

# How did COVID-19 affect children in Scotland?

Report **2** Play and learning, outdoors and social interactions

## Play



Parents and carers  
told us that ...

Around **5 in 10**  
children had **better**  
**imaginative play**

and around **1 in 10**  
children had **worse**  
**imaginative play**

In the week  
before the survey ...

Around **4 in 10**  
children played **actively**  
**inside most days**

Almost **6 in 10**  
children played a  
**screen-based game**  
**most days**





## Parents and carers told us that ...

Around **1 in 10**  
children had  
**better concentration**

and around **4 in 10**  
children had **worse**  
**concentration**

## In the week before the survey ...

**8 in 10**  
children looked at  
**books or**  
**read stories**  
**most days**

**5 in 10**  
children did  
**drawing or**  
**painting**  
**most days**

**6 in 10**  
children said  
**nursery rhymes**  
**or sang songs**  
**most days**

**6 in 10**  
children spent time  
learning about **letters,**  
**words, numbers**  
**or shapes**  
**most days**



## Time outside



Parents and carers told us that ...

**5 in 10**

children **spent more time outside**

**3 in 10**

children **spent less time outside**

In the week before the survey ...

**8 in 10**

children **played outside most days**

**6 in 10**

children went for a **walk, scoot or cycle most days**

## Greenspace



In the week before the survey ...

**3 in 10**

children had been to a **park or greenspace most days**

and **3 in 10**

had not been to a **park or greenspace at all**

More than

**9 in 10**

children had access to **good-quality, safe greenspace**



## Social interactions



### Parents and carers told us that ...

Around **1 in 10** children had **spoken to friends on most days**

and more than **4 in 10** children had **not spoken to friends at all**

Around **4 in 10** children had **spoken to extended family members on most days**

**1 in 10** children had not **spoken to extended family members at all**





## Parents and carers told us that ...

**8 in 10**

said they found it **difficult or stressful** keeping their child 2 metres apart from people from other households

**5 in 10**

had tried to keep their child 2 metres apart from people from other households **but were not able to**

**5 in 10**

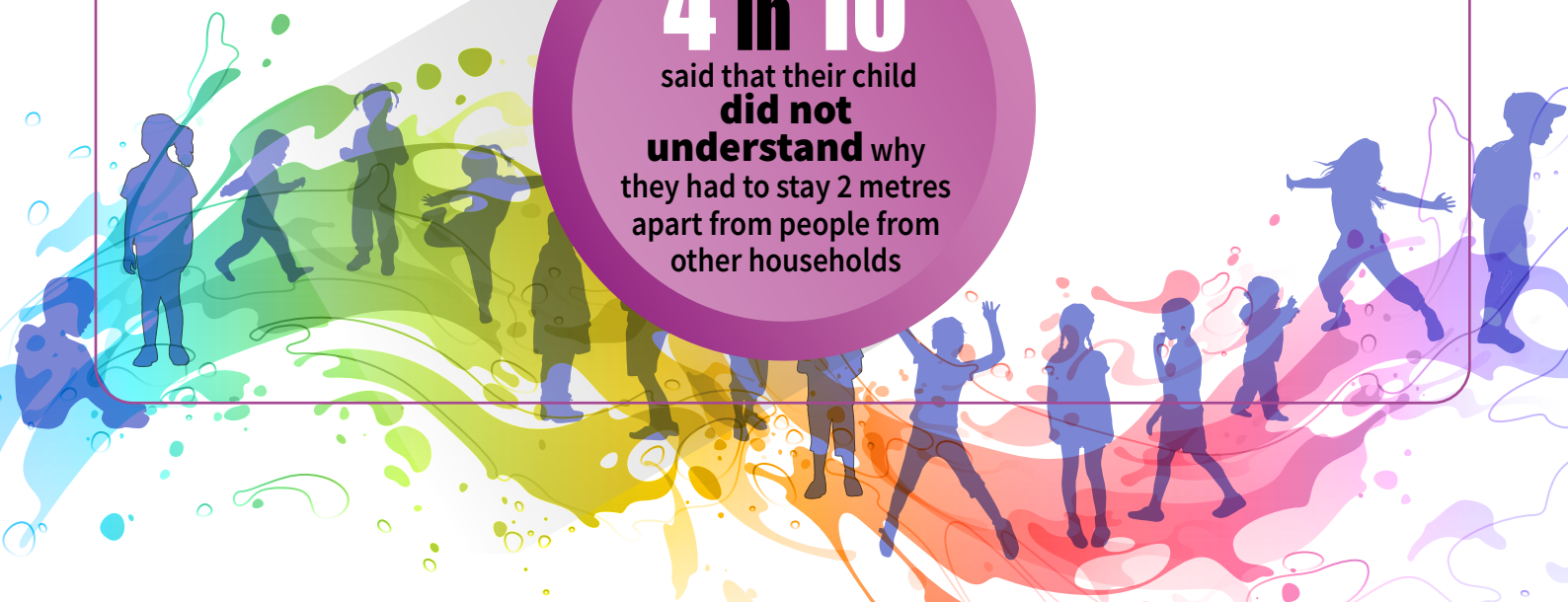
said that their child had tried to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, **but found it difficult or upsetting**

**6 in 10**

said their child had tried to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, **but had easily forgotten**

**4 in 10**

said that their child **did not understand** why they had to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households



## COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS)

Report 2 – Play and learning,  
outdoors and social interactions  
in children in Scotland aged 2–7  
during COVID-19

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) is an online survey launched by Public Health Scotland for parents and carers of 2–7-year-olds in Scotland. The first round of the survey ran between 22 June and 6 July 2020, and was completed by the parents and carers of over 11,000 children in Scotland.

This report is the second in a series presenting the findings from the first round of the survey. It focuses on describing the play, learning and social activities of 2–7-year-old children during COVID-19 in Scotland. It covers:

- play and learning activities
- use of outdoor spaces
- social interactions

There are important methodological caveats that must be considered when using these findings. Our sample is not nationally representative as we did not reach all the groups in our community equally. Our results, therefore, only represent the views of the parents and carers who answered our survey. In particular, under-representation of lower-income families may influence some findings. More information on the background, context and methods of the survey, including an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants, is provided in the [Background report](#).

## Results

In total, we had 11,228 valid responses to our survey\*. In this section, we report our findings under relevant questions from the survey. Throughout, we combine the proportions of respondents saying that things were worse or much worse and refer to this as 'worse', and we combine better and much better and refer to this as 'better'. We also categorise age in two groups: a younger age group comprising children aged 2 to 4 years and an older age group including children aged 5 to 7 years.

### Play and learning activities

How would you rate the following areas of your child's life now compared to how it was before the lockdown?

#### Ability to concentrate

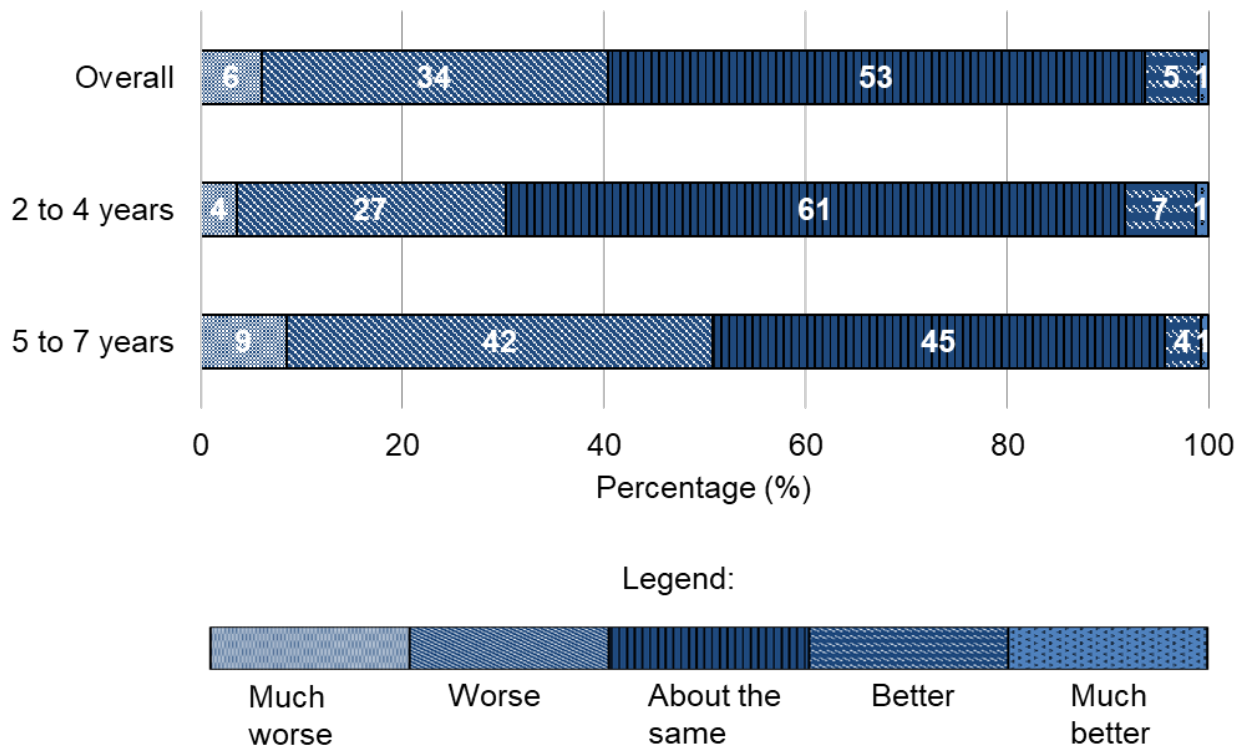
For around half of the children (53%), parents and carers rated the ability to concentrate since lockdown as the same as it had been before, while 6% of parents and carers rated it as better. For the remaining 40% of the children, parents and carers rated the ability to concentrate since lockdown as worse than what it was before.

