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# Summer '23 Activity Check-In

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Understanding the physical activity of young people during the school summer holidays



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# Background and objectives

Previous research has shown that during the school summer holidays, children & young people take part in fewer sessions of activity per week compared to term time. This is despite most likely having more free time available.

During term time, we hypothesise that children have more opportunities to be active due to Physical Education and after-school classes. In contrast, during the summer holidays, it's possible that these opportunities are reduced. It is also believed that there is a shift towards informal (rather than organised) activity during the summer holidays. This research aims to shed a light on the decisions and behaviours related to the physical activity of young people during the summer time period.

## Key objectives and aims of the research

The main objective for this research was to understand the impact of school holidays on the physical activity levels, habits and opportunities of children and young people.

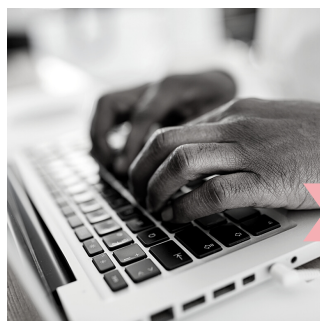
The research aims to address the following questions:

- What does a typical day in the school holidays look like and where does physical activity fit into this?
- How is opportunity to be active perceived in the summer holidays compared to term time
- What are the barriers to participation in summer term compared to term time?
- What is the impact of the cost of living on opportunities to be active during the summer holidays?
- Who is perceived to be responsible for promoting opportunities to children and young people during school holidays?



# Methodology

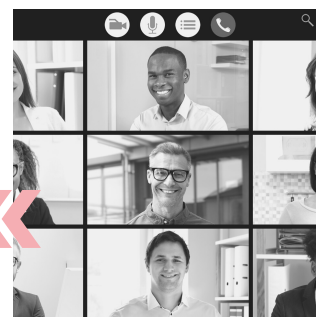
A multi-faceted approach was used to obtain insights into behaviour and attitudes of children & young people during school summer holidays. We conducted qualitative research during the 2023 school summer holidays with three distinct participant groups: lower secondary school students (school years 7 & 8), upper secondary students (school years 9 to 11) and parents of primary school children (school years 1 to 6). Participants involved in the qualitative phase of this study took part in two activities:



## ACTIVITY DIARY

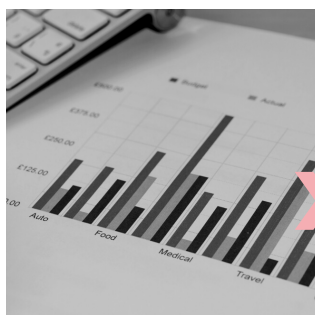
- A 7-day diary task where secondary school participants provided daily updates on the activities they engaged in, their feelings about those activities, and activities they wished to do but couldn't. Parents completed a similar one-off task where they submitted a summary of all the activities their child had taken part in during the week.
- The diaries were accessed online and self-administered by participants.
- The diaries were completed between 14-20 Aug 2023

- After completion of the diary task, participants took part in focus groups, which were conducted online and lasted 90 minutes
- Each group consisted of 6 participants, grouped by activity level (i.e. high or low activity) and demographics (age & gender)
- The sessions involved guided discussions & interactive group tasks
- The groups took place between 21-30 Aug 2023



## FOCUS GROUPS

Findings from the qualitative phase of the study are complimented by data from:



## WAVE 8 QUANT

- Quantitative data from Wave 8 of the Sport England Activity Check-In survey
- 15-minute online survey with 2,266 English Adults and 613 children & young people (aged 5 to 16)
- Fieldwork took place 18-22 Aug 2023
- This data has been included in this report to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the insights and findings from the qualitative phase





# Participants



The table below shows the demographic breakdown of the participants who took part in the qualitative stage of this research. Participants were selected to achieve a representative spread of gender, ethnicity, social-economic status and urban/rural living.

## CHILDREN

Gender	Ethnicity	SEG	Urban/rural
11 females 13 males	14 White 10 Other ethnicity (including black, Asian and other non-white ethnicities)	12 ABC1 12 C2DE	14 urban 10 rural

## PARENTS

Gender	Ethnicity	SEG	SEG
3 female 3 male	3 White 3 Other ethnicity (including black, Asian and other non-white ethnicities)	2 ABC1 4 C2DE	4 urban 2 rural

### Definitions used in this report

Throughout this report, phrases like **young people** and **high/low activity group** refers to children & young people aged between 5 and 16 years old who participated in this research. **Lower secondary** refers to those in school years 7 & 8 and **upper secondary** refers to those in schools 9 to 11. **Parents** refers to the parents of primary school children (school years 1 to 6), unless stated otherwise.

# Activity level definitions

In order to understand physical activity levels amongst a variety of children & young people, this research classified participants into two groups: high activity and low activity.



## HIGH ACTIVITY

- A young person who typically does 3-4 days activity in term time and does the same or more during the summer time. These are young people who are quite active with some reporting a boost in activity during the summer time

OR

- A young person who typically does 5+ days activity in term time. These are highly active young people who may continue to be active in the summer, or may see a slight dip but generally remain moderately active

- A young person who does 3-4 days activity in term time, but less in summertime. There are young people who are quite active but report a drop into low activity during the summer time

OR

- A young person who does 0-2 days activity in term time. These are low activity young people who continue to have low activity levels in the summertime. They might experience a slight increase but never go above moderate activity overall.



## LOW ACTIVITY

The young people who took part in this research were allocated to focus groups based on their activity level and other demographics (age or gender) resulting in the following breakdown:

- Group 1: Upper secondary aged, high activity young people
- Group 2: Lower secondary aged, high activity young people
- Group 3: Mixed aged, low activity young females
- Group 4: Mixed aged, low activity young males
- Group 5: Parents of primary school aged children of mixed activity levels

# 02



## Executive Summary

### Physical activity in the summer holidays

As physical activity shifts from a requirement during the school day in term time, to an optional past-time in the summer, a young person's general attitudes towards physical activity play a key role in their approach to activity in the summer time.

Those who are highly active in term time are likely to carry their motivation through to summer where they seek to maintain routines. However, they often struggle to match their term time activity schedules, seeking summer alternatives which may lack the enjoyment, feeling of progression and intensity of term time sports.

Meanwhile, low activity children, stripped of the expectation to be active that comes during school time, are more prone to replacing physical activity with sedentary hobbies. Most can give or take being active, as their main objective is to just spend time with their friends.



## Influences

Friends, family and parents play a role in motivating and facilitating activity during the summer, but the extent to which they influence differs depending on the young person’s overall attitude towards physical activity. For highly active young people, having access to a peer group who are as keen on sport and/or exercise plays an important role in staying active. Youth in this group often rely on parents to fund and provide travel to their chosen activities. For those who are lower activity, many will participate in sports if influenced by friends or nudged by their parents

## Barriers

Reduced access to facilities, reliance on parents and lack of connection to friends present barriers to taking part in and enjoying summer time activity. Cost of living is also a challenge, more so in summertime where many families are required to subsidise physical activity for their children. This is especially felt by parents and older children who find their options to be active limited by their budget and the available activities in their local area.

## Moving forward

The transition from planned and mandated activity during term time presents different challenges depending on a young person’s general outlook on physical activity. Additionally, there are access and opportunity barriers that can impact all. Enhancing the convenience of location for physical activities, making them easily accessible and reducing the need for extensive travel, can be a significant step forward. Promoting summer activity can be achieved through strategies like organising social activities, providing cost-effective options for families and peer group, and increasing awareness of local activities.





## Physical activity in the summer holidays

An examination of the role of physical activity within the lives of young people during the summer holidays and how their behaviors are influenced by attitudes and external factors.

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***'We're probably just going to head out to a park or like go to the gym together, stuff that doesn't really need a whole lot of planning.'***

Male, Upper secondary, High activity

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# Attitudes towards physical activity

Before looking at the summertime activities of the young people who took part in the research, it is important to consider their general outlook towards physical activity and sport. This provides helpful context for the behaviours exhibited and barriers faced when term time ends.

Unsurprisingly, the high activity young people demonstrated an enthusiasm for being active and taking part in sports. They associated being active with positivity and self-improvement. They stated it was beneficial for their mindset and linked it with traits such as perseverance, determination, and constructive hard work. They also viewed it as being productive. Additionally, they described it as being "fun" and "my happy place". The sports they take part in are usually one of their main hobbies, which they will take part in with friends informally and in formal settings including clubs (associated with school and outside) and competitions.

They enjoy the social elements of being active as they are part of peer groups who all enjoy sport.



