents’ responses overwhelmingly focused on fun. They also acknowledged that play could occur outside or inside, could involve both toys and imagination, and was primarily a source of entertainment and enjoyment.





“Any activity that is part learning and part fun.”  
- *Dad of 7yo girl*

“Play is any time that my child is able to use their imagination and grow. A time when they have fun.”  
- *Mom of 2yo girl*

“Any kind of movement with a smile.”  
- *Mom of 3yo boy*

“A time for children to be children, to have fun, be creative, keep themselves entertained and occupied.”  
- *Mom of 5yo girl*

“An action where one enjoys themselves by participating in an activity that is fun and can occasionally be educational to stimulate happiness and enjoyment.”  
- *Mom of 7yo girl*

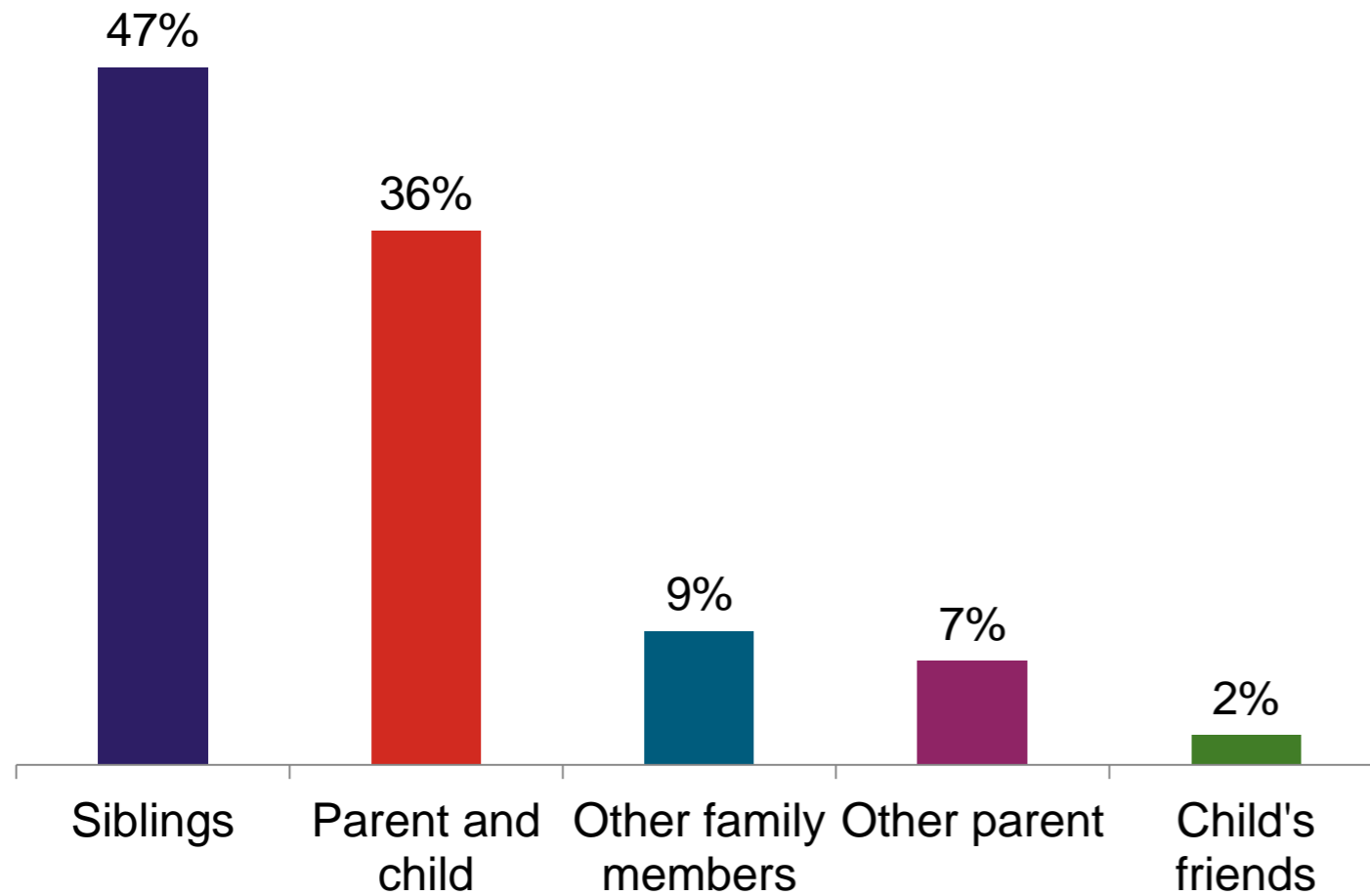
“Engaging in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.” - *Mom of 7yo girl*