The percentage of children with concentration rated as worse was much higher in the older age group, with just over half (51%) of the children in this age group rated as worse for ability to concentrate compared with 31% of the younger children.

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\* Parents and carers could complete the survey once for every child they cared for within the age range. Therefore, the number of responses relates to individual children, not individual families.

**Figure 1. Child's ability to concentrate, by age categories\***



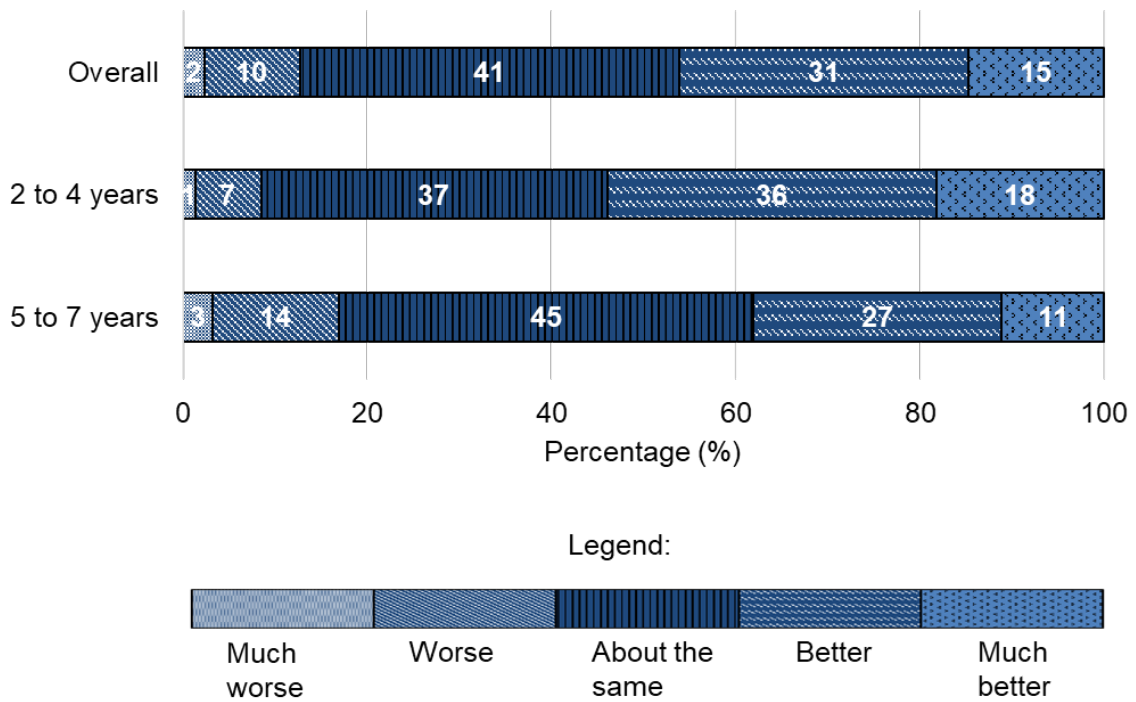
\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,609. Base for 2–4 years: 4,845. Base for 5–7 years: 4,723.

**Imaginative play**

For 41% of the children, parents and carers rated their imaginative play as the same since lockdown as it had been before, for 12% it was rated as worse. However, for 46% of the children, parents and carers rated their imaginative play since lockdown as better than before lockdown.

The percentage of children with improved imaginative play was higher in the younger age group, with just over half (54%) of the children in this age group rated as having improved imaginative play compared to 38% of older children.

**Figure 2. Imaginative play\***



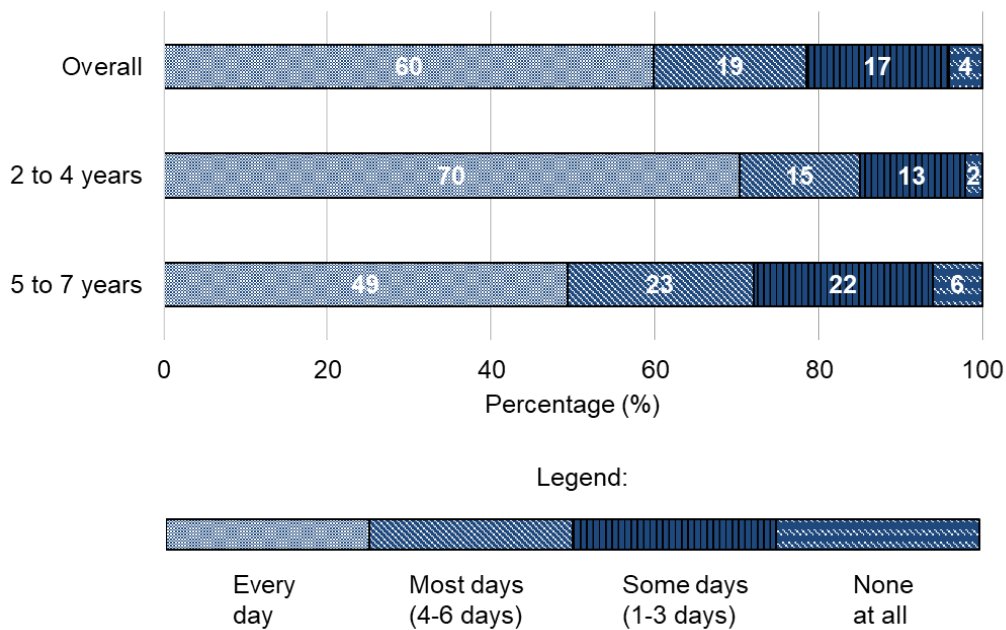
\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,596. Base for 2–4 years: 4,837. Base for 5–7 years: 4,718.

How many days in the last week (last seven days) has your child done each of the following things?

This question had several activities that could be broadly categorised under home learning activities and general play activities. The first four activities related to home learning activities and included looking at books or reading stories, activities involving painting or drawing, reciting nursery rhymes or singing songs and recognising letters, words numbers or shapes.

The most common activity was looking at books or reading stories, which 79% of the children did at least four days out of the last seven. Letter, number, word or shape recognition was also common, with 64% of the children doing these activities at least four out of the last seven days. Fifty-eight per cent of the children had sung songs or nursery rhymes on at least four out of the last seven days. Drawing or painting activities were the least common activities, with 51% of children taking part in these activities on at least four out of the last seven days. Participation in these activities did not differ greatly by age for all but one: fewer 5–7-year-olds had looked at books or read stories on at least four of the last seven days (72%) than 2–4-year-olds (85%). See Figures 3 to 6 for details of these breakdowns by age groups.