Friends play a significant role in the lives of all young people, but for many of those who are highly active, friendships often revolve around physical activity. These young people are more likely to be part of groups where physical activity is a central theme of their gatherings, shaping their social interactions and the time they spend together

*'I like going to the gym a lot. It is quite cathartic and is a nice start to the day. I like improving my physique and it makes me feel good.'*

**Male, Upper secondary,  
High activity**





# Case study

High Activity

○○○○

Female

Year 7

Mixed

Lower middle class (C1)

High activity

Chanel is an elite trampoline gymnast who trains rigorously four days a week, with each session lasting up to three hours. She is preparing to compete in the British finals. She is dedicated to the sport and really enjoys training. She views it as part of her set routine and something she chooses to do.

She also enjoys walking the dog, playing football, and riding her bike. Although these activities are of a physical nature, they are still relaxing to her.

Chanel maintains a training schedule during the summer holidays and is encouraged strongly by her parents who facilitate and support her physical activity by paying for her gymnastics and transporting her there.

## From Chanel's summer time activity diary:

*'This morning I went for a walk with my mum and dog. After the walk we went food shopping In the evening my mum took me training. I am an elite trampoline gymnast and I train 4 days a week. I always go on Tuesday so it's part of my routine. I have the British final in September. After training I came home had some food and went to bed. I enjoyed everything I did today. I love trampolining and enjoy training.'*

Whilst the low activity young people did not shun sports & physical activity completely, their commitment and motivations are very different to the high activity group.

Generally, they are less enthusiastic about physical activity and many struggled to provide examples of activities they really enjoyed. They required greater probing to describe the benefits of being active. One girl spoke of the “relief” she felt at getting it over and done with, whilst another associated it with being “tiring”.

However, it was not all negative for the low activity groups, as they also recognized the social benefits of being active. For many in these groups, social interactions serve as a primary driver for engaging in physical activities. While they might partake in activities like playing football or going for a walk, the underlying motivation is often more about social engagement rather than the activities themselves. The emphasis is on spending quality time with friends rather than a profound interest in the physical activity. This is different than high activity counterparts, who often find their friendships centered around shared physical pursuits.

They place prime value on the communal aspect of an activity, with the physical element acting as a backdrop to the social interaction. The low activity young people were much less likely to list sport amongst their main hobbies, preferring to spend their time reading, gaming or drawing.

*‘I do [sport], but it's attached to school. So in the summer holidays, I don't. I used to just do it as something to like fill up my evening because my parents wouldn't be home and my friend would do it with me, so it doesn't really bother me [not doing it in summer].’*

**Female, Upper Secondary,  
Low Activity**





# Case study

Low Activity



Male  
Year 7  
White  
Middle class (B)  
Low activity

Jack spends a significant portion of his time watching TV, movies and playing Xbox. He will engage in these stationary activities for multiple hours a day. During the summer, he takes advantage of the opportunity to play video games, as this is usually restricted during term time.

He is more open to engaging in physical activity, such as swimming, if his friends are involved. He wishes he could see them more during the summer holidays but they don't live close to him and he is unable to travel to see them without his parents taking him.

There is a lack structure to his summer days which are filled with impromptu decisions. There is no physical activity that reoccurs daily or weekly for Jack during the summer.

## **From Jack's summer time activity diary:**

'I got up late at about 10.30 and watched TV downstairs. We stayed in all day and didn't go out. I did help my mum pick up the leaves in the garden, but I didn't like doing that. I played on my x box from 6 until 8. I liked playing as I am usually not allowed to during the week when I am at school. Then after I watched a film with my family.'



## Activity levels in the summer holidays

The perception amongst the majority of the young people who took part in the research was that their levels of physical activity did not drop significantly during the summer holidays. They didn't see themselves as being "inactive" during the summer.

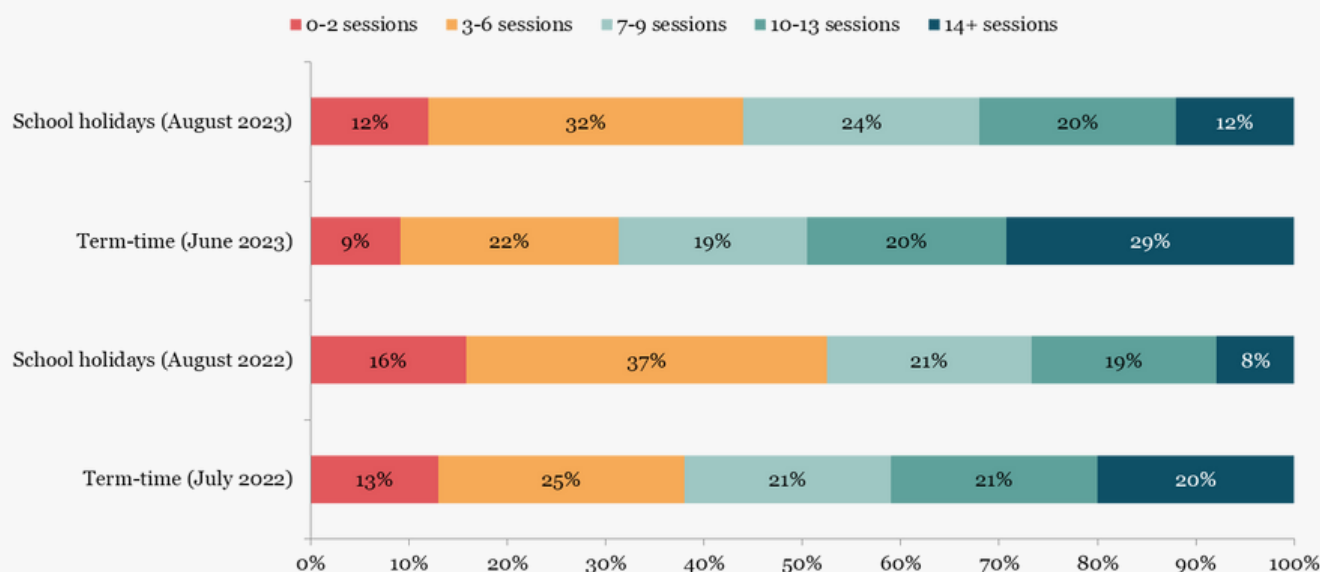
However, they described changes in type of activity they do, opportunity to take part and access to facilities and frequency. This aligns with quantitative data, which shows that the shift in summer leans towards younger people doing less activity in the course of a week, but not necessarily stopping activity altogether.

We see a significant decrease in those doing 14+ sessions a week, whilst the proportion taking part in 3 to 6 sessions (a relatively moderate amount of overall activity) increases significantly.

*'I really enjoy like extra curricular clubs at school like, for example there's an athletics club.. I would have really liked to have been able to like continue that into summer. But it's sort of restricted to term time.'*

**Male, Upper Secondary, High Activity**

**Number of sessions of sport and physical activity children and young people have done in the last 7 days**



Source: CYPQ5. Thinking about the last 7 days, how many times did you do the following... Base: Wave 3 (Aug '22) n=592, Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=613

Highly active young individuals, often involved in school-related or outside teams and clubs during the academic term, experience a significant disruption to their routines when summer arrives. This is important because the organized and structured nature of these young people extends to their approach to physical activity. Summer poses a challenge as the structured school days are no longer in place, and they must strive to maintain order in this new, less organized environment. Daily diary entries described detailed schedules, routines and even self-imposed restrictions, such as only allowing themselves an hour of TV viewing time.

*‘Since these holidays have started I have been pretty active every single week. I’ve been going swimming three times a week consistently.’*

**Male, Upper Secondary, High Activity**

The appeal of routines and adherence to them, combined with the self-motivation to be active, means that the high activity young people would often find themselves looking to replace the

high levels of activity they engage in during term time with alternative arrangements depending on availability.

*‘Me personally, I’ve been in a routine, so I’ve been going to the gym every other day and then in the other days I have to go to work.’*

**Female, Upper Secondary, High Activity**

This may include taking part in fewer organised training sessions and replacing them with informal versions (e.g. playing in the park with friends), seasonal changes in the type of training (e.g. from skills & tactic-based football session to fitness sessions). For those in upper secondary school, spending more time at the gym. Many will often use whatever resources are available to them during the summer holidays as they enjoy the benefits of being active and want to continue, even though PE and access to school facilities & clubs are restricted during this period. In some instances, this can negatively impact the overall enjoyment and sense of achievement as they feel that these alternatives are less beneficial to their overall goals and lack the social element they value.

For the low activity groups, who were more likely to be engaging in stationary activities (e.g., reading, gaming etc.) and for longer periods than the high activity groups, the summer holidays exacerbated this trend. They had more opportunity to engage in screentime, including watching TV and playing on games consoles, which would occupy significant amounts of their leisure time.

