



THE SHAPE OF PLAY

A Study by Mattel

Welcome to The Shape of Play:

A Study by Mattel



At Mattel, we believe play is essential—a core part of human expression that fosters creativity, connection, and well-being. For over 80 years, we’ve been at the forefront of understanding how kids and families engage with play. From early feedback on Barbie doll prototypes in the 1950s to cutting-edge research today, we’ve always prioritized insights to inform innovation.

As the world evolves, so does the nature of play. To better understand these changes, we undertook an ambitious global study involving more than 33,000 people, both children and adults. This research offers a snapshot of how play is shaping lives today and how it may evolve in the future.

I’m excited to share these insights with you. Our designers will draw on this data to create new, engaging experiences for all ages. But these insights extend beyond toy design—they are meant to help educators, parents, and policymakers understand the profound role play has in human development.

Play is a vital human right, one we must nurture and protect. We encourage everyone to make time for it, today and every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Down'.

Chris Down, Mattel Chief Design Officer



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RESEARCH DESIGN & CONTRIBUTORS



Tasja Kirkwood

Mattel, VP Global Consumer Insights

Favorite Game:
UNO, Show 'em No Mercy

“The evolution of play in our modern lives reflects the dynamic nature of human culture. It continues to adapt and expand as technology, society, and individual preferences change.”

**Play is
evolving —
along with
the world
around us.**



Allison Glatstein

Director,
Mattel Play Lab

Favorite Game:
Apples to Apples



Brynn Frawley

Research Moderator & Manager,
Mattel Play Lab

Favorite Toy:
*Fisher-Price Loving
Family Dollhouse*



Angela De Voe

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Favorite Toy:
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Coronation Gold State Coach*



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Favorite Doll:
*Barbie Cake
Decorating Playset*

CONTRIBUTORS

The Mattel Global Consumer Insights team is a group of dedicated global researchers who learn directly from people in order to help create innovative and inclusive toys and experiences for players of all ages, all around the world.

As leaders in play for 80 years, understanding how and why people play has been a core value for Mattel. Our broader insights team has studied purposeful play and collaborated with universities on multi-year studies, such as researching the impact of playing with dolls on children's social skill development.

For the Shape of Play project, the Mattel Global Consumer Insights team is at the forefront of industry thought leadership, exploring the holistic nature of play and its evolution in our rapidly changing world.



GCI

GLOBAL CONSUMER INSIGHTS

So, We Embarked on an
Adventure to Learn...

How is Play Changing Today for People of All Ages?

Our Research Included...