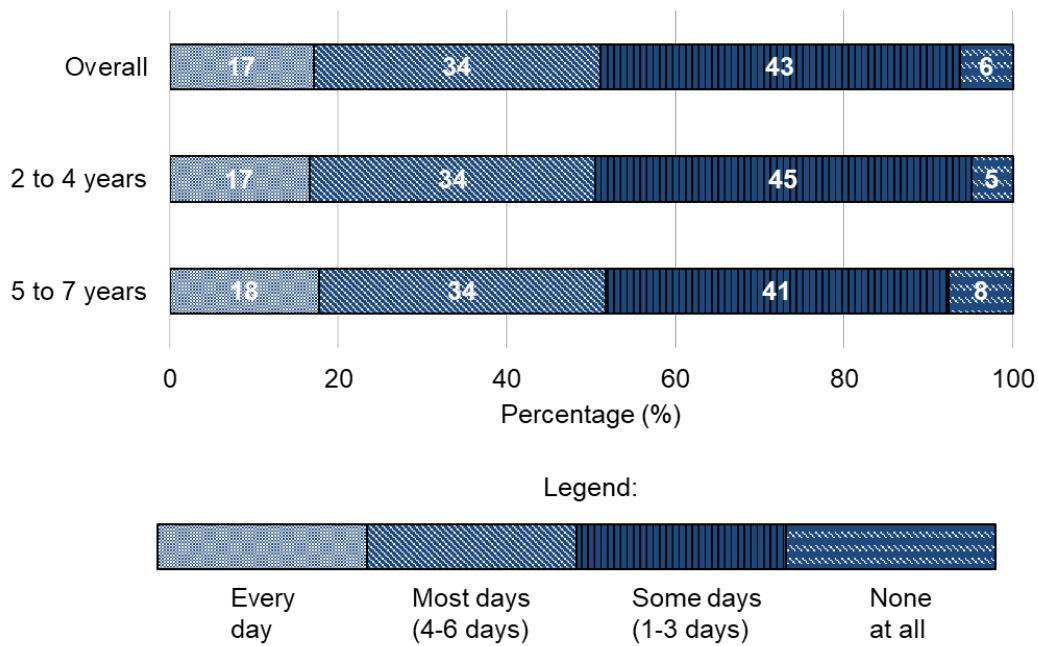
**Figure 3. Looked at books or read stories\***



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,412. Base for 2–4 years: 4,742. Base for 5–7 years: 4,636.

The nationally representative Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC), which was conducted in 2019, found that 62% of 3-year-olds looked at books every day at home but that no 3-year-old children had not looked at a book over the last seven days. The same study found that 57% of 4- and 5-year-olds had looked at books every day for the past week but that 2% of them had not looked at books at all in the same period. However, as our CEYRIS sample is not nationally representative, and was self-selected, direct comparisons are not valid and these observed differences as well as comparisons to SSELC noted below should be interpreted with care.

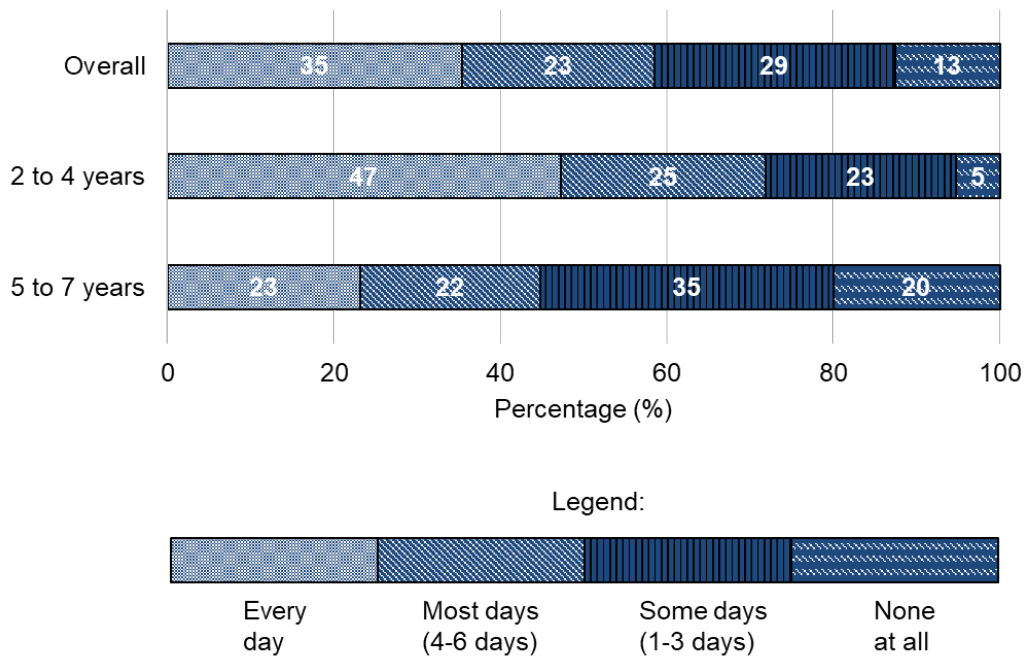
**Figure 4. Activities involving painting or drawing\***



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,413. Base for 2–4 years: 4,746. Base for 5–7 years: 4,633.

The SSEL study found that 23% of 3-year-olds had done some painting or drawing every day in the last seven days but that 1% of them had not done any in the same week. For 4- and 5-year-olds, 25% had done painting or drawing every day but 3% had not done any in the past week.

**Figure 5. Recited nursery rhymes or sung songs\***

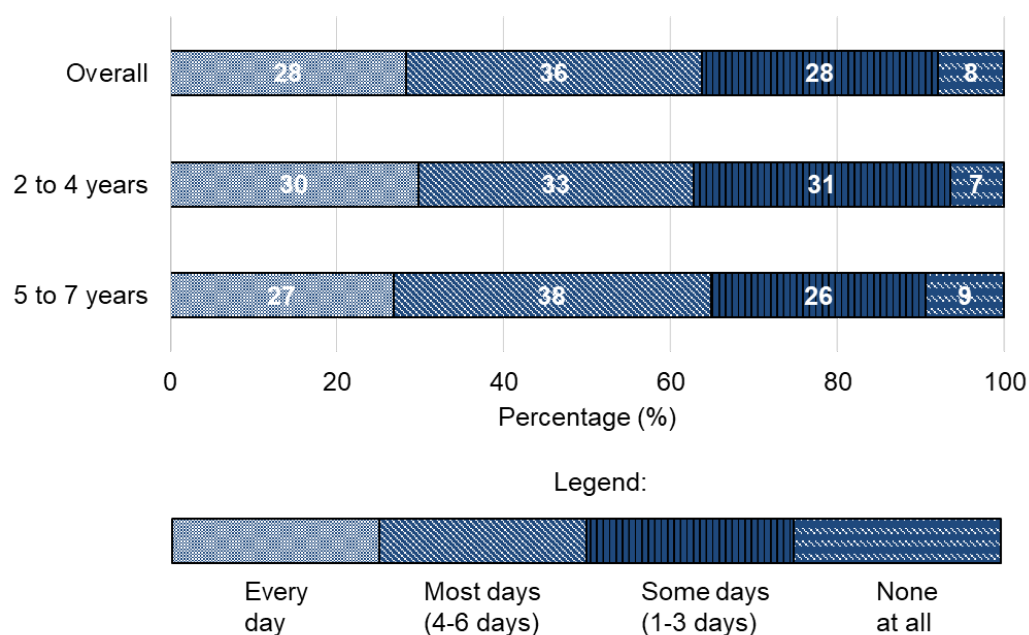


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,406. Base for 2–4 years: 4,746. Base for 5–7 years: 4,626.

The SSELC found that 61% of 3-year-olds had sung songs every day in the past week but that 1% had not sung songs at all. For the 4- and 5-year-olds, 51% had sung songs every day but 2% had not sung at all in the last seven days.



**Figure 6.** Played at recognising letters, words, numbers or shapes\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,399. Base for 2–4 years: 4,741. Base for 5–7 years: 4,624.

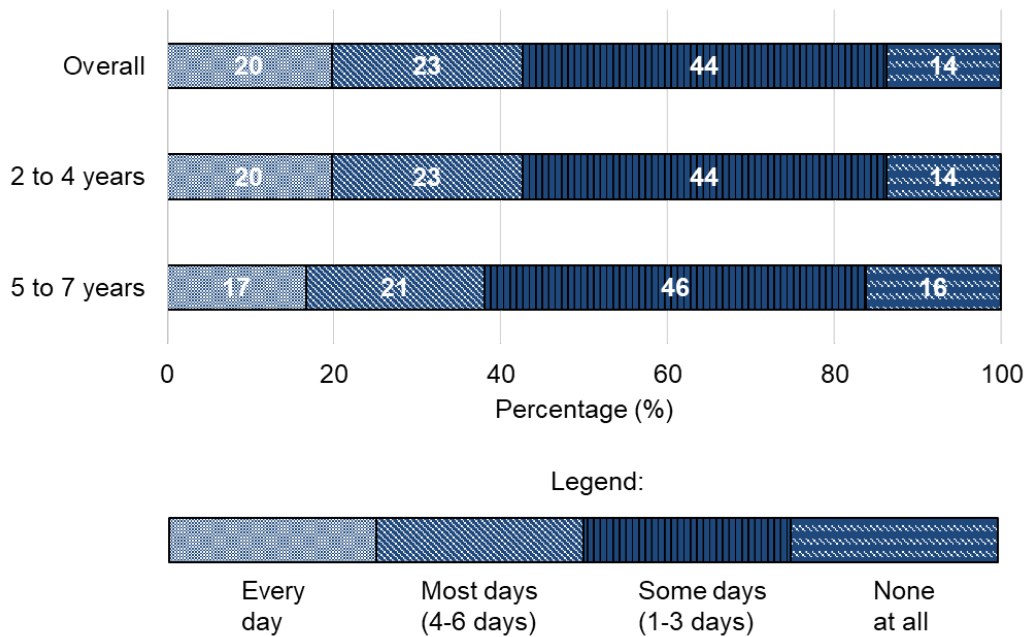
The SSEL C found that 39% of 3-year-olds had done letter/number/shape recognition every day in the last seven days but that 2% had not done this at all in the past week. For 4- and 5-year-olds, 42% had done letter/number/shape recognition every day in the last seven days but 2% had not done it at all.