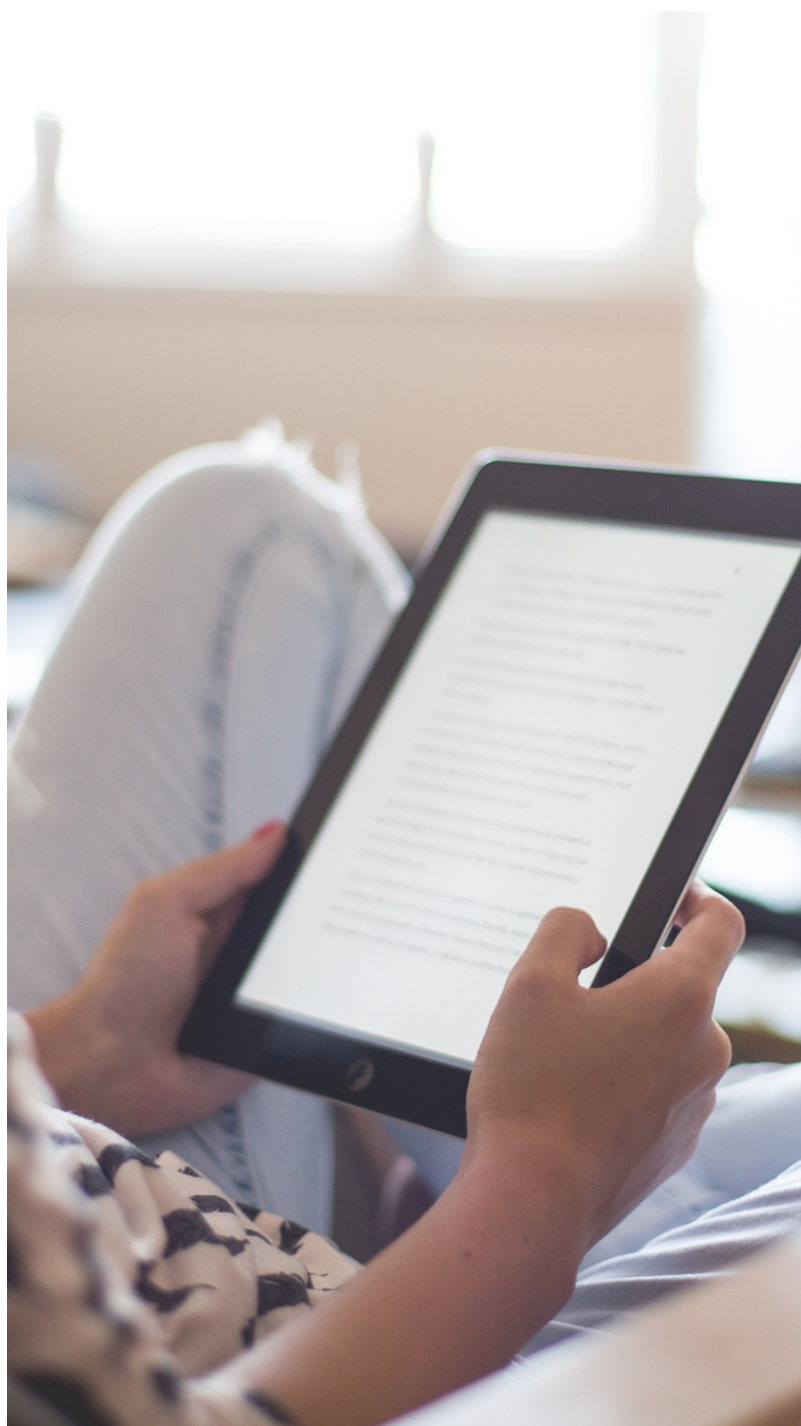
*'I enjoyed watching anime because I really like them and I could watch it all day. I didn't like cleaning and helping my mum because I just wanted to play games.'*

**Female, Lower Secondary, Low Activity**

Whilst term time presents a requirement to be active at school through PE (and sports clubs for some), this is removed during the summer holidays. Unlike the high activity group they are not motivated to replace it. A typical day for a low activity young person during the summer holidays might involve waking up, playing video games, perhaps going for a short walk with a friend, then returning to sedentary activities.

*'I love reading my kindle I just love to read and spend most of my free time reading.'*

**Female, Upper Secondary, Low Activity**





It is interesting to note that despite the lower levels of physical activity amongst the low activity group during the summertime, they did not necessarily perceive themselves as being low activity. Although we found that in general, they were partaking in physical activities in a more casual and sporadic manner than the high activity group, as long as they did something

(even if it was a low impact activity like walking, a casual bike ride or occasional swimming) they still considered themselves to be “active”. This contrasts heavily with the high-activity group, who felt the need to maintain their often intense term-time activity routines. Low activity young people were content to do a small amount, whilst high activity worried about keeping up.

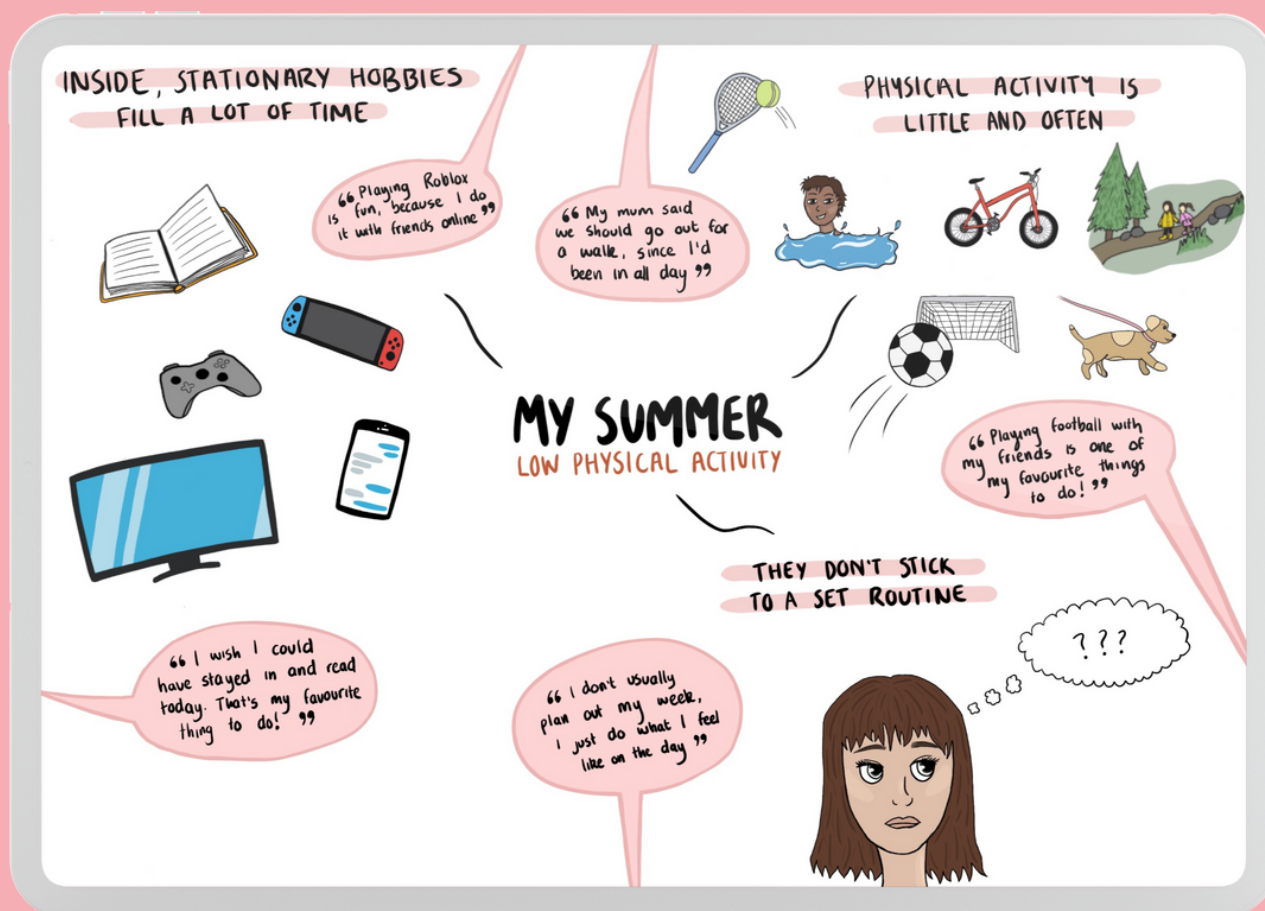


We created the following visual mind-maps to demonstrate what the summer-time of our participants looks like. This highlights some of the key differences between low activity participants and high activity participants.

Low activity participants tend to spend a lot of time inside doing stationary activities, such as watching TV and playing video games. High activity participants also did these activities, but it took up much less of their time as they focused their energy on sports & physical activities.