7 Countries
Worldwide



Global Play
Expert Interviews



Witnessing
Dozens of
UNO Card Slams



Finding Countless
Barbie Shoes



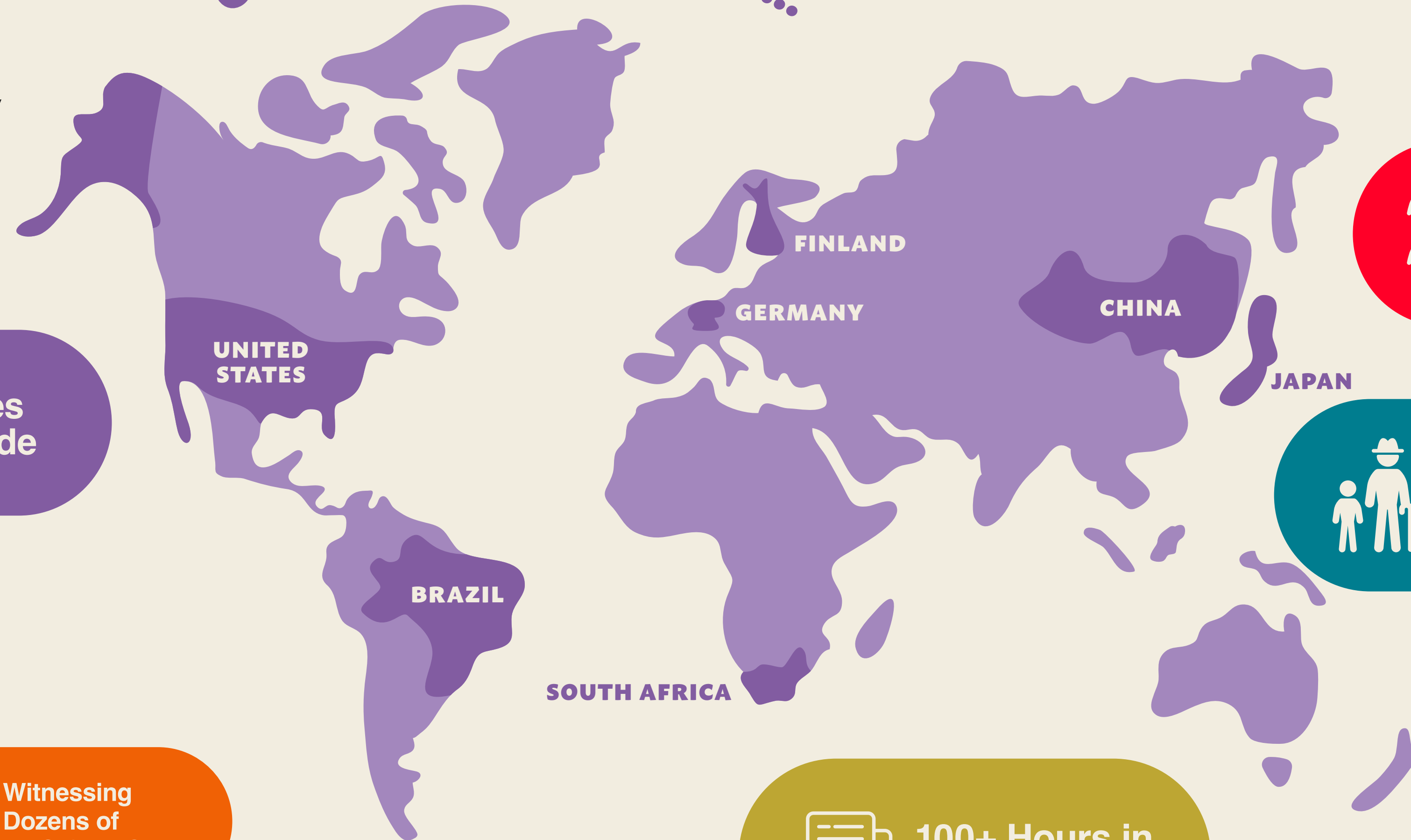
100+ Hours in
Conversation



33,000+
People



“Kids” of
All Ages



What We Found Will Inspire a New Generation of Play.



PLAY BY PLAY: OUR KEY LEARNINGS



Play is All Around Us.

We uncovered an expanded definition of play to incorporate the new ways people are playing. In our research, we heard that 80% of people say play can happen anywhere and that 85% believe play is integral to life. Around the globe, there are some regional differences in how and why we play, but overall we're more alike than different.



No Matter What Else Changes, Joy is the Constant Center.

It's our connective thread across age, gender, and culture, and is joined by four core play motivations with growing importance today: **Growth, Wellbeing, Expression, and Connection.** We often think of play as amping us up, but "relaxation" and "stress relief" are some of the most important play emotions for 41% of people today.

More Than One Third of Us Aren't Playing Enough.

Globally, the top three barriers preventing us from playing as much as we'd like are: being too busy, too lonely, and too unsafe.

We Never Outgrow the Need for Play.

In fact, 94% of people believe "play is for all ages" versus being for children only. Across seven distinct age groups spanning babyhood to elderhood, the way we play and how much time we spend having fun may change, but it stays critical throughout our lifetimes with several key inflection points.

Play Personalities Reveal Which Interests are Uniquely Us.

Through our research, we identified six main play personalities (different attitudes towards play) which highlight a beautiful variety in the way that people approach play, from creative expression to self-improvement and everything in between.



Play is a Global Force for Connection, Wellbeing, and Innovation.

Across the world, thousands of people have spoken:



of people think play has the power to improve the health and wellbeing of people globally.



of people say play can solve isolation and loneliness.

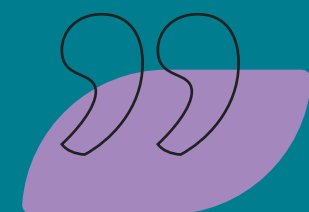


of people believe play has the power to bridge social differences.

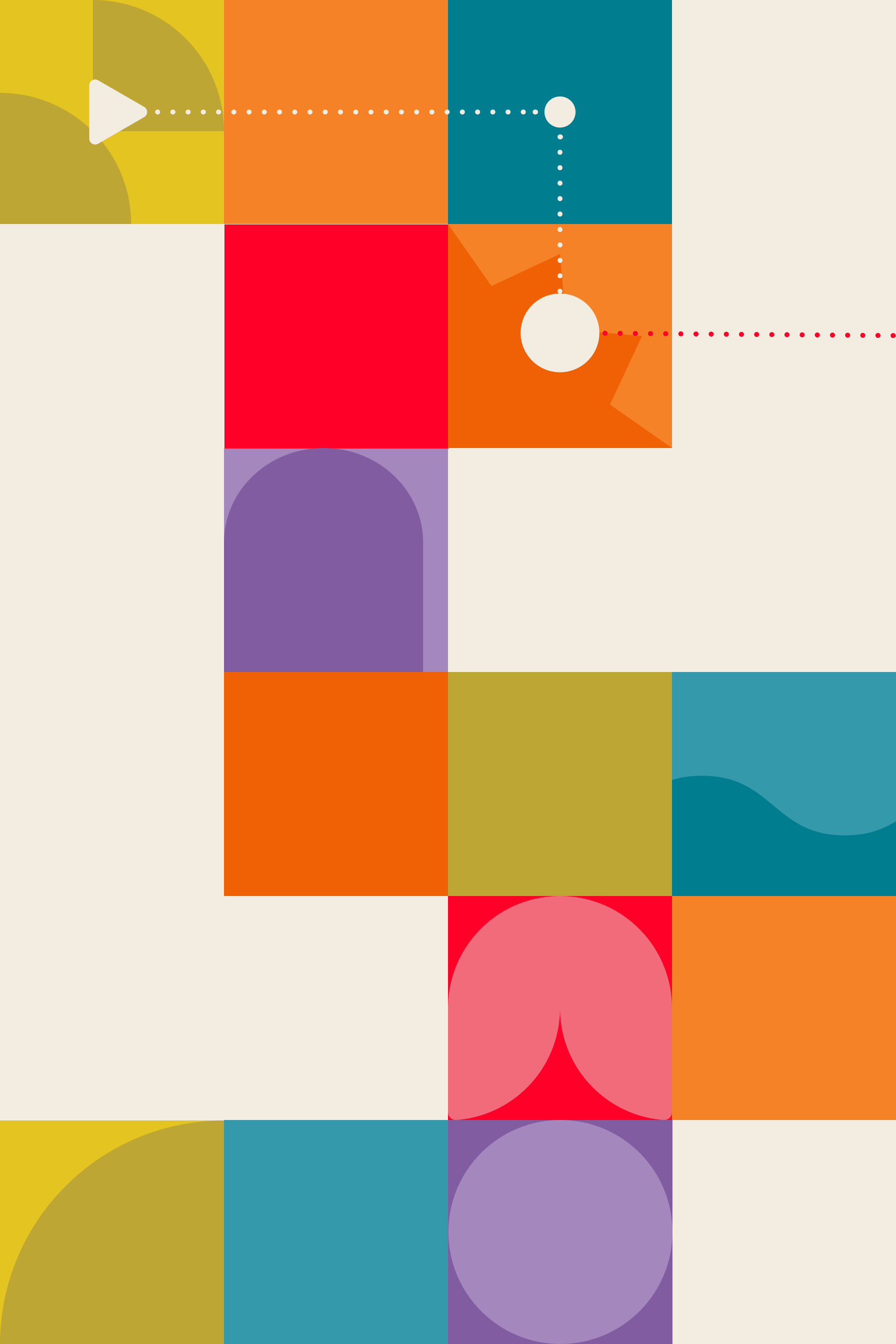
“In an age of AI,
in an age of
social media,
in an age of so
much speed...