The remaining two activities were more focused on general play activities. Note that we report outdoor play under **Children’s use of outdoor spaces**.

**Played actively inside (for example, PE, dancing, games)**

Forty-three per cent of children had played actively (that is, playing in a physically active way) inside on at least four out of the last seven days, while 14% had not played actively inside at all in the last week. Fewer children in the older age group had played actively inside most days of the week (38%) compared to younger children (43%).

**Figure 7.** Number of days the child actively played inside in the last week\*

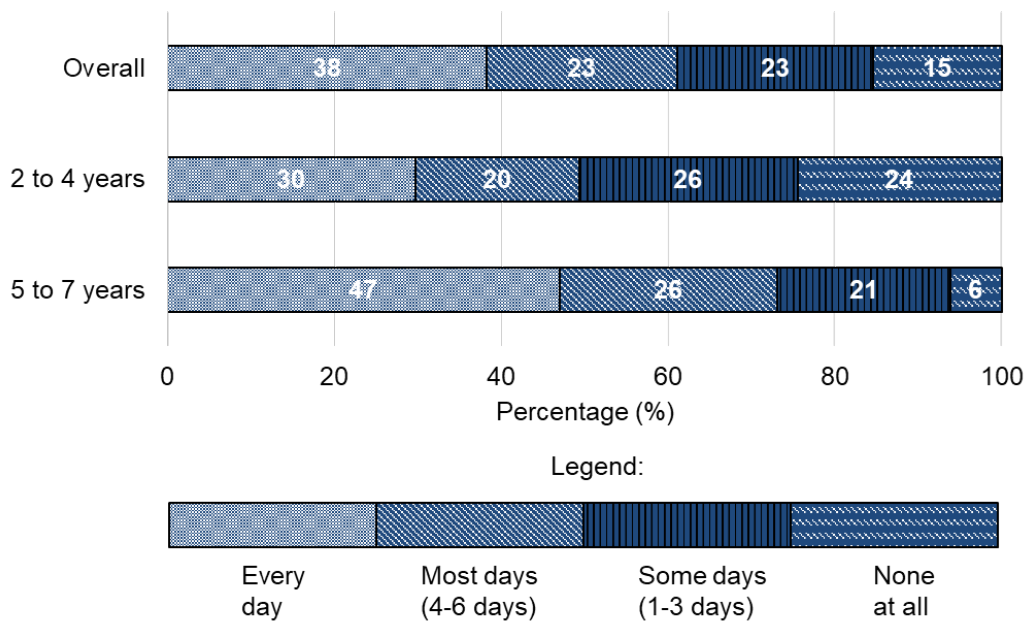


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,402. Base for 2–4 years: 4,739. Base for 5–7 years: 4,629.

**Played a screen-based game (for example, on phone, tablet, computer)**

Sixty-one per cent of the children had played a screen-based game on at least four of the last seven days. This was higher in the older age group (73%) than in the younger age group (50%). Overall, 15% of children had not played screen-based games at all in the last week, 6% in the older age group compared to 24% in the younger children.

**Figure 8.** Number of days the child played a screen-based game in the last week\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,380. Base for 2–4 years: 4,718. Base for 5–7 years: 4,628.

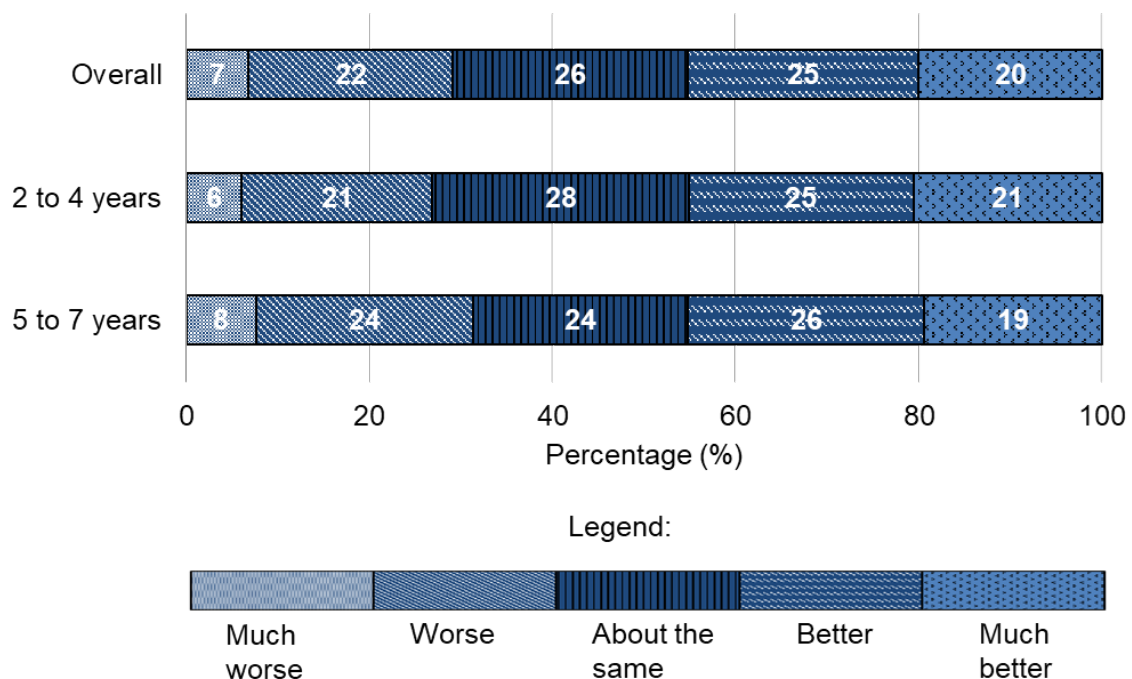
## Children’s use of outdoor spaces

How would you rate the following areas of your child’s life now compared to how it was before the lockdown?

### Time spent outdoors

For over a quarter (26%) of children, parents and carers rated amount of time spent outdoors as the same as that before lockdown and for 29% they rated it as worse. However, for 45% of the children, amount of time spent outdoors was rated as better than that before lockdown. This did not differ greatly by child’s age.

**Figure 9.** Comparing the amount of time the child spent outside since the lockdown to how it was before the lockdown\*

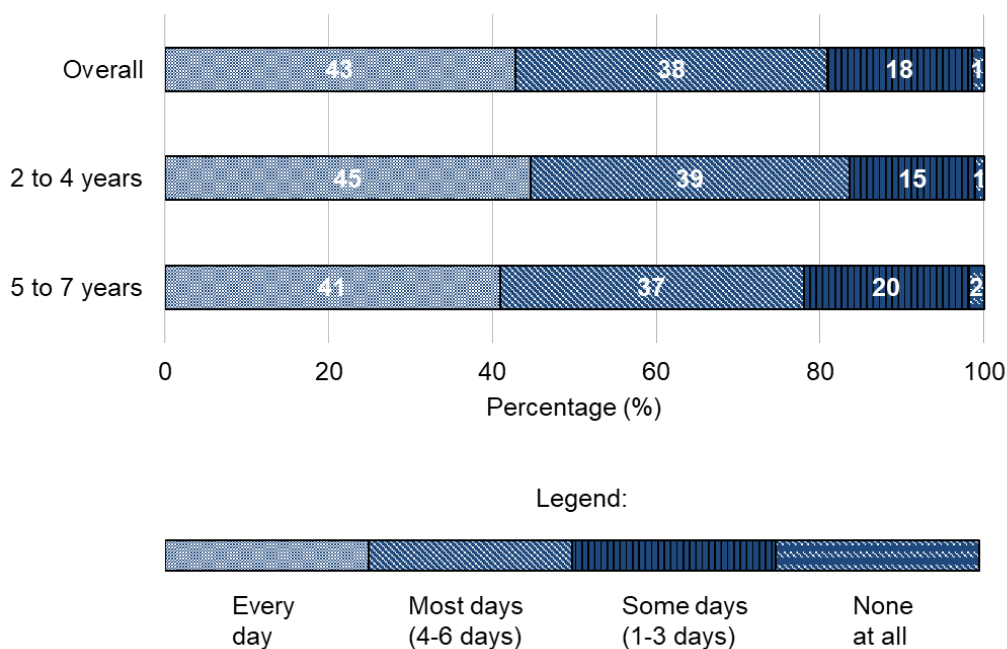


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,603. Base for 2–4 years: 4,841. Base for 5–7 years: 4,721.