The activities that the high activity group sees as relaxing hobbies may be considered as physical activity by the low activity group such as going for a walk. A majority of low activity participants take part in informal activity with friends and family, rather than in clubs. On the other hand, those who are high activity participants tend to have more structure and organisation in their physical activities. These tend to be sports which they dedicate lots of time and participate as part of a team. This level of commitment often continues even during the summer holidays. Low activity individuals might

play football in the park sporadically, while high activity ones might train with a team on set days. We also found that the low activity group generally seem to have less structure to their time in the summer holidays. They may tend to wake up later and plan things last minute based on how they feel on the day. On the other hand, high activity tend to have a more structured routine. They have established routines for their physical activity, and their other hobbies generally align with this structured approach. Mostly, they like to know what they are doing for the week ahead and are less likely to plan something last minute.



# Holidays

Some of the young people mentioned the holidays that they had taken, domestically and abroad. These trips influenced their physical activity levels, often making it a central aspect of their experience. Examples included a trip to Center Parks and a resort in Turkey, where activities such as swimming, other water sports, table tennis, and football were available. Active day trips that involved walking and hiking were also available. These holidays provide a short burst of high activity during the summer holidays for the children who go on them. They appreciate the diverse activities available, some of which were new to them.

Zak, a male in year 8 from the low activity group went on holiday to Spain. His physical activities included swimming, beach walks, playing football, and table tennis. In addition to these, he also engaged in more stationary activities like playing cards, pool, and spending time on social media (i.e., TikTok). Most of his physical activities were done in the company of his brother. While he enjoyed the range of activities, he expressed missing his favourite stationary pastimes.

*'I like being in Spain, but I miss my PC at home. I wish I had it here so I could play games.'*





For the high activity young people, these holidays provided them with an opportunity to continue being active, which they love. For the low activity holidays made being active more easily available than when they were at home. However, they may miss some of the more sedentary activities they are usually interested in (e.g. playing video games). It is important to recognise that the heightened activity levels seen during these trips may only last the duration of the holiday (e.g. a week) as the young people have difficulty replicating the activities they enjoyed when they return home due to them not being available at home or in their local area.

Bobby is a high activity 11 year old, who enjoyed an active holiday in Turkey. He spent time in the swimming pool with his sister and in the sea with his dad, even trying out snorkeling and diving from a dock. His holiday activities were varied and included a safari jeep ride, rafting, zip-wiring, a canyon walk, a mud bath, a visit to a waterfall, a boat trip, bingo, and water polo. Bobby found enjoyment in all the activities he participated in.





## Influences

This section will discuss the influences on physical activity during summer, highlighting the roles of friends and family.

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***‘I love swimming. It was nice to be with my sisters because most the time I stay home why they do something. It was nice to be involved.’***

Female, Upper Secondary,  
Low Activity

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## Summer time influences: friends

The primary influence on young people's activity levels is their peer circle, which aligns with the broader understanding that individuals are most influenced by those they closely identify with. This is consistent throughout the year, but it does have implications for young people's activity in the school summer holidays.

Young people in the high activity groups had friends who were similarly active, and they would engage in these activities together. This continued during the summer holidays when they had the opportunity to spend time together. In some cases, friends provided encouragement to be active when motivation was low and the young person was thinking about not doing any activity that day. This option becomes easier in the summertime when the obligation for activities like PE or school clubs is absent.

*'I feel like usually if my friends are going to the gym then that will encourage me to go... sometimes I feel unmotivated to go to gym But if my friends are like ohh yeah, come on, we're gonna go to the gym, we go.'*

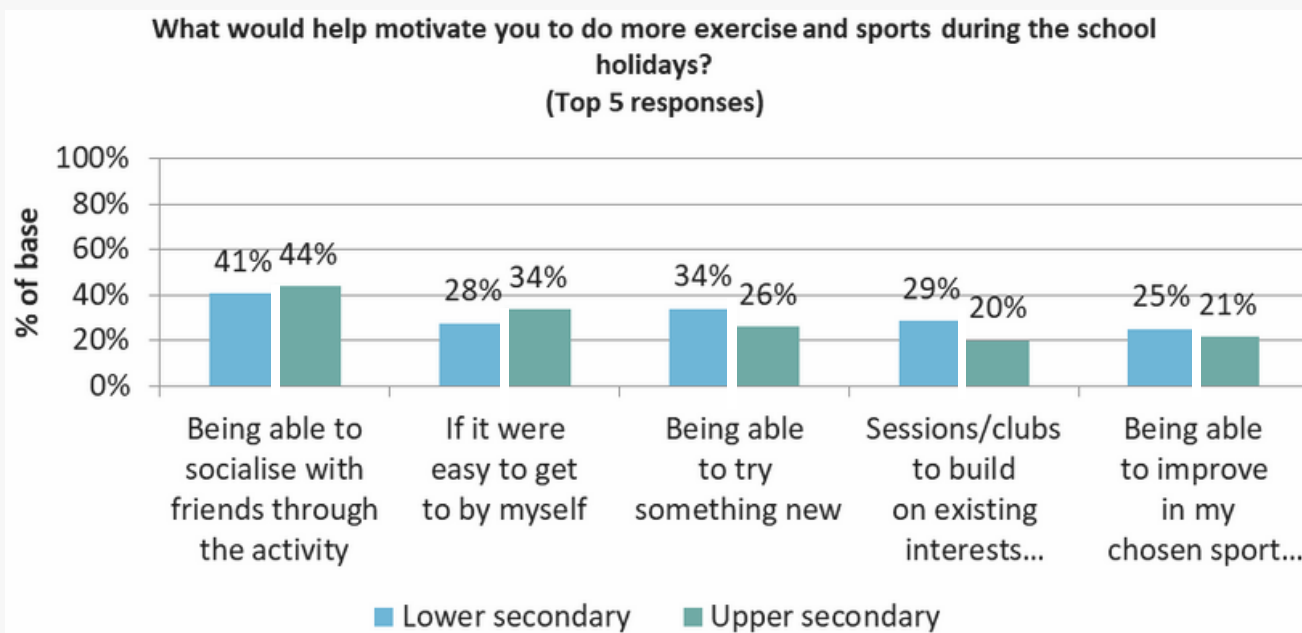
**Male, Upper secondary, High activity**

Those in the low activity groups indicated that their activity levels might increase or decrease depending on their friends and the current interests of their peer group. They are also less motivated to take up a new activity or stick with one if their friends are not interested. During the summer holidays, where physical activity is no longer a requirement, and the interests of the group may fluctuate, the low activity participants are more likely to deprioritise physical activity to socialise with their friends in different ways.

The importance of friends during summertime activity comes out strongly in quantitative data, as being able to socialise through activities is the most common answer cited by upper and lower secondary aged children when asked what would motivate them to exercise and take part in sports during school holidays.

*'I went to my Ninja class but didn't end up staying as my friends were not there.'*

**Male, Lower Secondary, Low Activity**



Source: QW3CYPF. What would help motivate you to do more exercise and sports during the school holidays? Base: Upper Secondary Children Wave 3 (Aug '22) & Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=173, Lower Secondary Children Wave 3 (Aug '22) & Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=204

## Social conformity: from compliance to internalisation

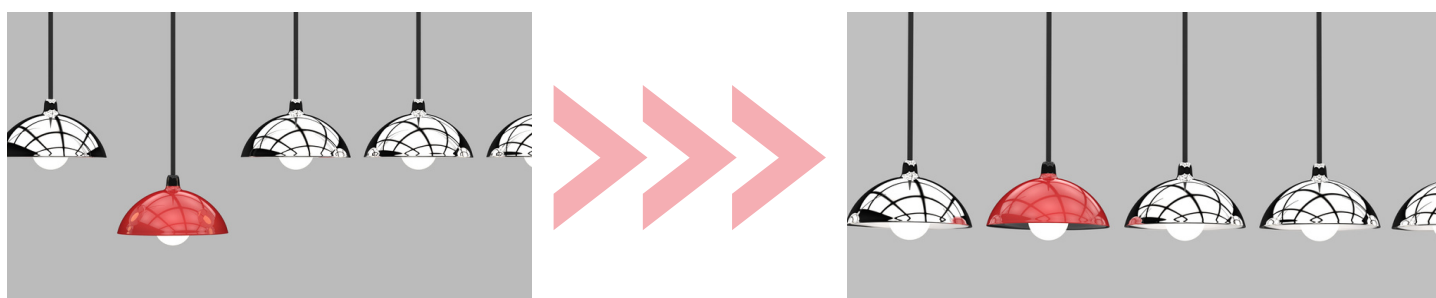
Friends play a significant role in shaping activity levels, as evidenced by instances where low activity individuals engage in physical activities due to the influence of more active friends. However, high-activity individuals also partake in activities independently, not solely in the company of friends.