“Any activity that is just for fun with no real purpose.”  
- *Dad of 7yo girl*

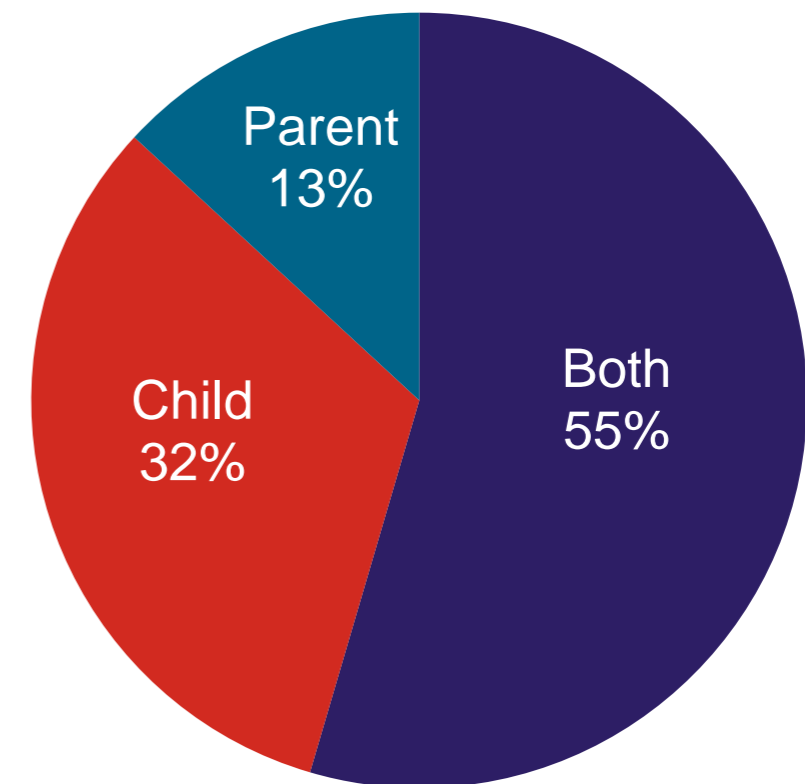
“Any activity that entertains the mind while keeping them active and allows them to use their imagination.”  
- *Dad of 3yo boy*

Play happens often in dyads and triads, with parents and siblings taking part.