Play has
the power to
re-enchant life.

Edgard Gouveia Jr.
Global Game Organizer, Livelab
Brazil



WHAT EVEN IS PLAY TODAY?



Through Our Research We Found
a New, Expanded Definition:

PLAY

[plā] noun, verb, intransitive verb

A Universal
Human Experience
that Connects People
of All Ages to

Joy!

We Learned Play is
Unique to Each of Us.
Play can be...

“A Story
to Tell

A Magical
Feeling

A Thrilling
Escape

A Window
to Another
World

A Way to
Connect

A Way of Life

Play is NOT...

“...Just for Kids.”

“...Only for the Playground.”

“...a Luxury.”

“...for After the Serious Work is Done.”

“...Frivolous.”

85%

of people believe play is integral to life!

Play most often brings us feelings of:



Play creates a foundation for happiness.



Father Finland

Play is All Around Us.



80%

of people believe play can happen anywhere.


62%

of people say play is a mindset or attitude.


62%

of people believe play can take place in the digital world.

In Fact, We're Finding New Ways to Play Every Day...

84% 

of people say spending time with pets is playing.

48% 

of people say organizing is playing.

51% 

of people say using AI is playing.

People Told Us About All the Ways They Play Today...






- Secret Shopping
- Making Cards
- Clap Games
- Dancing
- Make-Up
- Recess
- Singing
- Taking Care Of My Plants
- Drone Flying
- Painting
- Bubble Socks
- Watching Movies
- Playing with My Dog
- Making Art
- Dreaming/Visualizing
- Knitting
- Pretending
- Writing Poetry
- Playful Banter
- Joking With Family
- Drawing Outdoors
- Back of Door Basketball
- Meditation
- Swimming
- Hopscotch
- Playing with Dolls
- Meal Time
- Playing Ball
- Traveling
- Balloon Volleyball
- Card Games
- Relaxing With My Mother
- Playing Poker
- Costumes
- Playing On My Cell Phone
- Having Heart to
- Heart Talks With Friends
- Small Talk
- Putting Food Away in a Playful Manner
- Escape Room Games
- Role-Playing
- Cooking
- Playing In Puddles
- Goofing Around
- Blocks
- House Play
- Crafting
- Running
- Theme Parks
- Video Games
- Reading
- Trampoline
- Jumping On The Bed
- Collecting
- Fidgets
- Chasing Dog around the House
- Telling Stories
- Social Games
- Being Outside
- Trivia

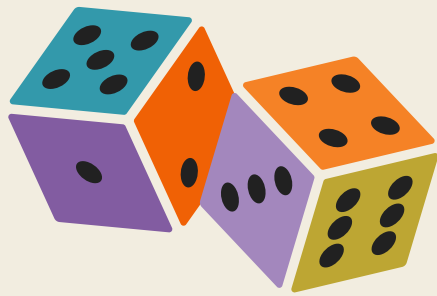


Play Along
How does play show up in your daily life?



People across the globe agree play is integral to life, yet in each country, we found certain aspects of play resonate more strongly.

- More likely to...
-  **USA** Play to experience **Awe & Achievement**
 -  **Japan** Include **Curiosity & Focus** in play
 -  **China** Play for **Wellbeing & Relaxation**
 -  **Germany** Include **Fantasy & Imagination** in play
 -  **Finland** Feel **Joy & Triumph** during play
 -  **Brazil** Include **Community & Excitement** in play
 -  **South Africa** Include **Competition & Experimentation** in play



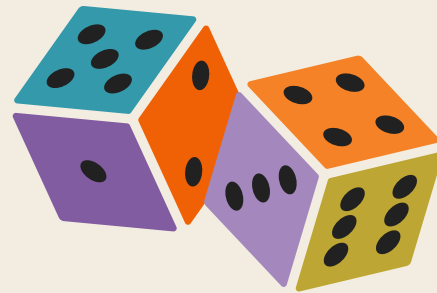
Play Along
Did you notice how people engaged with toys or games differently somewhere you visited? Were they solo or social? Wrapped up in the challenge or just relaxing? Note what you observed.