The psychology theory of conformity, which involves behavioural changes to align with a majority group, offers relevant insights. Two types of conformity are compliance and internalisation. Compliance represents public conformity where actions are influenced by group dynamics, whereas internalisation involves aligning personal beliefs with those of the group. Younger participants mainly display compliance, participating in activities to 'fit in' rather than due to personal inclination.

For instance, one participant from the low activity focus group noted increased sports participation this year due to his new friend group's interests. Another one expressed that he would engage in more physical activities if his friends were interested.

High-activity individuals show more signs of internalisation, embodying the beliefs as their own, which is why they engage in activities even when alone. Those displaying mere compliance tend to be active only in the presence of influential figures.

It's plausible that low activity individuals may transition from compliance to internalisation over time, potentially increasing their personal commitment to physical activity.





Due to the constant interaction with peers during term time, this shift from compliance to internalisation may be accelerated, creating an environment conducive to a change in behaviour. The school term provides a crucial platform for social interaction, significantly more than during the summertime when they may be isolated, especially for only children and those living in rural areas.

When opposed to the slower-paced social interactions of the summer for these children, everyday exposure to peers during term time can accelerate the influence of peer pressure and expedite the internalisation of more active behaviour, providing a window of faster change in activity levels.

*'Although I go to the gym by myself a lot of the time, I prefer going with friends. I feel as though when you have a workout buddy, it motivates you more and is a lot more fun.'*

**Male, Upper Secondary,  
High Activity**



## Summer time influences: family

Family also plays a role in physical activity, in particular family members of a similar age. This becomes important during the summer holidays as children more spend time with their family including their siblings and cousins, who they engage with in a similar way to the way they do with their friends. This means that their physical activity is lead by the interests of their family. If the child is from a family with high activity siblings & cousins then their summertime activity will reflect this, whilst those from lower activity families are less likely to pick up additional physical activity during this family time.

*‘I just asked my dad if he can organise to take me and my cousin just to go swimming for fun. Just like because we’ve got like a sport centre thing, like near our house. So we just go there.’*

**Male, Lower secondary, High Activity**

Parental influence differs; while they may not always serve as the role models for activity, they play a facilitator role, which can differ between age groups.

For the younger children (primary school & lower secondary) parents have a very strong influence over what activities their children do. The parent may set the agenda for what activity the child does, including taking them, paying for them and being the ones who encourage them to do it in the first place. At the younger age levels they are entirely reliant on the parent taking them to the activity, especially during the summer holidays where school options are not available.

For the older children (upper secondary) the parents continue to play a facilitator role, but as these older children have more autonomy, they may rely on them for travel (especially if the activity is in a location far away) and finance (or support finance) for the activity. For some low activity children parents would provide generic encouragement to do “something” if their child has not been active during the day.



For high activity young people, this could be the parents paying for equipment or clubs which have been requested.

*'[I encourage her by] booking it, paying for it and organizing and getting there and getting her ready.'*

**Female, Parent**

*'This boxing group training it's team building and respect and they do an awful lot of exercise, but the kit that they all wear is £50. Then you pay in the monthly subscription and things like that as well.'*

**Female, Parent**

For example, one female participant had specifically asked for football equipment (e.g., running ladders & cones) which she received as a birthday

present and allowed her to continue her football training during the summer in the garden. For low activity groups, the parents may provide additional motivation by suggesting activities to “get out of the house” during the summer holidays, especially for those who are low activity and spending time engaging in sedentary activities.

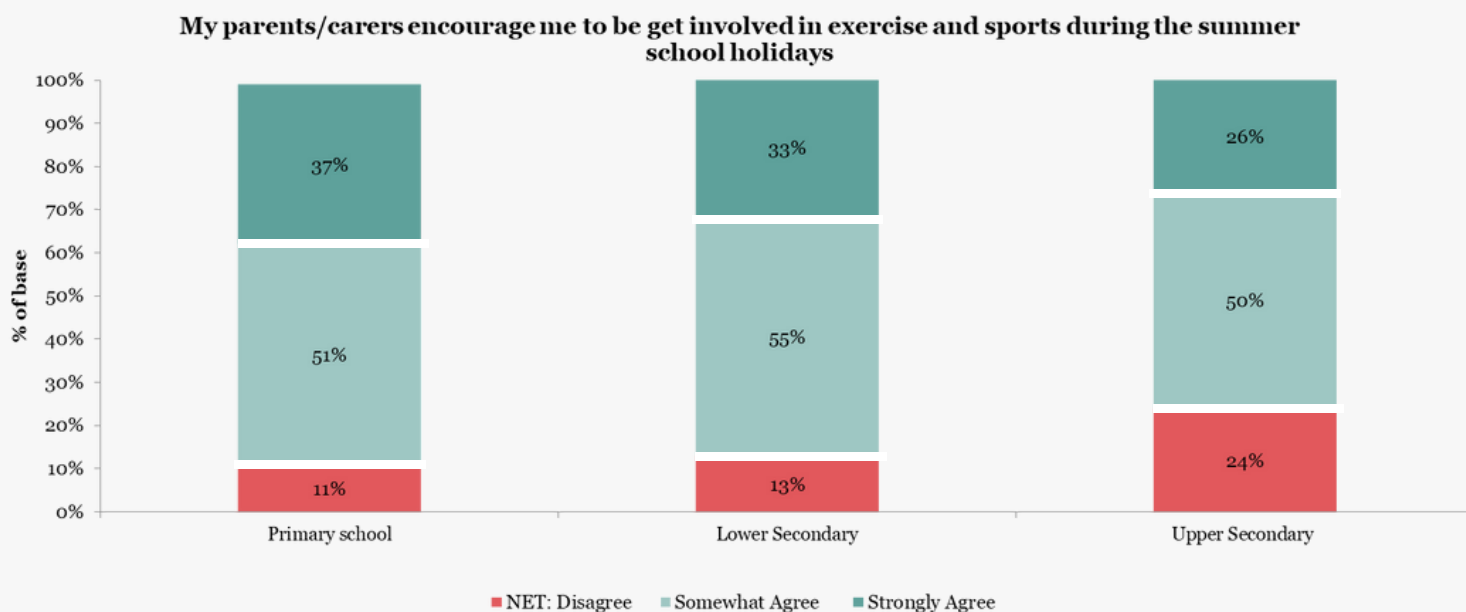
*'I forget to exercise And then my mum or dad says, why don't you go play with your friends?'*

**Male, Lower Secondary, Low Activity**

Away from family, additional adult encouragement or motivation for high activity young people comes from coaches. This can be challenging in the summer time as clubs and training are reduced or not available altogether and contact with coaches is missing during this period.







Source: CYPQ10. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Primary school Wave 3 (Aug '22) & Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=297, Lower Secondary Wave 3 (Aug '22) & Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=174, Upper Secondary Wave 3 (Aug '22) & Wave 8 (Aug '23) n=200

We have seen how a young person's general attitude towards physical activity, combined with external factors such as their friends and influence from family, play a role in their activity choices. During the summer holidays, some young people aim to fit physical activity into a routine to mimic their term-time pursuits.

However, for others, it slips off their radar and becomes something they may do casually when prompted by others or when an easy opportunity presents itself.

We will now turn our attention to the barriers faced by young people as they try to engage in physical activity during the summer time.



05

## Perceived Barriers

In the following section, we will unravel the intricate challenges to summer physical activity, exploring factors ranging from cost and accessibility issues to the distinct obstacles encountered by only children and the impact of weather conditions.

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***‘I wanted to go out to the park, but mum and dad were both busy working, so I didn't have much choice but to play games inside.’***

Female, Lower Secondary, Low Activity

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# Barriers

Participants' perceptions of barriers to physical activity during the summer months vary notably, influenced largely by their age. Lower secondary students, perhaps due to their limited exposure and experience, often report no significant obstacles. However, as they transition into upper secondary, a shift occurs. These older children become more aware of the external challenges that can impede their physical activity. The complexities of accessibility, cost, and other nuanced barriers begin to manifest more clearly. They start realising that maintaining activity levels isn't solely reliant on personal motivation but is also influenced by external factors.

Parents, on the other hand, possess a holistic view of these challenges, being fully aware of the barriers their children face. They recognise the impediments of cost and accessibility and understand the amplified challenges that summer brings. With schools closed and structured activities paused, parents are often at the forefront, navigating these obstacles to ensure their children remain active and engaged.

These differences in perception among the various age groups highlight the complexity of the barriers to summer physical activity. It's a complex interplay of individual motivation, external challenges, and the supportive framework offered by structured environments like schools and clubs. We will explore the barriers that emerge during the summer – cost, accessibility, the unique challenges faced by only children, and weather conditions, as these can profoundly impact one's ability to stay active. These barriers may not always be immediately apparent, but they play a crucial role in shaping physical activity patterns during the summer. In the following sections, we will examine each of these barriers, offering a comprehensive exploration of the obstacles these groups face in sustaining physical activity during summer holidays.