How often in the last week (last seven days) has your child done each of the following things?

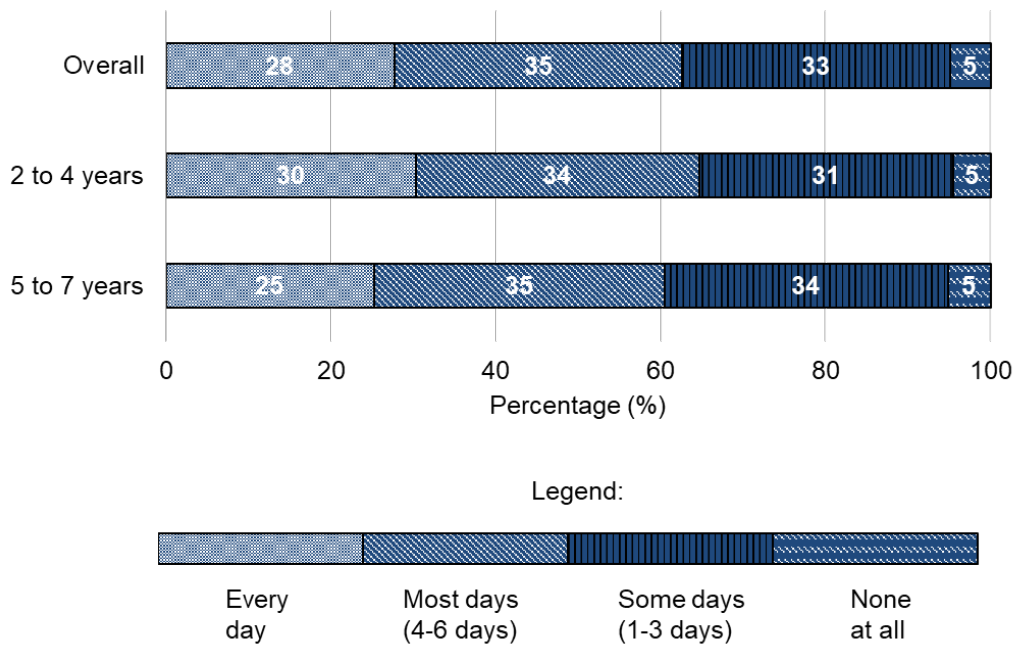
Eighty-one per cent of children had played outside on at least four out of the last seven days. This was slightly higher in the younger age group (84%), compared to the older age group (78%, **Figure 10**). Sixty-three per cent of children had been for a walk, cycle or scooter in the local area on at least four out of the last seven days; this was similar for both age groups (**Figure 11**). Thirty-two per cent of children had been to a park or other local greenspace on at least four out of the last seven days, while 27% had not been to a greenspace at all in the last week (**Figure 12**).

**Figure 10.** Number of days the child played outside in the last week\*



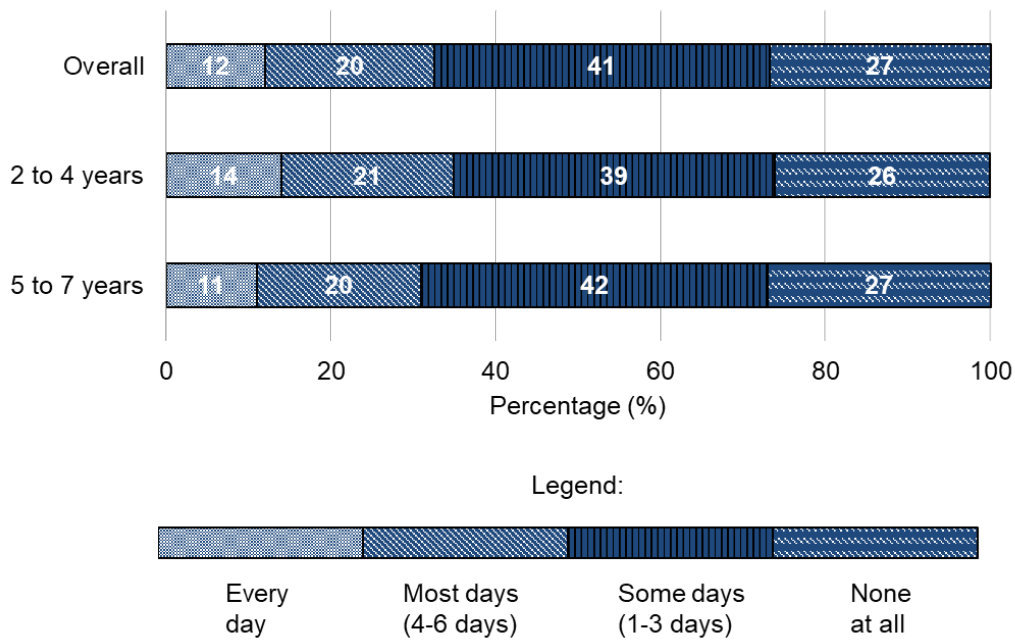
\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,426. Base for 2–4 years: 4,752. Base for 5–7 years: 4,640.

**Figure 11.** Number of days the child has been for a walk, cycle or scoot in the local area in the last week\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,426. Base for 2–4 years: 4,751. Base for 5–7 years: 4,641.

**Figure 12.** Number of days the child has been to a park or other greenspace in the local area\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,414. Base for 2–4 years: 4,750. Base for 5–7 years: 4,630.

## **Access to outdoor spaces**

As well as use of outdoors spaces, the survey asked about children's access to different types of outdoor spaces, including at home (for example, a garden or communal space), in the local area. For 91% of children, parents and carers reported that they had access to private outside space at home, whereas 2% had no access to outside space at home. Further, 13% had access to communal outdoor spaces, 8% had a private patio area and 2% had access to a balcony (percentages add up to more than 100 as respondents could select all that apply). In addition, 94% of children had access to good-quality greenspace in the local area, while 6% did not. The high proportion of children reported as having access to private outside space at home, and good-quality greenspace in the local area, is potentially influenced by the bias in our sample, with a greater proportion of our participants coming from high-income households than is nationally representative.



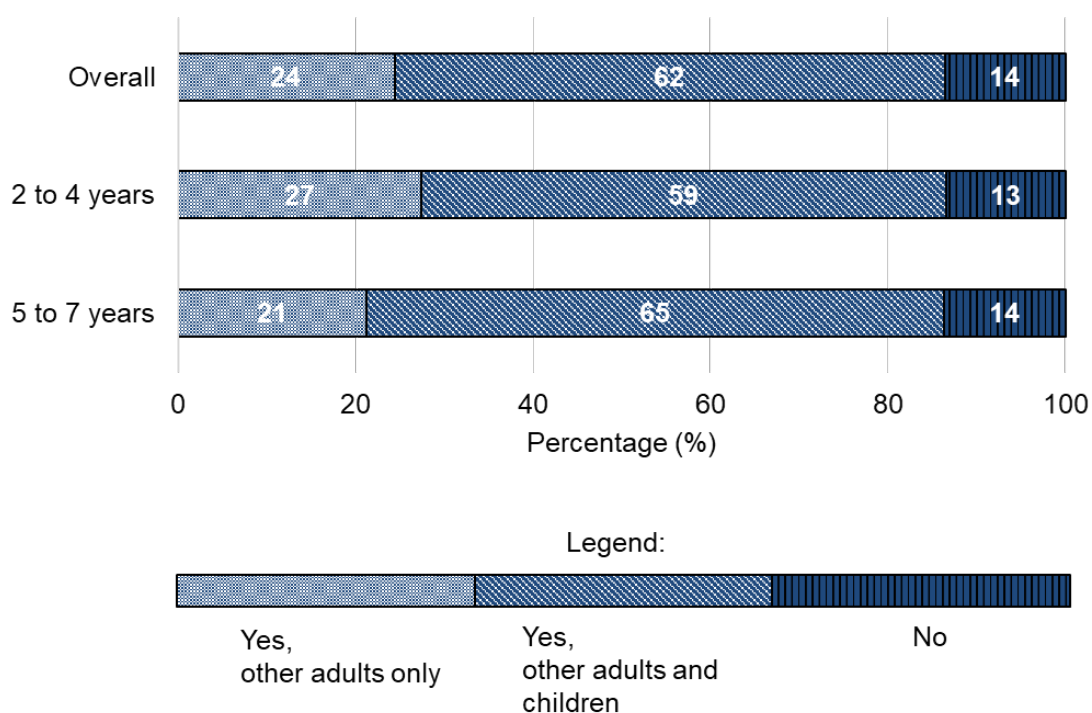
## Children’s social interactions

The survey included questions that provide some insight into children’s social interactions since lockdown began. These included asking if children had met up with people from other households, attended a childcare setting or spoken (online or otherwise) to friends or family.