Through Play, Our Unique Values and Shapes Emerge.

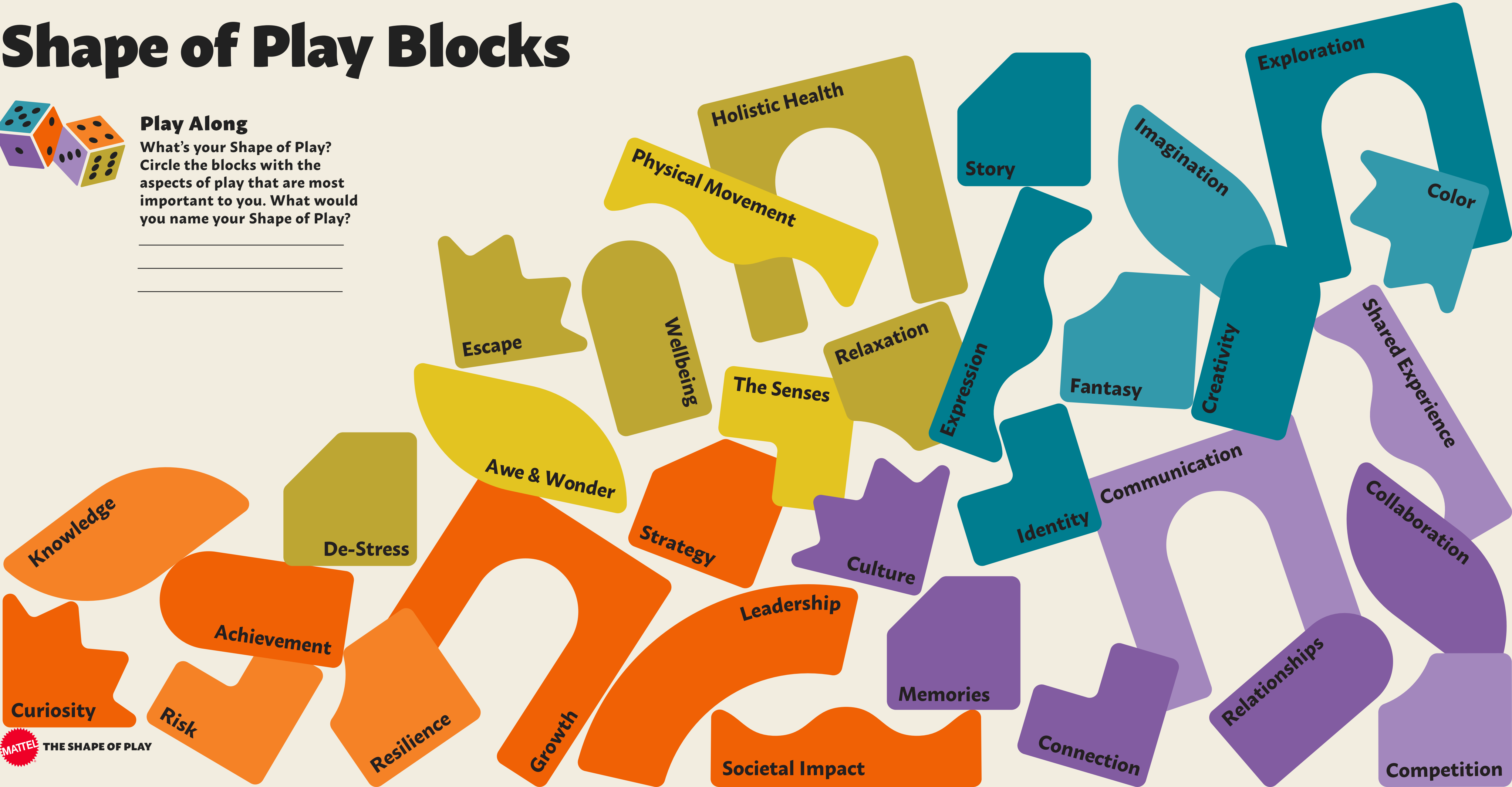
In our travels around the globe, we brought a custom set of blocks with us representing a wide range of qualities and aspects of play. Using these blocks, we asked people to reflect on the role of play in their lives and show us their Shape of Play. And we saw nearly as many different collections emerge as people! Some Shapes of Play were focused on peace and de-stressing, others on imagination and creativity. Some arranged the blocks into designs that capture their whimsical spirits and others turned them into equations. The Shape of Play is infinitely unique—and we find that inspiring.