## Access Challenges

Access to various venues, including school sports facilities and 3G football pitches, becomes limited during the summer, as these spaces are often available only during the term time. This constraint is further compounded by a knowledge gap regarding public resources and their availability. Many young people, therefore, find themselves opting for informal activities and makeshift play areas in domestic settings like parks or at friends' homes.

During the academic year, school clubs are a common avenue for children to engage in physical activities. However, these clubs often pause during the summer, leaving a void for those children who rely on them. Some manage to fill this gap with private clubs that operate year-round, but this is not a universal solution.

Geographic accessibility emerges as another distinctive challenge. For children who live in rural areas, the reliance on parental support or public transport to access these facilities becomes a significant factor, and in many cases, is not always feasible during the summer.

Parents may be occupied with work or other duties and public transport may be limited or unsuitable. This barrier extends to social interactions, as children find it challenging to meet with friends who they usually see at school or clubs.

*'If I need to get to the gym, I need someone to take me so it can be difficult. It's close to my school but I can't get there in the summertime while I'm at home.'*

**Female, Upper Secondary,  
High Activity**

With schools closed and formal clubs on break, high activity children are left to their own devices, finding alternative ways to stay active. They may seek and find alternative avenues to expend their energy, often resorting to informal activities and utilising available resources creatively. In contrast, those with lower activity levels may face a decline, as the structured environments that schools and clubs provide, and which can motivate participation, are temporarily unavailable.



These children may not actively seek alternatives to the structured activities offered by schools and clubs during term time.

In addition, age restrictions at certain facilities, such as gyms, pose a significant barrier to physical activity for many young people, especially during the summer months when school facilities and clubs are unavailable. This challenge is heightened for those who are keen to stay active but find their options limited due to their age. One male participant highlighted this issue:

*'Last summer I wasn't old enough to go to the gym. Now that I am old enough I can be a lot more active and consistent.'*

**Male, Upper Secondary, High Activity**

For children who are too young to access gyms or similar facilities, the summer period can result in a significant reduction in physical activity. They are confronted with the challenge of finding suitable and appealing alternatives that fit within the constraints of their age and other associated restrictions.

## Only Child Challenges

Children without siblings experience a distinct set of challenges, particularly noticeable during the summertime. With school out of session, the social interaction and communal play facilitated within the educational environment are absent. These children, already having limited peer access, often find themselves further confined to solitary activities. Playing in the garden or with toys like LEGOs becomes a common pastime, as opposed to spending time with friends.

The situation is illustrated by a boy with a keen interest in football, yet constrained by his circumstances. The absence of siblings or nearby friends to play with confines him to individual play at his grandmother's house. This setting lacks the dynamic and stimulating environment that group play or team sports offer, impacting not just his skill development but also his social interaction opportunities.

*'Right now I'm just playing my grandma's garden. It's a bit boring after you do it a lot.'*

**Male, Lower Secondary, High Activity**

The boy's enjoyment was significantly diminished in this solitary setting. Being highly active, he found individual play not just limiting in skill and social development but also less rewarding, lacking the sense of achievement and fulfillment typically derived from group play and team sports. The absence of peers and the dynamic energy of group interactions rendered his playtime as somewhat pointless.

Summer amplifies this issue. While children with siblings can continue interactive play, children without siblings can experience heightened isolation, especially those in rural areas. The vibrancy and social engagement of group activities are missed, leading to a more solitary and less physically active summer.





## Weather

Summer is often anticipated as a time for increased outdoor activities for children, attributed to longer days and favourable weather. However, rainy summer weather has an impact on children's levels of physical activity, as was the case in 2023.

*'We've actually done less this summer, with the weather being a lot worse this year, cause it's actually been one of the wettest summers we've had in quite a while.'*

**Male, Parent**

Children who are accustomed to informal outdoor play are particularly affected. While those with higher activity levels might still find alternatives in indoor workouts or gyms, many children reliant on outdoor, unstructured play find themselves confined indoors. The dampened summer deprives them of the spontaneous outdoor play and social interactions, which are often facilitated by outdoor play during the brighter, sunnier days of summer. Whereas at school an indoor alternative may be found for cancelled outdoor activity, during the summer children do not have this option at home.



## Cost of Living

The younger children often displayed minimal knowledge of the effects of the expense of living, particularly the lower secondary students. While some of the barriers are acknowledged, the cost of living is frequently overlooked by them, who might not completely understand the complexities of everyday expenses. Many engage in cost-free activities, such as informal football matches, walking, running or are simply not aware of how their parents are funding their activity. However, as they grow older, there is an increase in their awareness of costs

related to hobbies, as evidenced by comments about expensive gym memberships.

*‘Having access to sort of like more free things [would increase my activity levels]. So like, maybe there's a gym that didn't have to pay for, for like children or more clubs that were sort of free that would be good.’*

**Female, Upper Secondary,  
High Activity**

On the other hand, parents deeply feel the effects of rising cost of living. Quant data shows that “cost” is the most frequently cited challenge faced when trying to facilitate their child’s physical activity in the summer time. They frequently find themselves in a difficult financial position, particularly when it comes to funding their child’s extracurricular activities. This becomes especially prominent for parents with children engaged in competitive sports like dancing, where costs for equipment, classes, and travel accumulate rapidly. This also means that parents are making significant personal sacrifices to mitigate the impacts of the rising cost of living on their child’s extracurricular engagements.

*‘Tutus cost like 350 pounds. That's one of the reasons I've stopped my gym membership. I know she's only four, but she loves her dance and we focused on that.’*

**Female, Parent**





Parents are making a shift in spending priorities where the child's needs and interests are placed above their own.

*'I'm not cutting my child's activities. I'm cutting my activities more like what I would spend for myself on going out, doing something or some like this, but for the child I'm trying to give as much as he wants.'*

**Male, Parent**

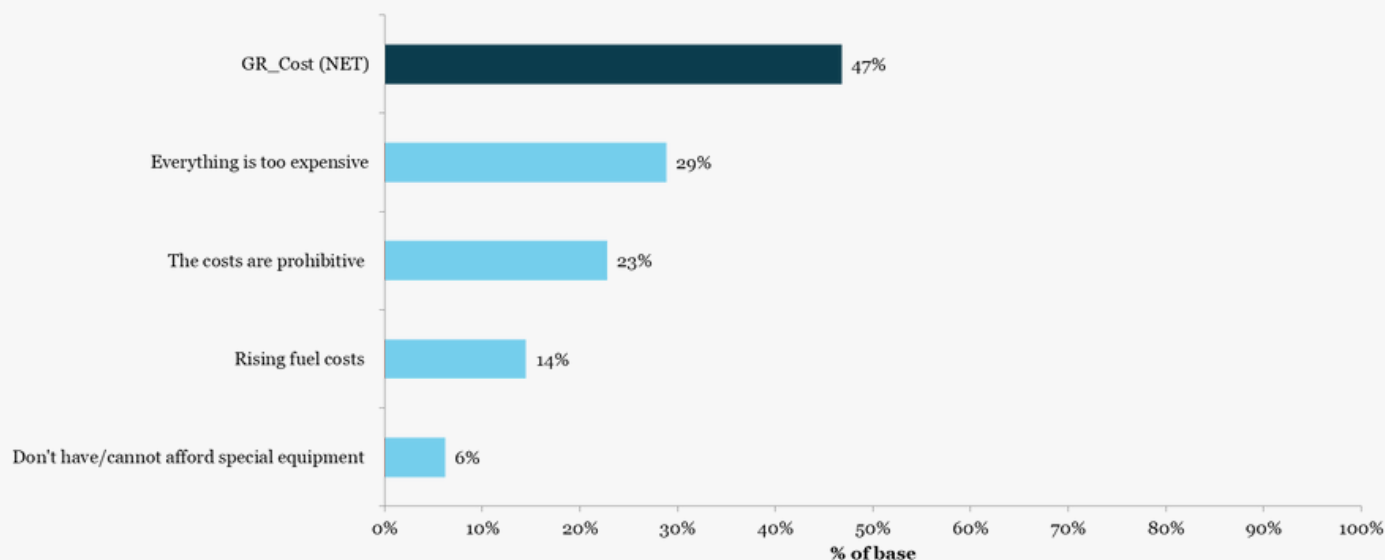
These narratives show a recurring theme of parents' determination to put up with personal financial hardships to ensure that their

children's activities remain uninterrupted amidst the escalating cost of living. As a result, parents may view these expenses as an 'investment', weighing the potential returns.