In the last two weeks, has your child met up with people from another household?

At the time of the survey, 14% of children had not met up with anyone else from outside their household. Further, parents and carers reported that 93% of children had not been attending any type of childcare or education setting since the lockdown began (Table 1).

**Figure 13.** Meeting with people from other households, by age group\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 10,304. Base for 2–4 years: 5,264. Base for 5–7 years: 5,040.

Has your child been attending a childcare/education setting since the lockdown began?

**Table 1.** Attending a childcare/education setting since the lockdown began\*

	<b>Number (%) of 5 to 7 years</b>	<b>Number (%) of 2 to 4 years</b>	<b>Number (%) of all children</b>
Local authority hub	265(6)	202(4)	470(5)
Childminder	65(1)	135(3)	201(2)
Fully outdoor childcare setting	8(<0.5)	19(<0.5)	27 (<0.5)
Not attending childcare/education setting	4,373(93)	4,485(93)	8,895(93)
Total	4,711 (100)	4,841 (100)	9,593 (100)

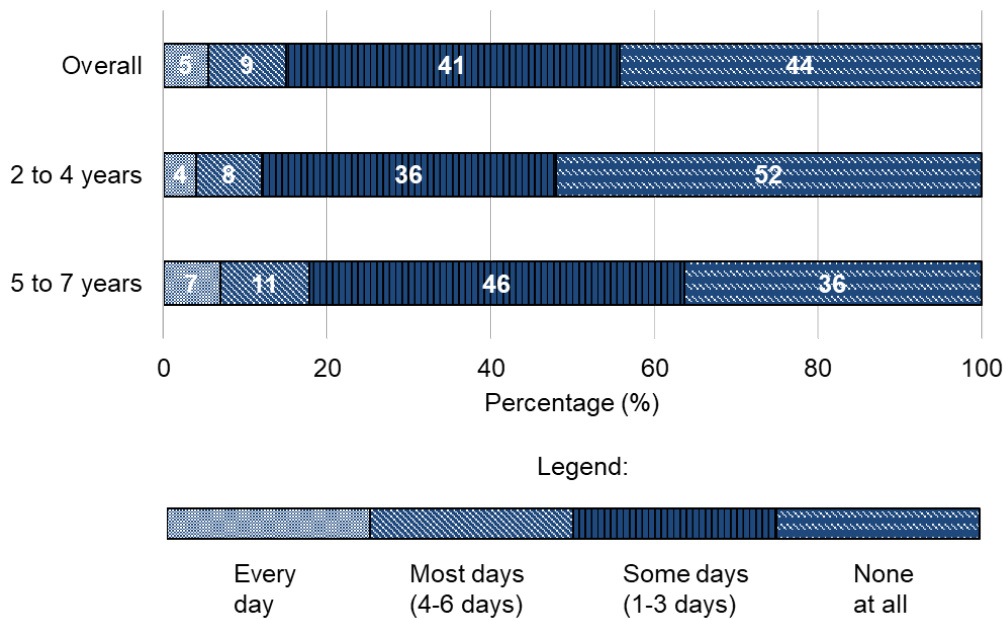
\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers.

How often in the last week (last seven days) has your child done each of the following things?

Overall, parents and carers reported that 44% of children had not spoken to friends at all in the last week, with only 14% having spoken to friends on at least four out of the last seven days. Older children had slightly more contact with friends than younger ones. In comparison, more children had been in contact with extended family, with 43% having spoken to extended family members on at least four out of the last seven days, although 9% had not spoken to extended family members at all in the last week. There was little difference in contact with extended family members between the age groups.

## Spoken to friends (online or otherwise)

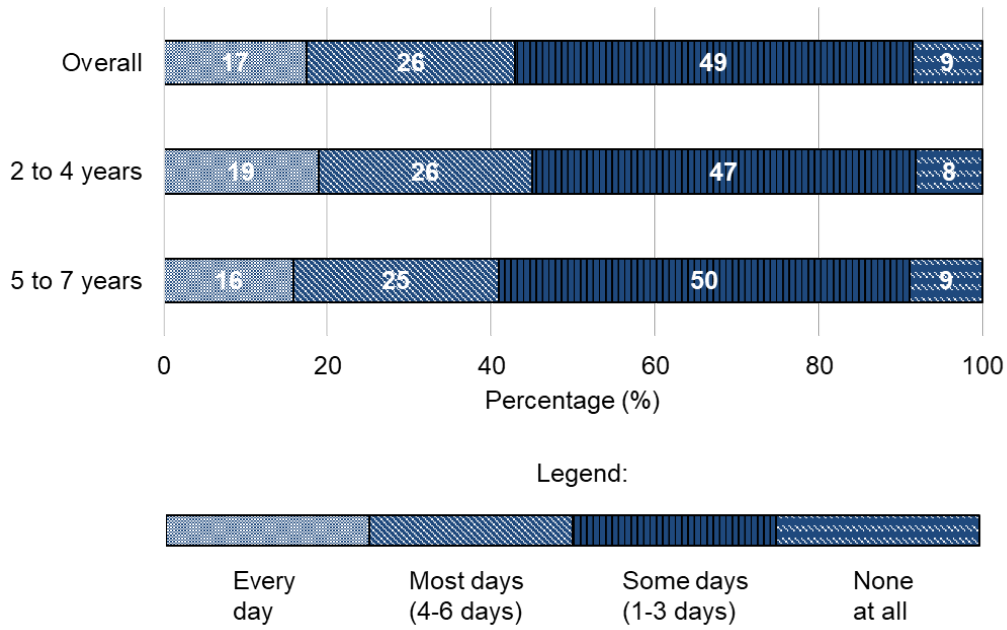
**Figure 14.** Number of days the child has spoken to friends in the last week\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,249. Base for 2–4 years: 4,638. Base for 5–7 years: 4,578.

**Spoken to extended family (online or otherwise)**

**Figure 15.** Number of days the child has spoken to extended family in the last seven days\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 9,384. Base for 2–4 years: 4,729. Base for 5–7 years: 4,621.

## **Experience of physical distancing**

At the time of the first round of CEYRIS, lockdown had just been eased and households were permitted to meet outside with one other household under strict physical distancing conditions. As such, we included questions on the experience of physical distancing for both parents and carers and their children. The restrictions were rapidly changing during the survey period, including the introduction of guidance that children under 12 were no longer required to physically distance. Key milestones are set out in our Background report for comparison.

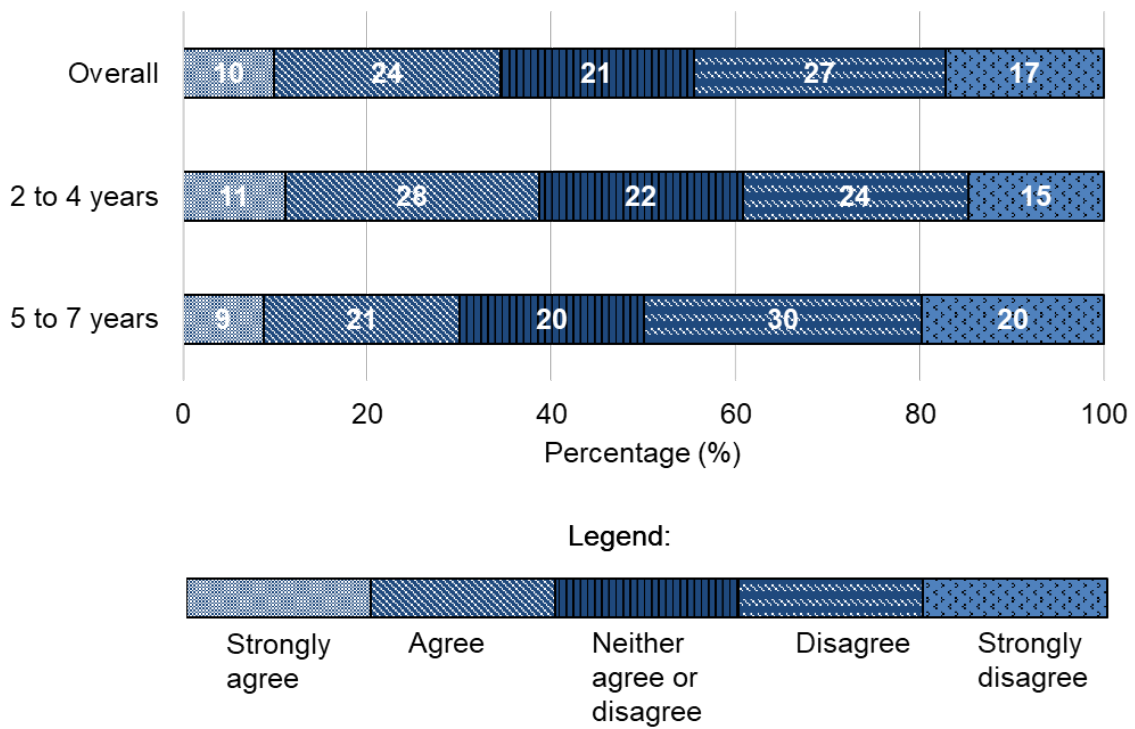
**Below is a list of statements about your child's experience of physical distancing since lockdown has eased and families are able to meet people from other households. Please state the extent to which you agree with each statement.**

This question comprised six statements on parent and carer or children's experiences of physical distancing measures since lockdown began. Please note that these questions were only asked of parents/carers whose child had met up with people from other households. Findings from each are reported below. Throughout this section, we combine the proportions of respondents that agree or strongly agree and refer to this as 'agree', and we combine disagree and strongly disagree and refer to this as 'disagree'.