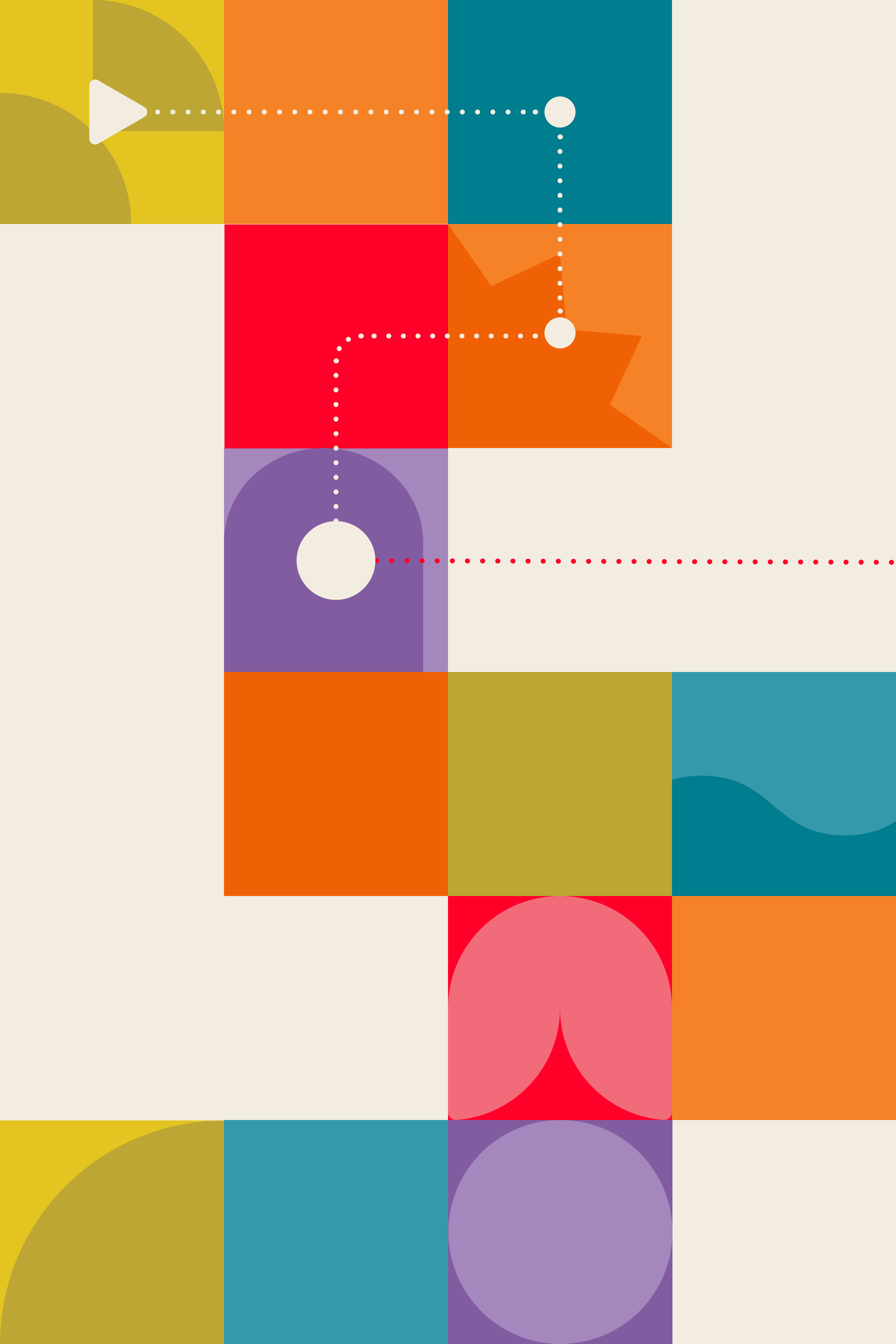
Shape of Play Blocks



Play Along
What's your Shape of Play?
Circle the blocks with the
aspects of play that are most
important to you. What would
you name your Shape of Play?



WHY DO WE PLAY?



We Play for **Joy!** It's Our Connective Thread Across Age, Gender, and Culture.

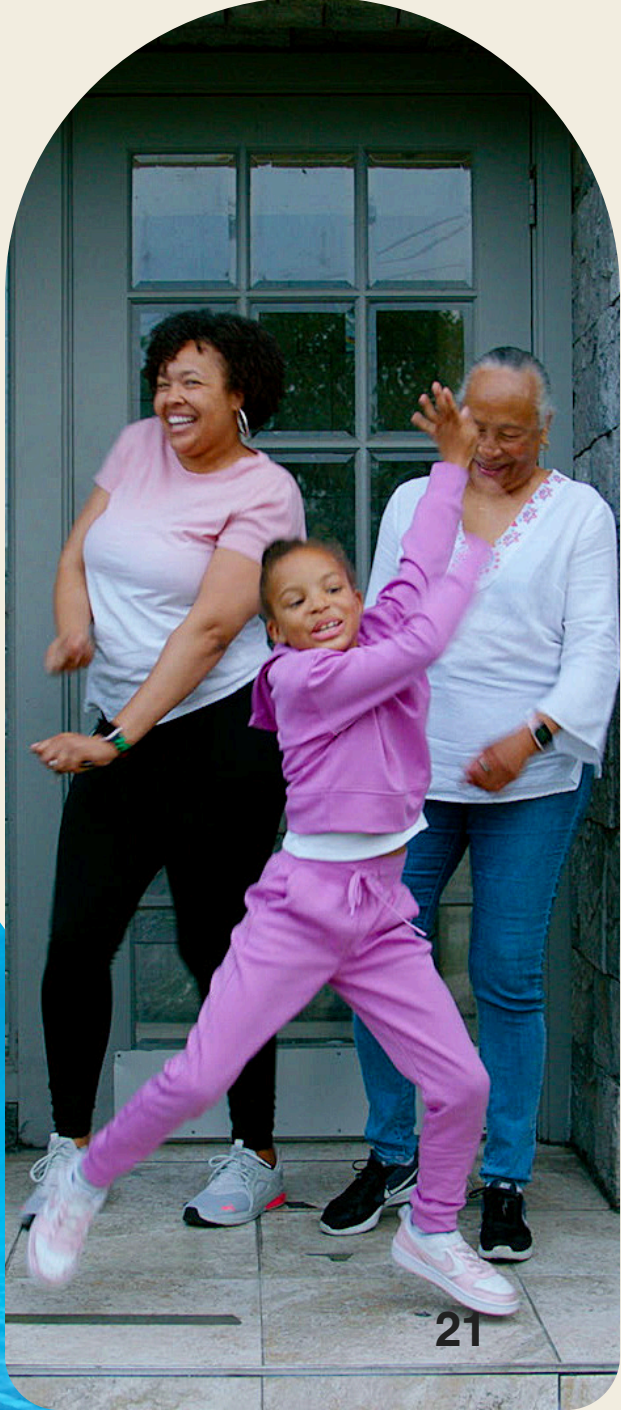
Happiness is the most common emotion people feel during play, so it's no surprise that chasing joy is what motivates most of us to play. When we play, we laugh and smile. Our bodies wiggle, jump, get incredibly still and focused, or melt into relaxation—and no matter what, it just makes us happy.