*'For one-to-one activities you really gotta look at the value for money that we're getting. So, fencing lessons cost £25 for half an hour and then the equipment. You know is a huge amount of money if we invest in it. So we're gonna make sure it's worthwhile doing and he is actually enjoying it and benefiting from it.'*

**Male, Parent**

**Challenges parents face to keeping children doing as much activity as they would like - Cost (W3/W8)**



Source: QW3M. What are the challenges you (and your child) face that prevent them doing as much as they/you would like during the school summer holidays? Base: All parents Wave 8 (Aug '22) n=1150

This financial burden draws attention to a larger structural issue and emphasises the need for more accessible alternatives for young participation in physical activity. Affordability has become a key element affecting children's physical activity as the cost of living rises. A substantial 55%<sup>1</sup> of parents think that more affordable or better value for money options could increase their kids' participation in physical activity. It's interesting to note that 20%<sup>2</sup> of secondary school students said that being able to purchase these activities on their own would motivate them, highlighting their progressive transition away from family support.

In august 2023 88%<sup>3</sup> of primary school children say they are encouraged by their parents to be active in the summer holidays, a figure which drops to around 76% in those of upper secondary school age. 85% of primary school children also say that they do more activity with their family in the school holidays than in term time, compared to 69% of those in upper secondary. Notably, it was the parents of these primary school students who shared information about their cost-cutting tactics like guiding children to free activities, cutting back on personal expenses, canceling their own gym memberships to afford their kids' extracurriculars.

*'My husband actually was the house husband when she was little. He's got a part time job now that works around her, but we know that his work is essentially to pay for her dance and yeah, some people think it's crazy, but she loves it.'*

### **Female, Parent**

Alarming, almost half (47%) of all parents say that money is a barrier to their kids getting the physical activity they want, and primary school parents are more likely to express this worry (52%) than secondary school parents (41%).



<sup>1</sup> QW3L\_Motivation\_Affordable\_Yr1-6 for combined W3/8

<sup>2</sup> CYPQW3F\_Motivation\_Affordable\_Yr7-11 x CYPD1\_SchYr\_GR2

<sup>3</sup> CYPQ10 & CYPQ11 - Wave 8 only



# Case study

## Low Activity

Male  
Year 10  
Asian  
Lower middle class (C1)  
Low activity

Hamza was in a football club, where he not only enjoyed the game but also forged friendships. However, financial constraints compelled his parents to withdraw him due to the steep membership fees.

Despite this setback, he continues to play football informally, maintaining his enjoyment of playing. Yet, the absence of the camaraderie of a team has led to diminished motivation, making his engagement with the sport less consistent than before. He misses being part of the team and also the friends that he made there.

*'I played for a football club and you have to pay every year and I think that's getting a bit much now. My parents said I cant do it anymore but that they will maybe get me a gym membership soon instead. I still play just around the park for fun but I do miss doing it as part of a club. And I miss the people. I lost a few friends from not playing in the club.'*

# Case study



Male  
Asian  
Rural  
Working class (D)  
Parent of a primary school child

This summer, a notable change has impacted the quality of family time for Ali and his children. Rising cost of living meant that he had to take up a second job which he now juggles with spending time with his children which has been inadvertently reduced.

This shift has not only affected their shared moments but also led to a decrease in their collective physical activities and other joint endeavours, casting a shadow over their previous summer's experiences.

Ali wants to spend more time with his children, but is currently struggling to fit it in. His children's level of activity has suffered as a result.

*'I've cancelled my gym membership, but yeah, my mortgage has gone up because I just had a new deal recently and then obviously gas and electric and then sometimes like when I do think about doing stuff, I do have to sort of check if it's, you know within our budget and stuff like that.'*



# Demographic Differences

## Rural vs urban

Rural participants reported less options and lack of access for facilities such as clubs, classes and gyms. This is mainly due to transportation barriers. Due to the age of participants, they cannot drive and therefore rely either on parents, or public transportation. Unless the young people have friends nearby, they are limited in who they can engage in physical activity with. Therefore, they are more likely to rely on family that live in the household. The young people we spoke to reported that exercising in this way can sometimes tend to become boring when repeating similar activities.

Even those who are high activity feel constrained in what they can do and feel they could do more with improved access. Some look forward to going back to school, where they will have more variety during PE, attend afterschool clubs, or a gym that is nearby to their school.

On the other hand, urban participants had more available nearby and greater independent mobility with public transport. As long as the young person is old enough, they can travel on their own to meet friends or go to the gym. They have a wider range of facilities available and therefore are more likely to engage with them.

## SEG

Our research showed that it is not only the lowest SEGs that are being affected by cost of living and. For example, a male participant (Upper secondary, C1, Asian) had to give up football club due to his parents not being able to afford it anymore. Also, a working class parent (D) reported that taking up a second job to meet the rising cost of living severely limited the time available to engage with their child in physical activities, among other things, compared to the previous year when he was more available.

## Ethnicity

There were minimal differences noted by ethnicity; all ethnic groups described similar routines and parental & peer influences. There weren't many differences in barriers or enablers based on ethnicity either. However, within the parents' group, two parents from non-White ethnic backgrounds highlighted the impact of the cost of living. These parents felt compelled to either secure an additional job or, in cases where a parent hadn't been working previously, to start working to sustain their child's dancing interest.

## Age

For young people in primary school, parents play a pivotal role, especially in providing access to and transportation for activities. These children are heavily reliant on their parents for opportunities to engage in physical activities.

For those in lower secondary parental support is still quite crucial, especially in terms of access and transportation to various activities. However, we see that opportunities start to broaden for lower secondary, as those who are just starting secondary school see additional opportunities to be active. Secondary schools provide certain facilities and clubs that were not available in primary school and the young people look forward to these. In the summertime, people of this age range miss their school clubs. Particularly as they are less able to travel independently to other sources of physical activity.

For those in upper secondary, they display greater independence in their routines and are less reliant on their parents for direction. They can attend gym classes etc. on their own. However, they also have additional barriers when they are at the school level of doing GCSE with school work being more serious and taking time. This carries into summertime when they have more homework to complete over the period than majority of their younger peers. This means that some will choose sacrifice some of their physical activity to make more time.

## Gender

In general, boys mention playing football informally quite a lot, whereas young girls do not seem to have this similar style of play with their friends. Boys tend to use football as a way to socialize with peers and is a common interest for many, whereas girls are more likely to meet their friends in the summer and do activities such as shopping or just spending time together talking and 'hanging out'. In addition to those social activities, data from waves 3 and 8 indicate that during the summer, girls are more engaged in certain physical activities compared to boys. Specifically, a higher percentage of females reported walking for leisure (76% vs. 64%), swimming (40% vs. 31%), and participating in fitness, dance, or other activities at home (32% vs. 19%).

For females that are high activity and keen to partake in physical activity often they feel inhibited due to external factors. For instance, female participants mentioned wanting to go to the gym at night but not being able to due to the dangers of going alone in the dark alone.





## Moving Forward

In this section, we explore diverse perspectives on the responsibility for promoting and maintaining children's physical activity, addressing the challenges and opportunities presented during the summertime and proposing strategic pathways to enhance engagement and participation.

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***‘He's more active now, so he's doing more with every summer.’***

Male, Parent

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## Who's Responsible?

When it comes to who is responsible for promoting & maintaining physical activity opinion was slightly divided by the three groups we spoke to.

The high activity children are self-motivated, draw inspiration from within, and often hold themselves accountable for being active. They felt like it was up to themselves to find a way to be active in the summer.

Lower activity children placed more emphasis on external factors, such as encouragement from friends, parents, cousins, and older siblings. They prefer gentle reminders rather than a directive.

Neither the high or low activity groups had a strong opinion on who is responsible for opportunities to be active. There was little appreciation or knowledge of the structural and organisational set-up of physical activity, and they hadn't put much thought or consideration into this topic before.

This was very different amongst the parents of primary school children. Primarily, they saw themselves as having ultimate responsibility for their children's levels of physical

activity, particularly during the summer holidays. However, they pointed to the lack of availability and the inconsistency of facilities in local areas as significant barriers to providing their children with the opportunity to be sufficiently active.

There was a call for local governments to step in and provide more recreational facilities and activities, with initiatives like "Beat the Street" serving as positive examples.

Sporting governing bodies, while praised by some, may only be reaching those who are already into specific sports. They could do a better job of making initiatives and activities available to a wider audience. The example was given of a cricket organisation offering affordable classes in the summertime.

Additionally, during the summer, some parents express a desire for schools to play a more facilitative role, offering opportunities that can include both children and their parents, especially for the younger age groups. They raised concerns about this solution, as some children may not want to "go to school" in the summer time, even if the primary objective is to take part in a physical activity.