**I have decided not to keep my child 2 metres apart from people when we meet other households.**

Overall, the parents and carers of 34% of the children had decided not to keep their child 2 metres apart from people when meeting other households. Findings differed for parents and carers of younger and older children: half of the parents and carers of older children disagreed with this statement compared to 29% of the parents and carers of younger children.

**Figure 16.** I have decided not to keep my child 2 metres apart from people when we meet other households, by child's age\*

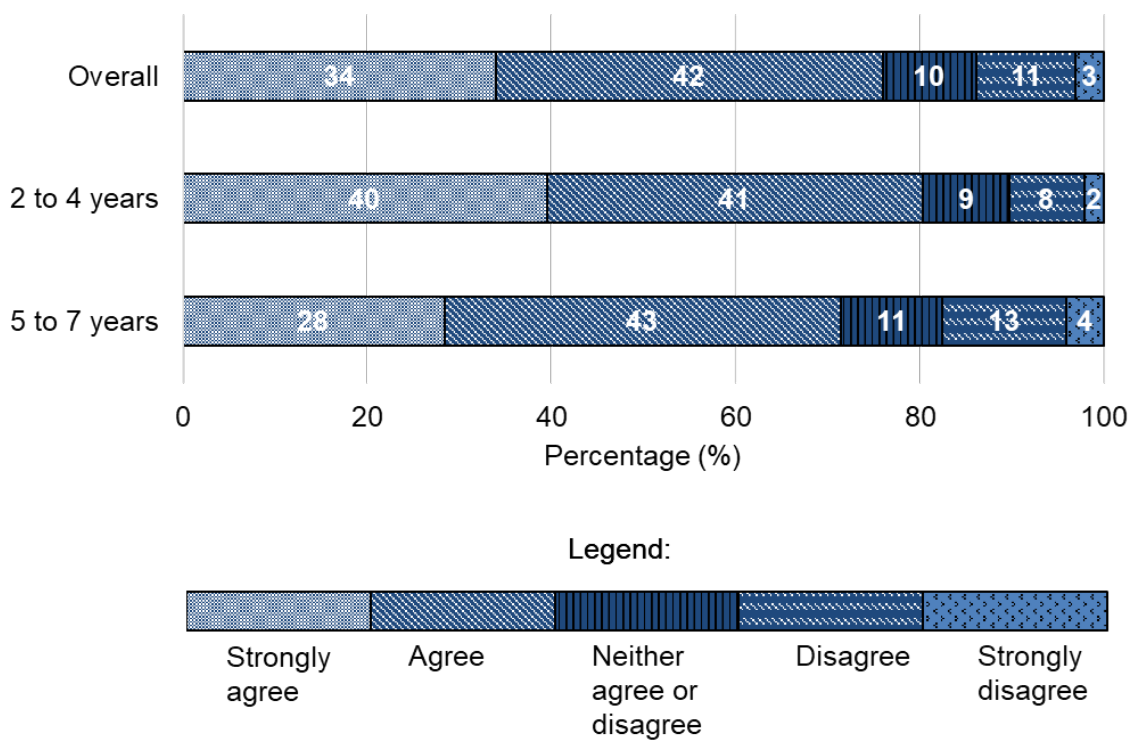


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers Base for overall: 7,930. Base for 2–4 years: 4,004; Base for 5–7 years: 3,901.

**I have found keeping my child 2 metres apart from people from other households difficult or stressful.**

Overall, 76% of the parents and carers agreed that they had found it difficult or stressful to enforce physical distancing measures with their children, with only 14% disagreeing. The number of children whose parents agreed that it was difficult or stressful was slightly higher in the younger age group (81%) compared to the older age group (71%).

**Figure 17.** I have found keeping my child 2 metres apart from people from other households difficult or stressful, by child’s age\*

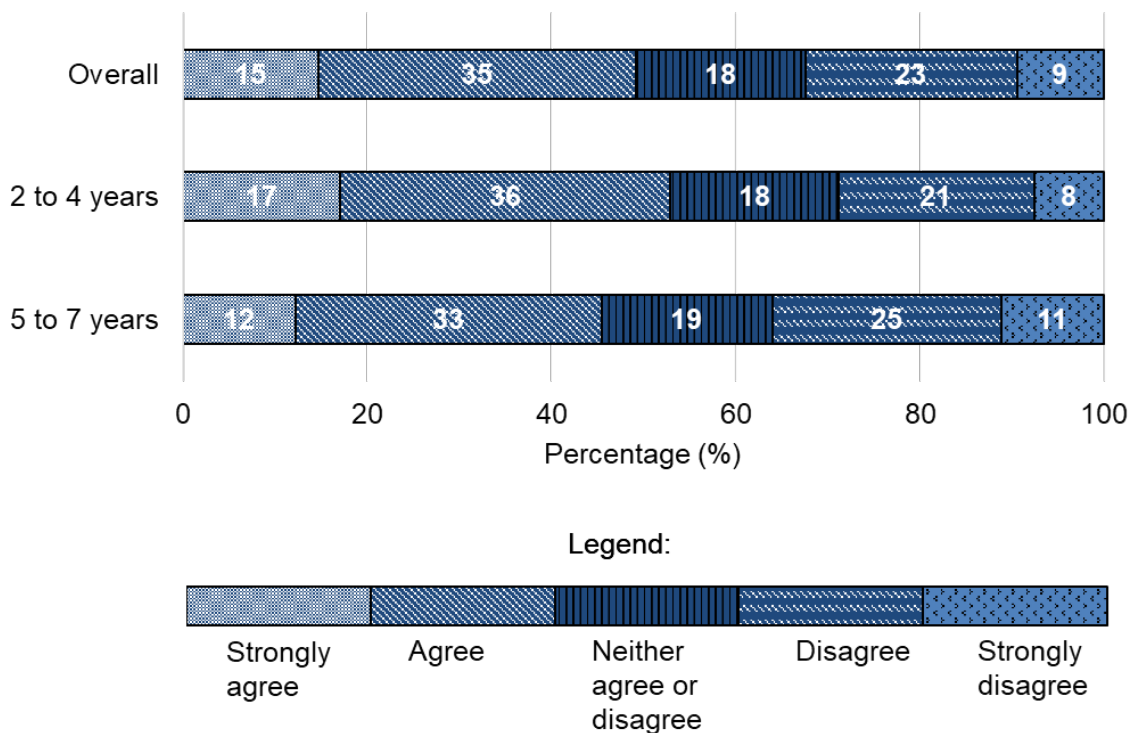


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 7,931. Base for 2–4 years: 4,006. Base for 5–7 years: 3,900.

**I have tried to keep my child 2 metres apart from people from other households, but I have not been able to.**

Overall, the parents and carers of half of the children (50%) agreed that while they had tried to ensure physical distancing was maintained by their child, they had not been able to, while 32% disagreed with this statement. The proportion of children whose parents and carers agreed with this statement was slightly higher in the younger age group (53%) compared to the older age group (45%).