### Who co-plays?

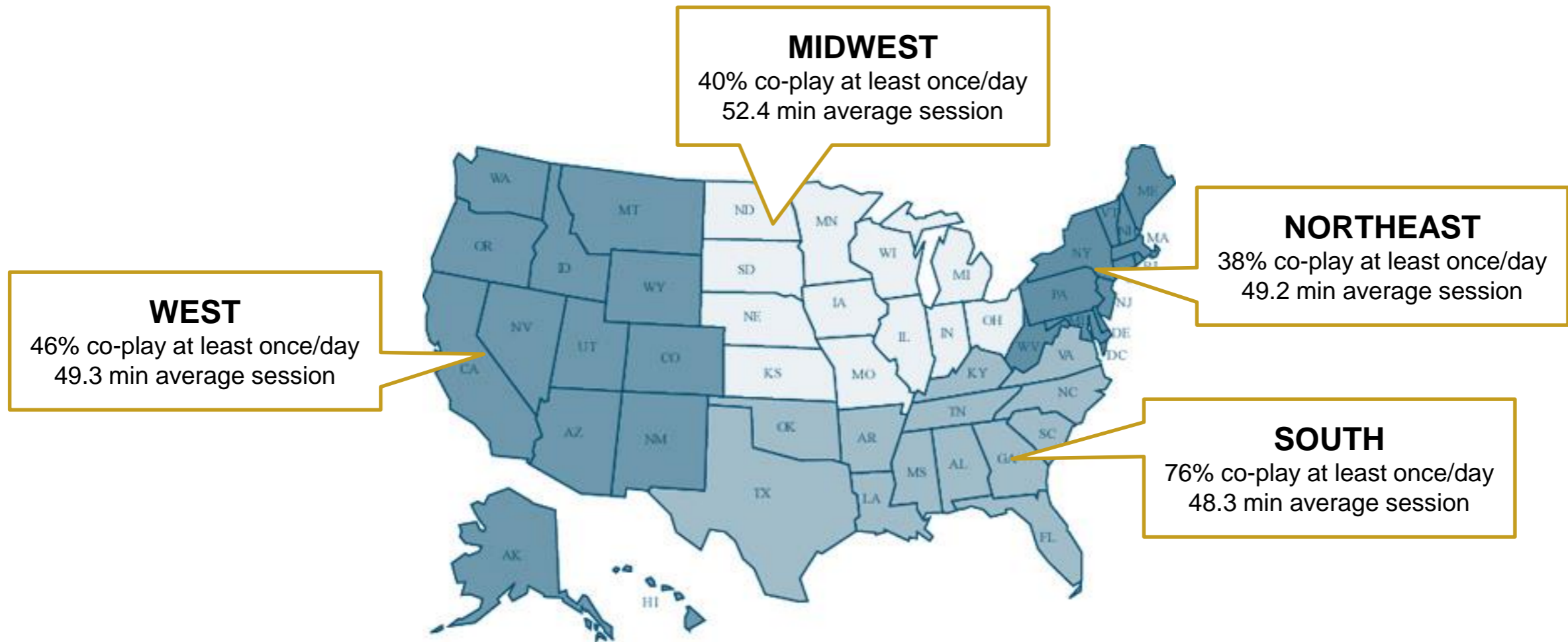


### Who initiates co-play?

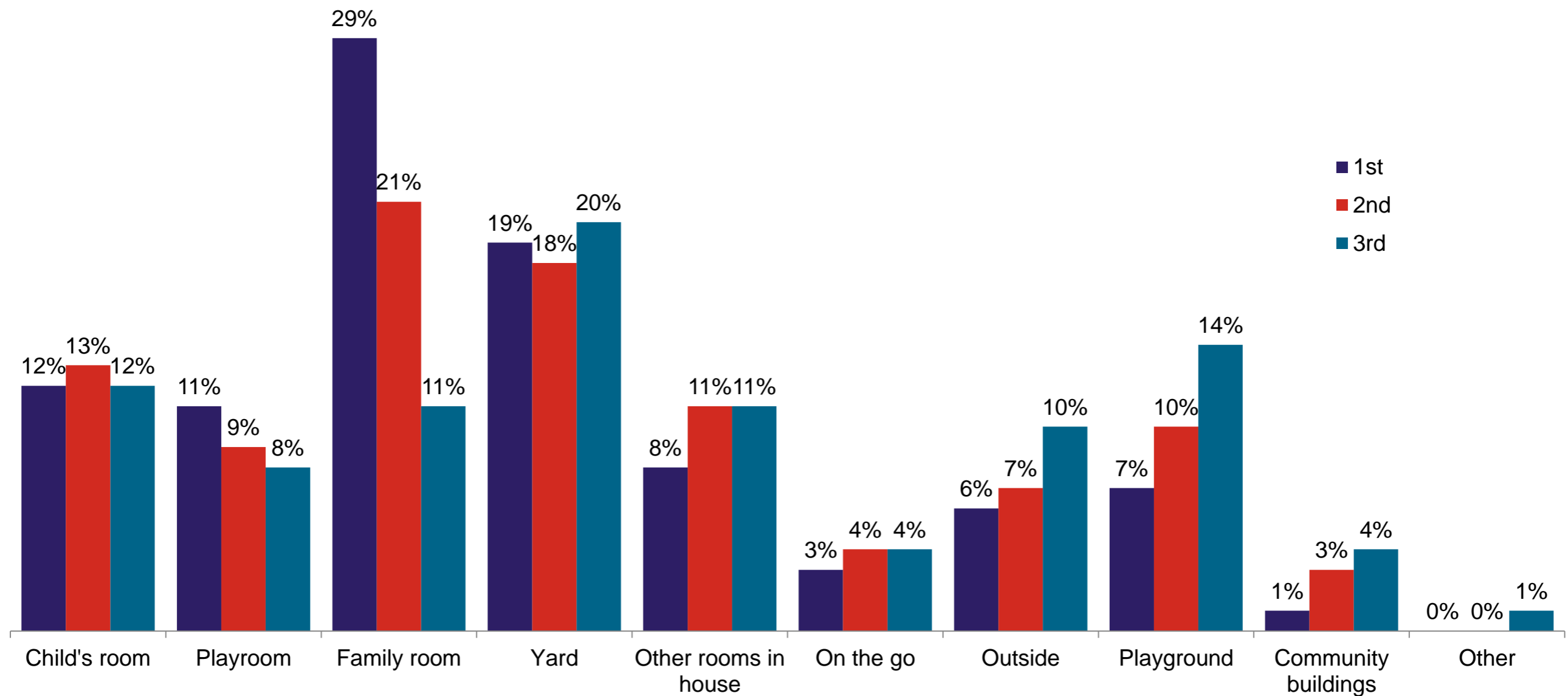


Nearly 76% of parents in the South said that they co-play at least once a day, a far higher percentage than in any other region of the country.

Interestingly, however, parents in the South reported the shortest co-play sessions (48.3 minutes), suggesting that, although parents in other parts of the country co-play less often, they do so for slightly longer periods of time.



Although play happens in many places, the top choice for co-play is the family room.



Dana Points, editor-in-chief, *Parents* magazine and *American Baby*, reminded us that **play can happen anytime**. For today's busy parents, finding time to spend with their child is key. Everyday events — walking to school, making dinner, running an errand — are all opportunities to be playful.

**Quality time is more important than quantity. Distractions (ahem, devices), too often take away from the quality.**



Angela Santomero, chief creative officer, Out of the Blue Enterprises, and co-creator of *Blue's Clues*, **advocates the “pause.”** She calls it the secret sauce in the shows she creates.

Pausing after you ask a question or pose a problem gives kids a chance to reflect and respond. While not actually “play,” it’s a “playful” way to engage kids in a process — be it a television show, a game, or an everyday conversation. Being playful and being silly about it takes the heat off the solving of a problem.



Alison Bryant, co-CEO and Chief Play Officer of PlayScience, emphasizes that **parents need play, too**. De-stressing, stimulating creativity, connecting with the outside world, and learning new things in an engaging way are proven benefits of play.

We expect children to play, but adults can reap these benefits too! We need to stop thinking of play as the opposite of work, and give ourselves permission to “act like a kid” again.