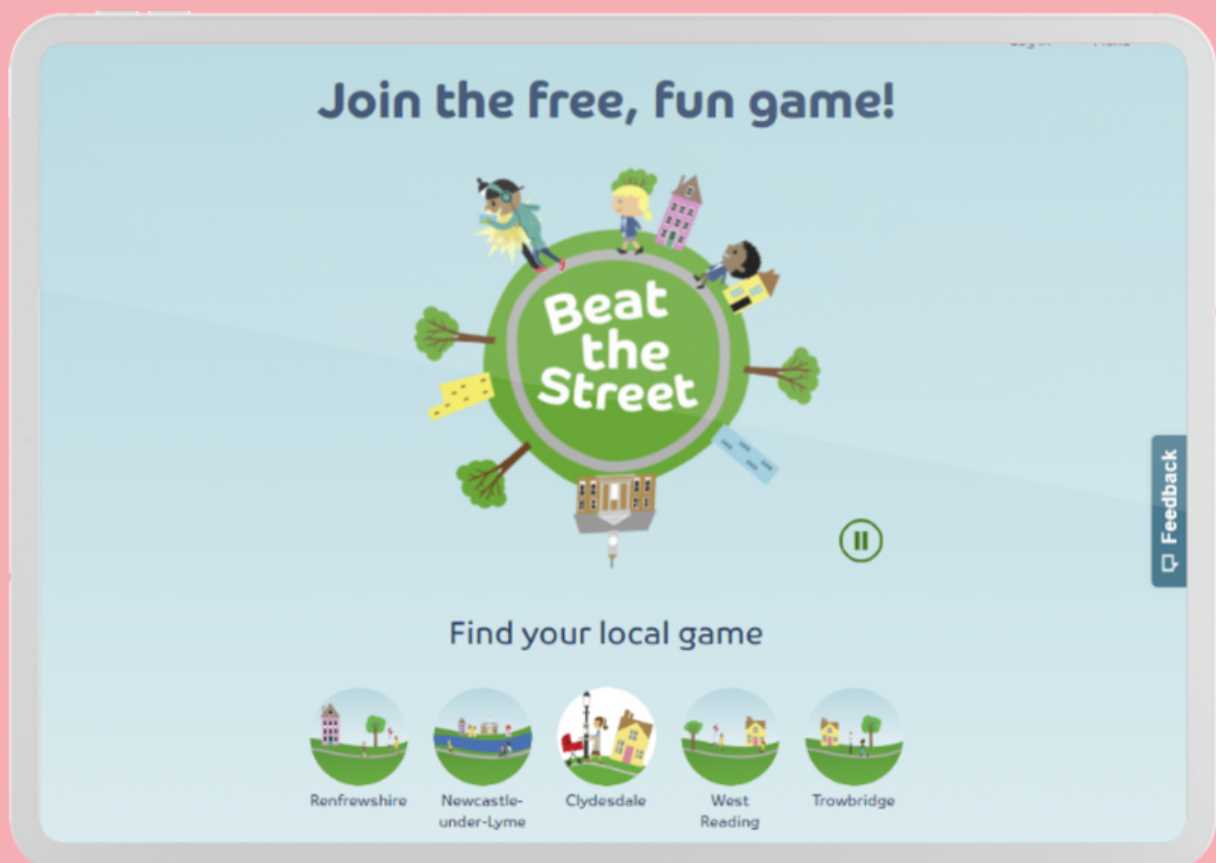
'Beat the Street' was raised as an example of a particularly successful initiative to encourage activity in young people. This program gained popularity among other parents in the group, who not only loved the concept but also wished for something similar in their own areas.

Beat the Street is a community programme that turns towns into giant free and fun games, encouraging people to get moving to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. Those who participate can win prizes while learning about their local area and exploring.

Community members can register online and receive a card, which they use to check in at 'beat boxes' throughout town, accessible by walking or cycling.

In turn, they accumulate points in teams and have the chance to win prizes.

The parent who had experienced Beat the Street told us that they participated as part of school teams, which were promoted by schools in the area. The schools with the highest points won free sports equipment, furthering the benefits to the children.





Programmes of this nature achieve success due to their gamified components, which sustain youth engagement. The competitive aspect, as evidenced in our focus groups, consistently captures young people's attention. Additionally, the emphasis on teamwork fosters social interactions, enhancing the experience for participants. Even those typically less active might find this appealing, considering many enjoy leisurely walks with friends and family.

For parents, the cost-free element of Beat the Street is especially appealing.

*'All the schools in the area promoted it. Children got a card to swipe boxes in the area and it encouraged the children to go on walking routes. They got points for their school and the winners got given some free sports equipment. It was really really good.'*

**Female, Parent**

*'We all want to help our kids do more. That sort of programme is so brilliant because you just want to find anything to help encourage your kids to do anything that isn't just sitting in front of the TV. Things like that are a brilliant idea.'*

**Female, Parent**



We have seen that summertime causes disruption to routine, access to facilities/clubs, and time spent with friends. It also means that engaging in physical activity switches from something which is regular and mandated during term time, to something which requires self-motivation, opportunity close to home and motivation from peers & family. These changes impact young people in different ways, depending on their general attitudes to physical activity as well as their personal circumstance. These factors must be taken into consideration, along with the specific barriers identified, when considering ways young people can be encouraged and supported.

## Getting there

Young people are limited to what is available in their local area during the summer time. With their school, and its various sports facilities, often out of bounds they are left to work with what they can access within the means of travel they have.

For some, this means switching dedicated sports facilities for local parks or even a back garden, whilst others become reliant on parents or local transport to remain active. The cost implication of travel can be restrictive for many, especially upper secondary school children who are likely to be more independent and figuring things out for themselves. Supporting young people to travel to the places where they are taking part in physical activity during the summer time would increase opportunity as well as helping motivation as the logistical challenge of actually getting there would be softened, and possibly even removed as an obstacle.

*'If the bus is free I'll be able to go to the gym whenever... Normally, I do my stuff in the morning and then I have free times in the evening. But like, I'm not gonna go to gym at 8:00 PM cause my area is not safe.'*

**Female, Upper secondary,  
High Activity**



## Staying in touch

Friends and the social aspects of physical activity are a key element of enjoyment throughout the year, but summertime presents a particular challenge as friends groups who spend every week day together at school, are suddenly pulled apart. Bringing friendship groups together in the summertime benefits both high activity young people and low activity. For the high activity young people it will allow them to engage in the camaraderie of teams and training or competing alongside those with a shared interest in sports, increasing their enjoyment of summer time activity.

For low activity young people, being with their friends makes them more open to taking part in physical activity

if this is something the group finds appealing.

Recreational activities with friends, where being active is a by-product rather than the core focus of the activity, will encourage those who are low activity to remain active during the summer. This could be as simple as encouraging a group of friends to get together to catch up whilst on a walk.

*‘One thing that would make my exercise better if my friends were here, like doing exercise with me, so I won't really alone.’*

**Male, Lower secondary,  
Low Activity**





## Maintaining progress

For some the summer holidays are a time to relax away from the pressures of term time, including PE and other physical activity. However, for others, summertime disrupts their feeling of progress and development in their chosen sports & activities. These are often high activity young people who are having to make do with what's available to them in the summer whilst they wait for term time to come around and they can get back on track with their teams, clubs and competitions.

Whilst activity for these eager young people doesn't stop entirely in the summer and they will still be taking part in reduced training/coached sessions, mini-competitions and following their own training routines and plans at home or in the gym, they are susceptible to lapses in motivation during the summer. They need to feel like what they are doing will benefit them when they return to regular activity in the term time and that summer isn't a period of stunted development or progress.

*'If someone said to me if you do this all summer then you're guaranteed to get into something or like move up higher into football.'*

**Male, Lower secondary, High Activity**



## What's on?

Knowledge of what is available can be a restricting factor, especially for parents as their sources of information about what is on and what is available for their child can be limited to their immediate peer circle. Survey data shows that the most common way parents find out about physical activity opportunities in the summer holidays is other parents, their friends or their children. Whilst 2 in 5 say that they also find out about what's available through organisations, this is primarily driven by schools or the clubs that their children are already involved in.

This creates a bubble of influence where information about new opportunities or existing ones outside of the clubs & organisations their children are already involved in are easily missed. Interestingly, social media becomes a more readily used source of information for parents during the summer holidays, with over 1 in 3 (35%) saying they use it to find out about opportunities in the summer time, compared to just 1 in 4 (25%) during term time. This shows that social media is a viable place to promote to parents what is available, especially locally.

Some parents also suggested the possibility of linking their activity, or the location of their activity, to their children's activity during the summer. For example, family gym or leisure memberships which offer value and allow parents and children to engage in activity either together, or at the same location, at the same time where they can travel together. Thinking about how summer holiday activities can cater for both parent & young person could help those parents who have been making sacrifices to their own activity to support their children whilst providing more opportunity for children themselves who are encouraged by the parent they will be attending with.

*'I go to the gym with my mum, so we kind of encourage each other to go, even if we're not, you know, and then at school I do the club because my friends do it.'*

**Female, Upper Secondary, High Activity**