

Child's play 'lost' in pandemic fear

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Ms Jennifer Fane, PhD candidate, Flinders University, South Australia Credit: Flinders University

Social and community disruptions caused by the COVID-19 restrictions could have a lasting effect on child wellbeing, Flinders University researchers warn.

While health, safety and education responses are the focus of restrictions, the needs of childhood independence, self-determination and play are less acknowledged, Flinders University experts explain in a new publication.

"Play is a key aspect of children's wellbeing from their perspectives," says lead author Jennifer Fane. "The closure of playgrounds, schools and the fear and worry associated with being in [public spaces](#) has likely had significant impacts on children during this time.

"As children return to school, and life starts to resume as it did pre-COVID-19, focus and attention to children's opportunities for play—and their ability to exercise reasonable 'agency' during this time of significant transition—are two key aspects that can support their [wellbeing](#) during this difficult time."

While everyone's freedoms have been impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, children's agency, or ability to make choices and decisions within adult-imposed constraints, has never been more apparent.

"Young children interviewed in the study told us of the importance to their lives of trying new things and having a say about play," says Flinders Professor of Public Health Colin MacDougall, a co-author on the *Child Indicators Research* paper.

"As the world takes baby steps to ease these life-saving restrictions, and move into an [uncertain future](#), we must take the time to think about very young children.

"This research can be used to help chart a course for the multiple transitions these children are undergoing."

Ms Fane, whose Ph.D. at Flinders focused on communicating with preschoolers, says these perspectives can support [child wellbeing](#) in future, including as government restrictions on people's boundaries affects where [children](#) play and how much they can have a say.

More information: Jennifer Fane et al, Preschool Aged Children's Accounts of their Own Wellbeing: are Current Wellbeing Indicators Applicable to Young Children?, *Child Indicators Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s12187-020-09735-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09735-7)

Provided by Flinders University

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