**GENDER**

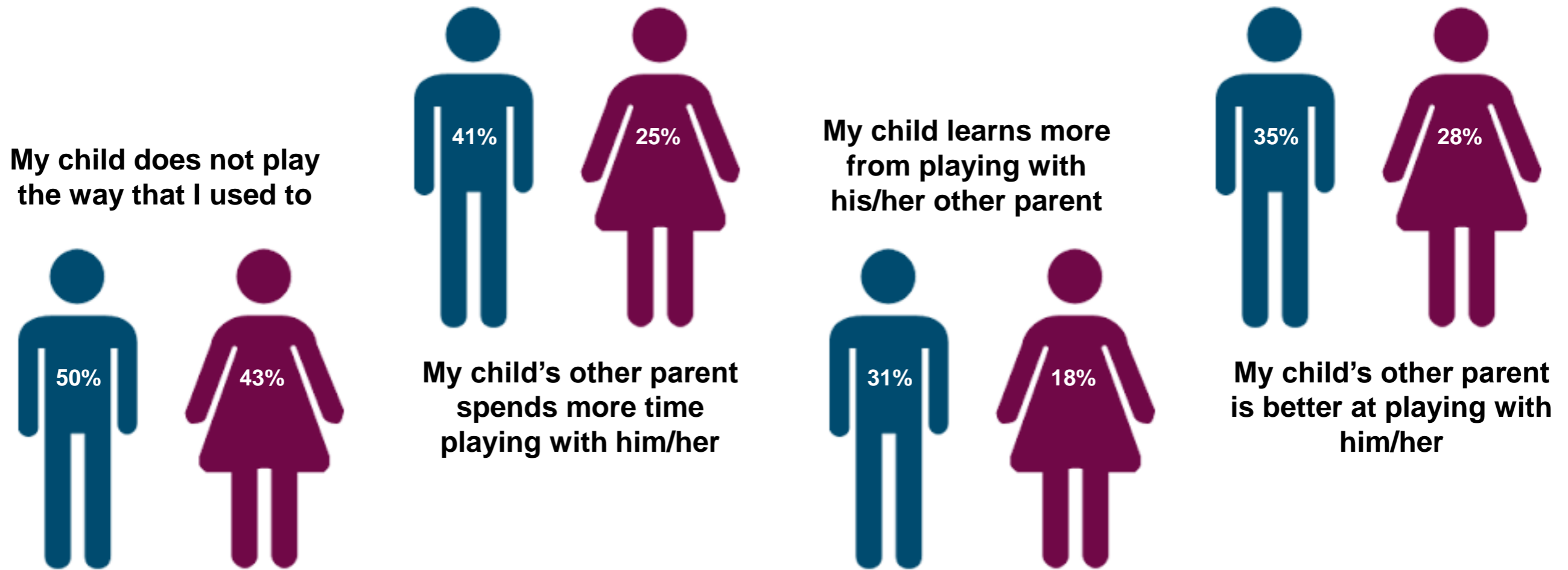
**PLAYS A ROLE IN PLAY**





Moms feel more confident than dads about what children's play looks like today. Dads tend to think that their child does not play the way that they used to.

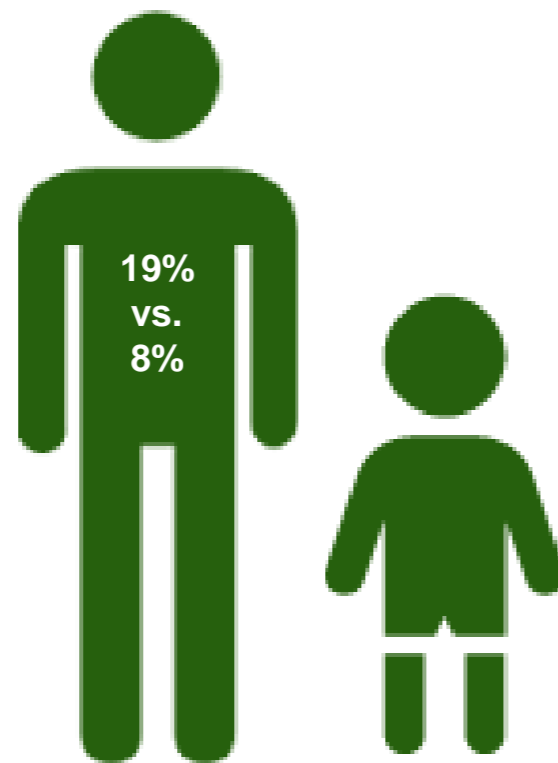
Dads also mostly agree that their child spends more time playing with their Moms, learns more from them, and that Moms are better at playing with their child.



Message to Dads to give them more confidence in playing with their child.

Interestingly, dads more often initiate play with their sons, but they are more likely to say that spending time together is important when they are playing with their daughters. Dads seem to feel more uncertain when it comes to how to play with their daughters and so, although they may leave it to their daughter to initiate co-play, they place even greater value on that time together.

**19% of dads** initiate play with their sons, while only **8% of dads** initiate play with their daughters

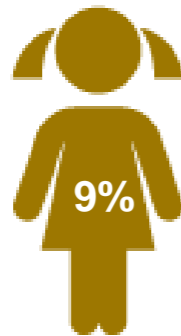
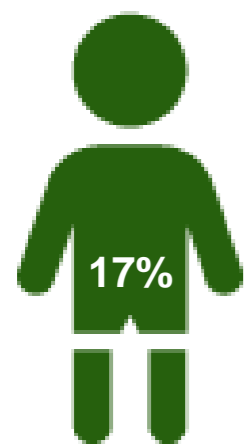


**50% of dads** say that spending time together is the most important aspect of playing with their daughter, while only **36% of dads** say this about their sons

Message to Dads to give them inspiration on how to play with their daughter.

Parents do not actually play more frequently with one gender than the other and the lengths of the co-play sessions are similar. However it seems that parents feel more capable on playing with their sons. They initiate the co-play sessions more when playing with their sons and they are somewhat more likely to say that nothing stops them from playing with their sons.