**Figure 18.** I have tried to keep my child 2 metres apart from people from other households, but I have not been able to, by child’s age\*



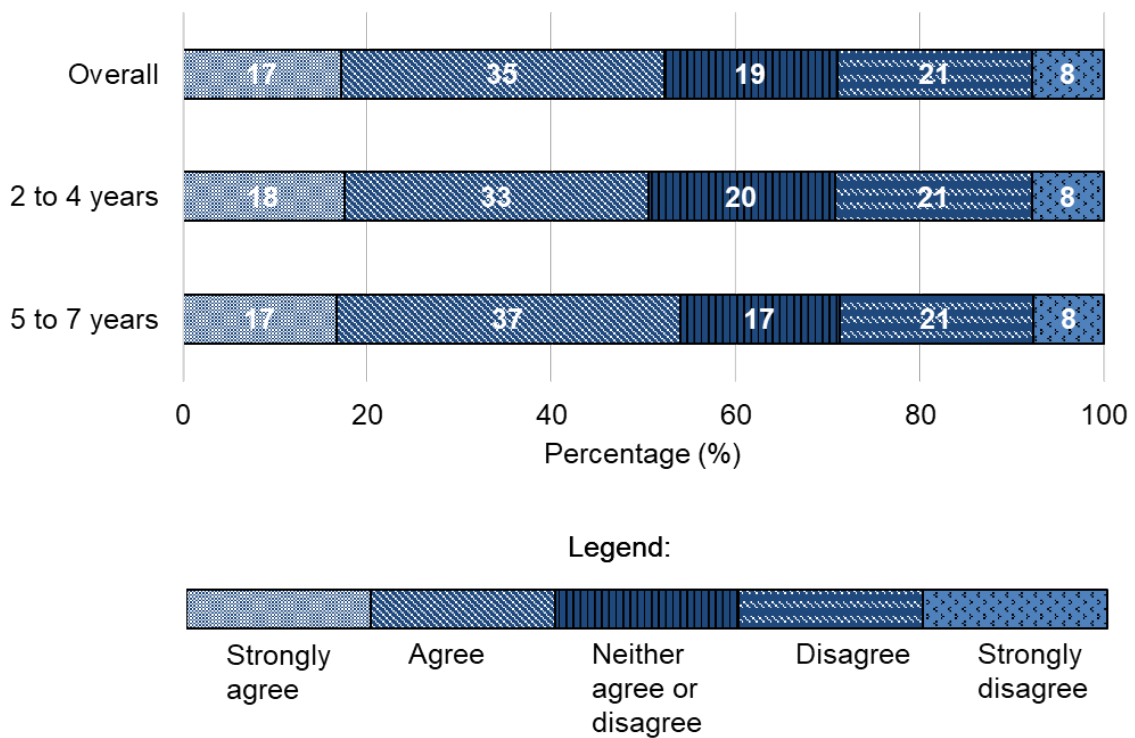
\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 7,919. Base for 2–4 years: 4,000. Base for 5–7 years: 3,895.



**My child has tried to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, but has found this difficult or upsetting.**

Overall, the parents and carers of just over half of the children (52%) agreed that their child had found physical distancing difficult or upsetting, with 29% disagreeing with this statement. The proportion of children whose parents and carers agreed that their child had found it difficult or stressful was similar in both age groups (51% and 54% for younger and older children, respectively).

**Figure 19.** My child has tried to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, but has found this difficult or upsetting, by child’s age\*

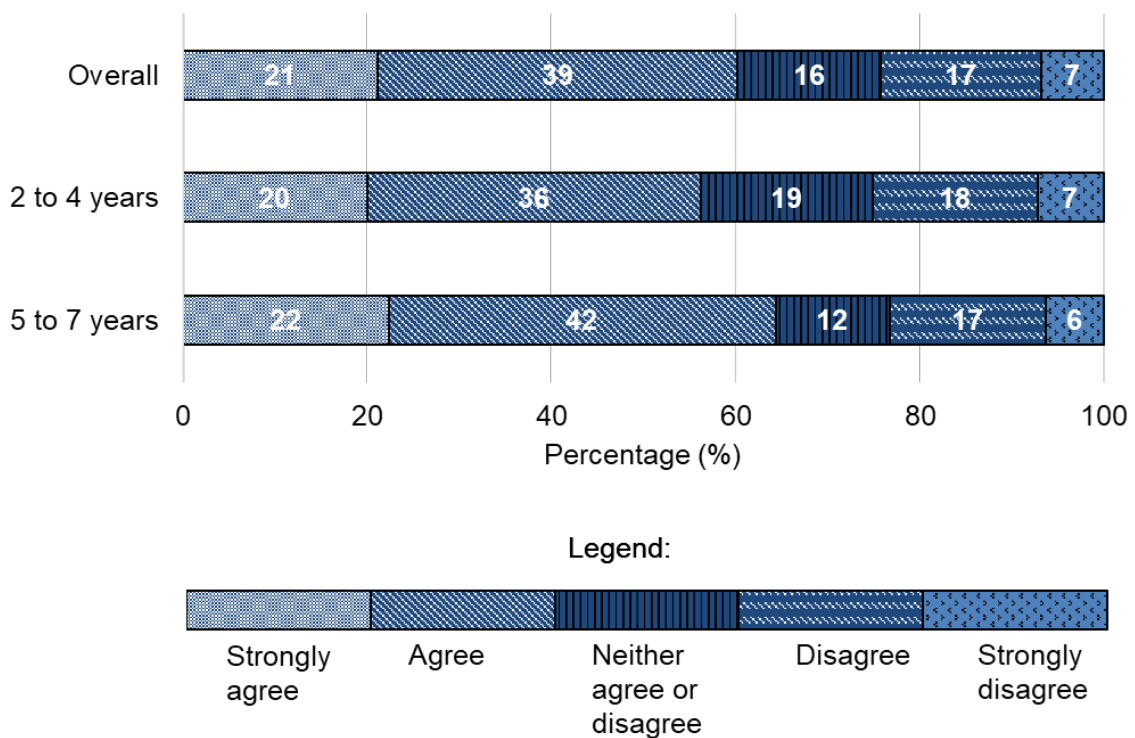


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 7,905. Base for 2–4 years: 3,990. Base for 5–7 years: 3,891.

**My child tries to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, but easily forgets**

Overall, the parents and carers of 60% of the children agreed that although their child tried to maintain physical distancing, they easily forgot, while 24% disagreed with this statement. The number of children whose parents and carers agreed that their child easily forgot about physical distancing was slightly higher in the older age group (64%), compared to the younger age group (56%).

**Figure 20.** My child tries to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, but easily forgets, by child’s age\*

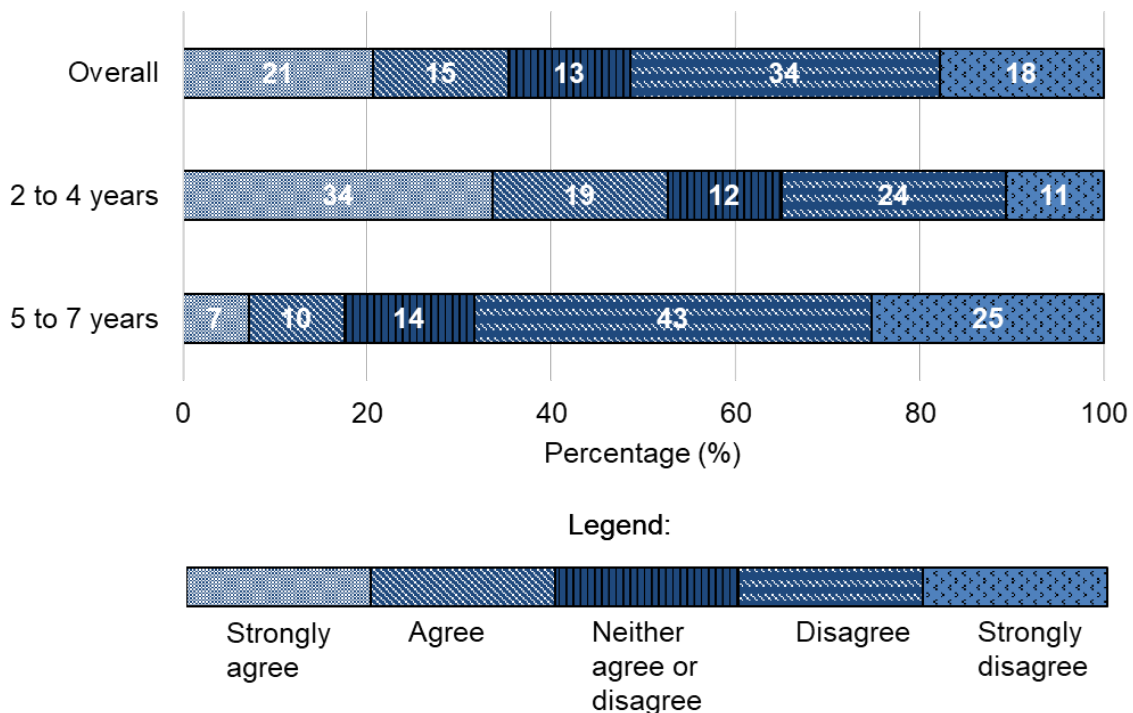


\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 7,906. Base for 2–4 years: 3,989. Base for 5–7 years: 3,893.

**My child does not understand the need to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households.**

Overall, the parents and carers of 36% of the children agreed that they did not understand the need to maintain physical distancing, with 52% disagreeing. The number of children whose parents and carers agreed that their child did not understand the need for physical distancing was much higher in the younger age group (53%) than in the older age group (17%).

**Figure 21.** My child does not understand the need to stay 2 metres apart from people from other households, by child's age\*



\* Excludes refused (prefer not to say) and missing answers. Base for overall: 7,919. Base for 2–4 years: 4,005. Base for 5–7 years: 3,890.

Other formats of this publication are available on request at:



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