“Life without joy would be nothing. Joy is fundamental.”

Marja
Age 75, Finland

”



The World is Changing, so Our Motivations to Play Are, Too.

While play has been with humans since the beginning, *why* we play changes with the context of our times. In today's fast-paced, high-pressure world, our research shows that people see play as a critical force for good in their lives. There are four core play motivations right now: Growth, Wellbeing, Expression, and Connection, with Joy as the constant thread that runs throughout.



An Antidote to Autopilot

In today’s culture, the fast pace of life, technology, and automation can hinder creativity and leave us feeling a little like robots ourselves. In fact, one measure of creativity, the Torrance Test, shows scores have been in decline since the 1990s₂.

We learned people are carving out time in their busy schedules for play in order to connect with something essential, intuitive, and human— their creativity. The freedom to express ourselves and explore new ideas is possible and pure in play.

Top hallmarks of playing for expression: **Imagination, Fantasy, Color**

Creativity is ranked the #1 element of an ideal play experience across all ages.

Want to Express Yourself? Try These!

- Exploring character-driven stories with dolls
- Freely experimenting with design ideas and art materials
- Dabbling in musical expression and collaboration
- Collecting and styling figurines
- Updating avatars with new themes and trends
- Creating new worlds through digital games

We enjoy diving deep into narratives that activate our imagination and creativity.

We play to explore who we are and try on different personas and ideas.

We roam creatively, testing things out and letting inspiration take hold.

We try out new ways of thinking, sharing them with others.

We show off design sensibilities in a range of different formats.

We create imaginative spaces wholly different from reality.





I come up with ideas and I feel like I'm introducing something new to the world... play gives me so many cool things compared to a life full of rules, schedules, and structures.



Robin
Age 23, Finland

"I play to keep my mindset flexible and creative—to get into a state of flow."

Brazil

"Play is like adding colors to life; it makes everyday interesting."

China

A Lifelong Growth Mindset

Today, learning is no longer a linear journey with an end point of mastering just one thing and minimizing the rest. Kids and adults are expected to continue evolving, not just learning hard skills but soft ones as well for success: “cultivating broad capabilities, such as self-awareness or resilience, that are necessary to adapt to dynamic, evolving challenges,” according to *Harvard Business Review*₃.

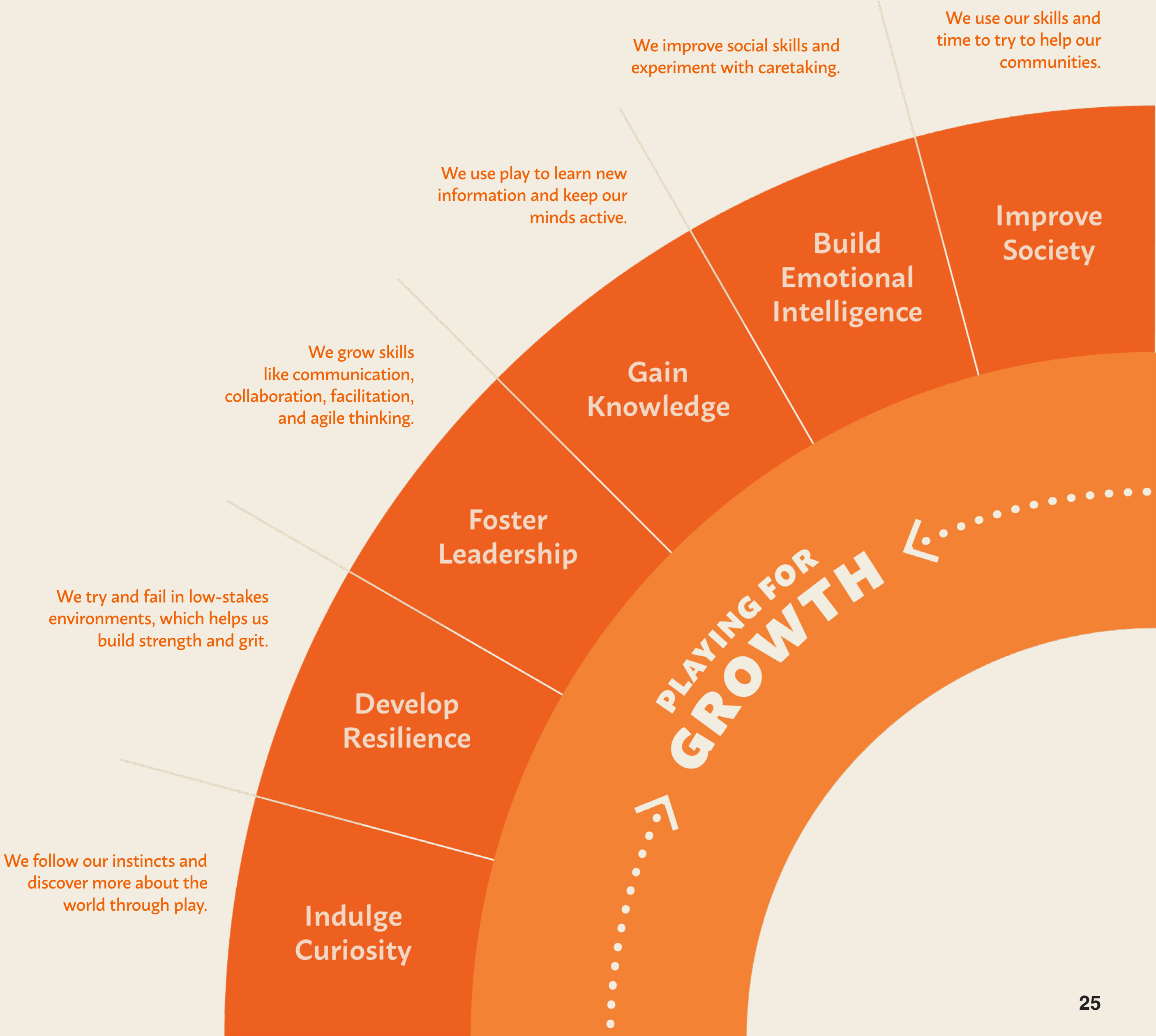
We learned people are playing not only to gain knowledge but for a broader sense of growth too, building qualities and skills we hope will make us more fulfilled people and better citizens of the world—pursuing what naturally interests us and cultivating character traits like leadership, empathy, and kindness.