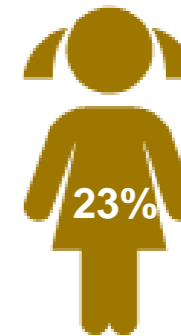
The toys that parents use with each gender may play a role in how comfortable parents feel during co-play, since girls' activities tend to involve more creativity and freedom (e.g. arts & crafts, pretend play), while boys' activities may have more structure or associated storylines (e.g. action figures, sports).



Parent initiates play  
with child



Average length of co-play sessions

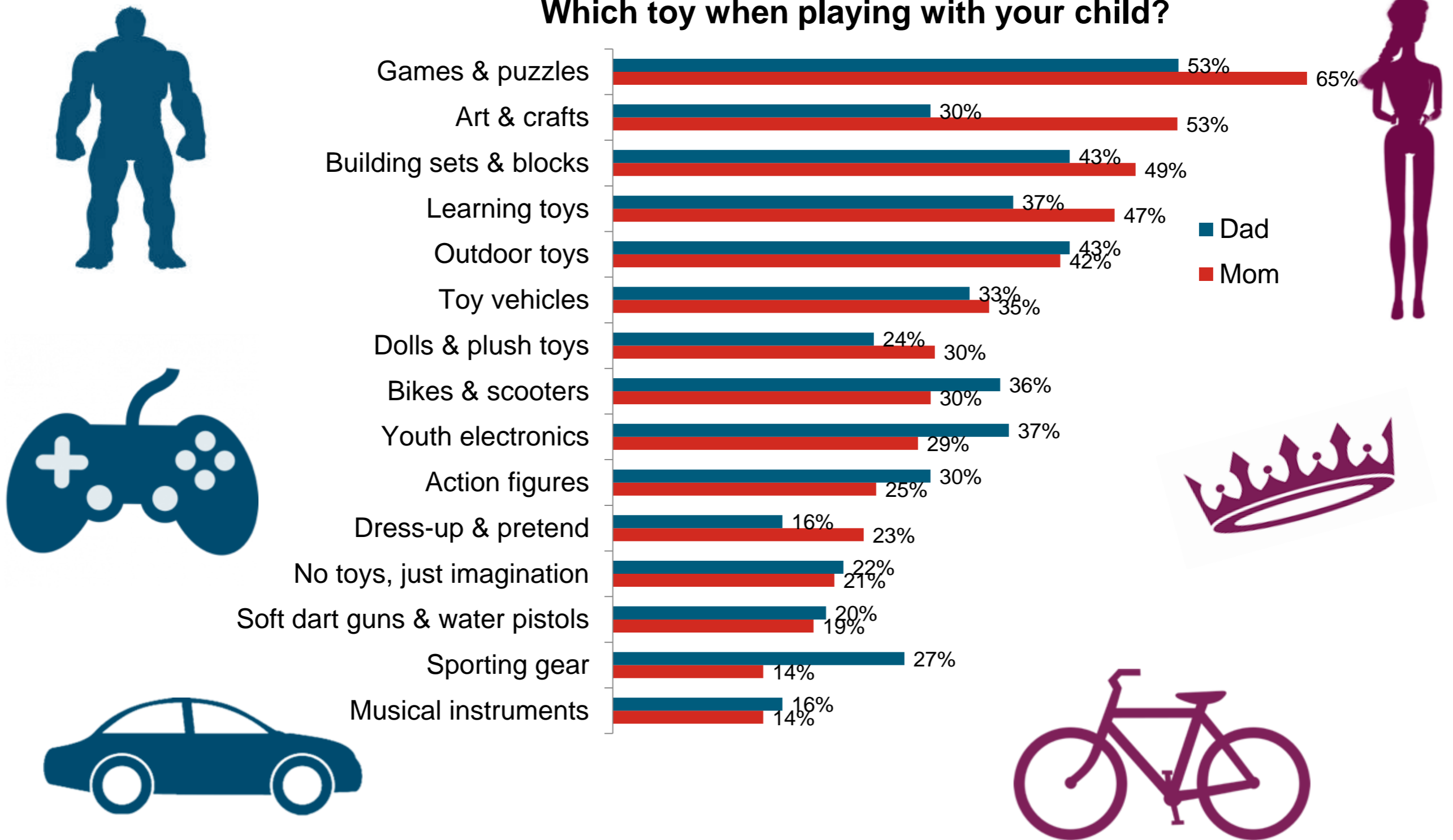


Nothing stops parent from  
playing with child

Give tips to parents on how to play creative and imaginative games with their child.

Moms tend to co-play with creative toys and Dads with the more action-oriented toys, although Dads are also the youth electronics expert.

### Which toy when playing with your child?

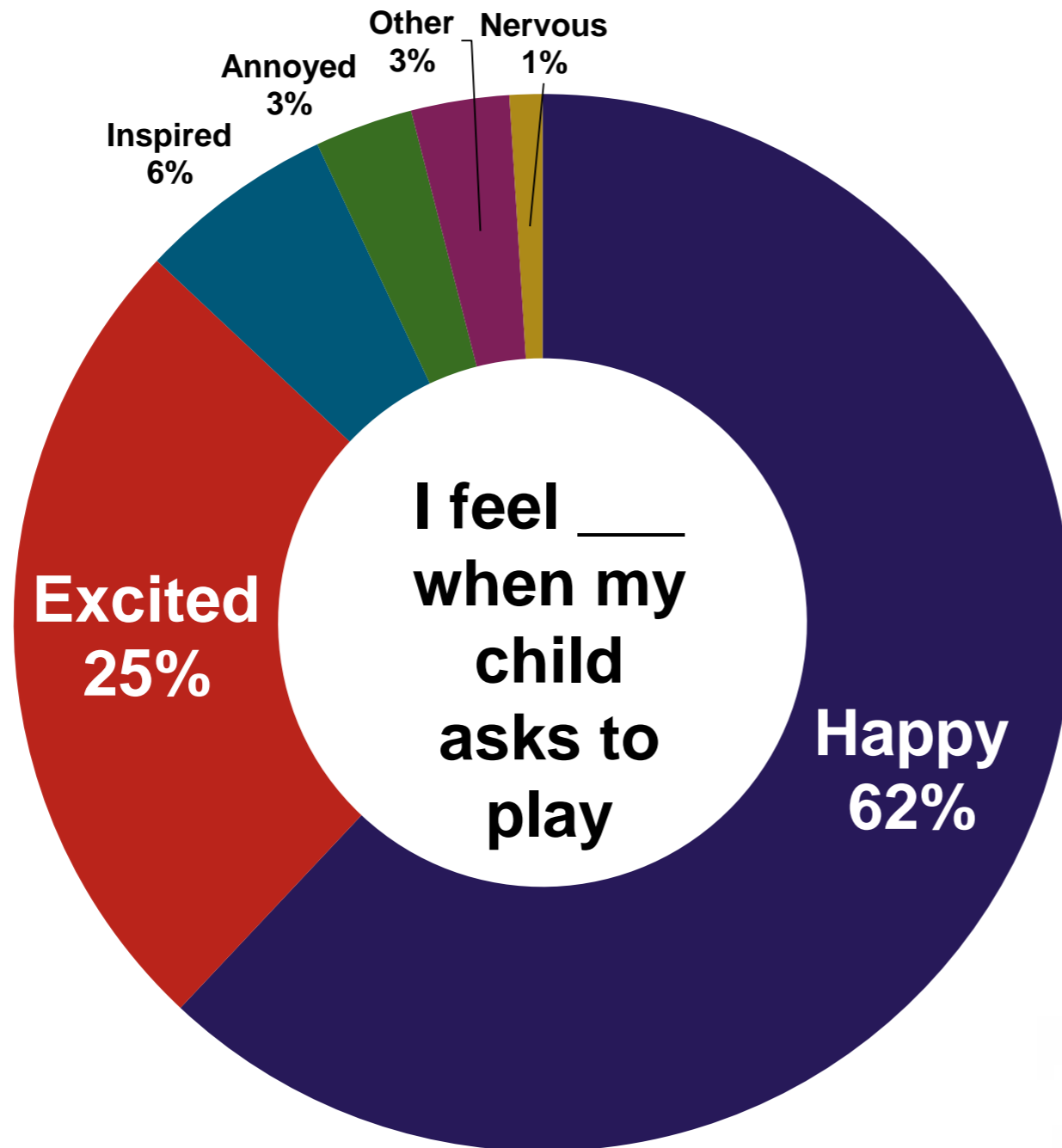


**OUTREACH**

**ENGAGING PARENTS IN PLAY**



Reminding parents of the joy and excitement they feel when their child wants to play with them is a key emotional trigger to get them “over the hump.”





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