Top hallmarks of playing for growth: **Strategy, Risk, Achievement**

70% of people today believe play can be used to achieve important goals.

Want to Grow? Try These!

- Building a complex tower with blocks
- Trying a new sport with a level of risk
- Building a race track and testing which toy cars perform best
- Learning a new language
- Playing with someone in a different age group
- Mastering a strategic game over time
- Leading a team game in your local community





I hope play helps her to be successful one day. It's important to teach these emotional skills and train your kid as a good human. I actually love toys and games where it focuses on that side of learning.

Mother to Liyana
Age 5, USA



"Play challenges and encourages me personally."

Germany

"I play to learn new concepts and grow as a person, even beyond moments of play."

Japan

"Play is my daughter's way of expressing herself and discovering the world."

Brazil





A New Ritual for Relaxation

Over the past few years, global stress and anxiety hit an all-time high, not just for adults but for young people as well. Over 15% of children aged 3-17 years have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, and the numbers are even higher for adults₄. It's an epidemic, and almost everyone wants to feel more relaxation and joy.

We learned that people are seeking out play as an intentional part of their approach to maintaining wellbeing and optimizing health. When we play for Wellbeing, we relax and escape life's pressures, feel balanced, and are more resilient.

Top hallmarks of playing for Wellbeing:

Sensorial Immersion, Awe & Wonder, Physical Movement

Relaxation is ranked the #3 most memorable emotion tied to play experiences.

Want to Relax? Try These!

- Immersing yourself in a great book
- Playing a favorite card game
- Jumping joyfully into the pool
- Bringing your activity or toys outdoors into nature
- Immersing in an all-day live action role playing game
- Riding bikes with friends
- Acting out your feelings through playing with dolls or action figures
- Snuggling with your favorite stuffed toy

Barbie can be an escape from reality... to get into this world of an 11½ inch doll figure - it's fashionable and glamorous with her big hair... it's kind of like my own free therapy.

Giovanni
Age 43, USA

“My child plays because he needs an outlet to relax from school.”

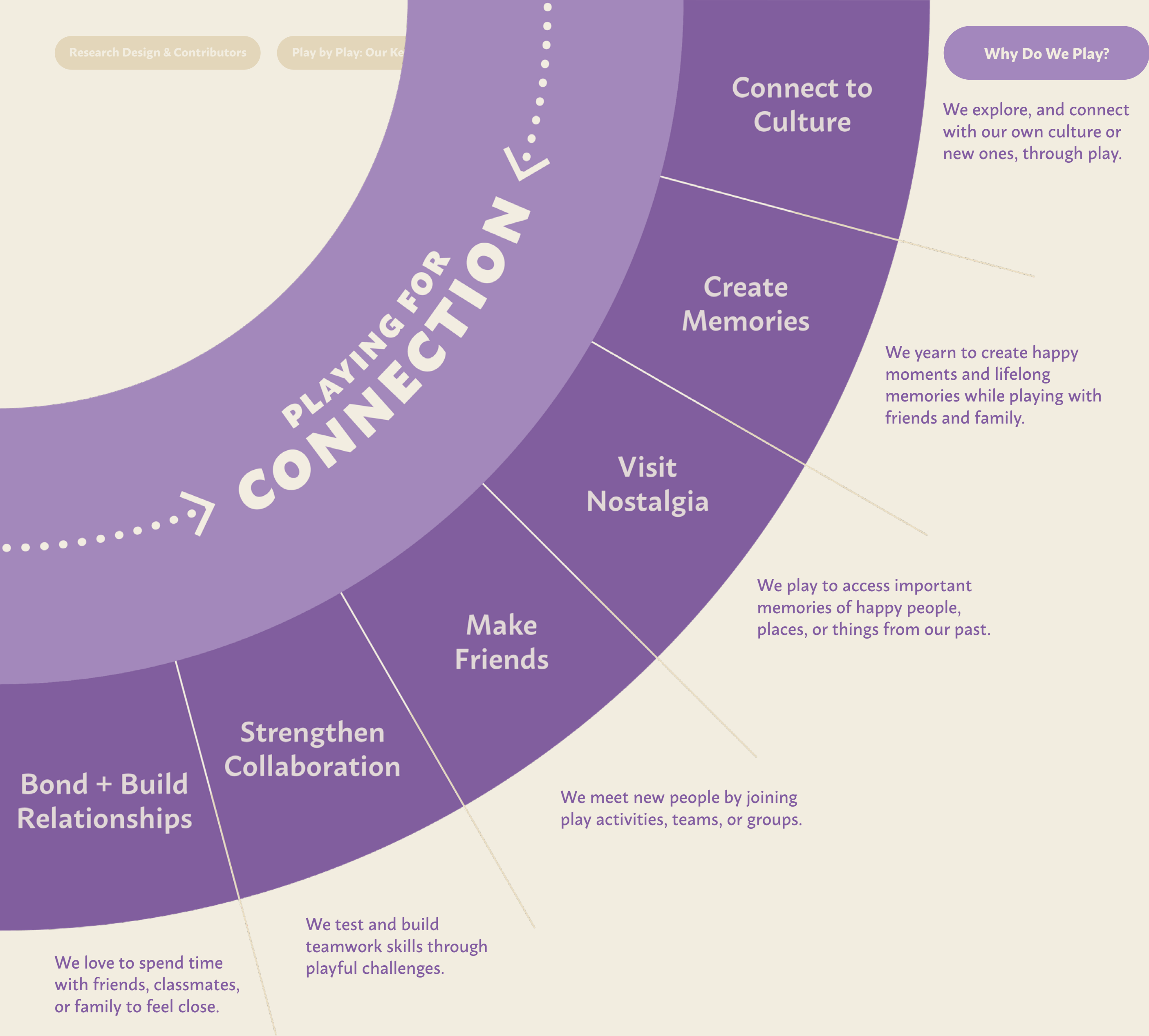
USA

“I play with friends with the aim of brightening up their day, creating a more pleasant and interactive atmosphere.”

Brazil

“My perception of play is that it allows me to relax, unplug, and enjoy life in the moment.”

China



Relationships as Rebellion

In today’s world, isolation is a major issue. We socialize in person less and our sense of community is fractured. Playdates more often have to be arranged through parents than occur organically, and 74% of 18-to-34-year-olds say it’s harder to connect with people today than in the past₅.

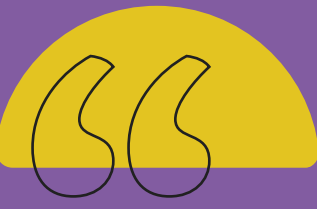
Our research shows that people are especially drawn to play today because it activates powerful connections to people and communities—reinforcing our sense of belonging and connection to humanity.

Top hallmarks of playing for Connection: **Communication, Competition, Shared Experience.**

More than half of people globally prioritize relationship building through their play.

Want to Connect? Try These!

- Playing a board game with family
- Doing an escape room
- Playing with nostalgic toys
- Going down the slide with friends
- Starting a group dance party or sing-along
- Going to the team pizza party after the big game



Family game night is like the one time I actually see them and we're all together sitting around the table, we're laughing, they're acting silly... play arguing back and forth.

Mom to Sabrina (13),
USA



"My daughter plays to feel good, to feel included, and spend time with friends."

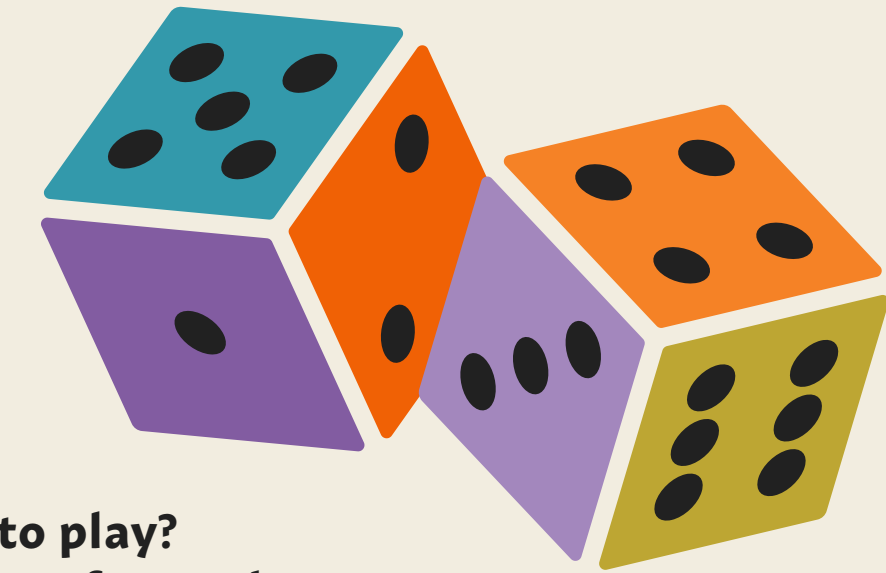
Brazil

"I believe play creates a bond with the kids, and they will always cherish and remember these moments."

South Africa

"I play to enjoy beautiful moments with friends."

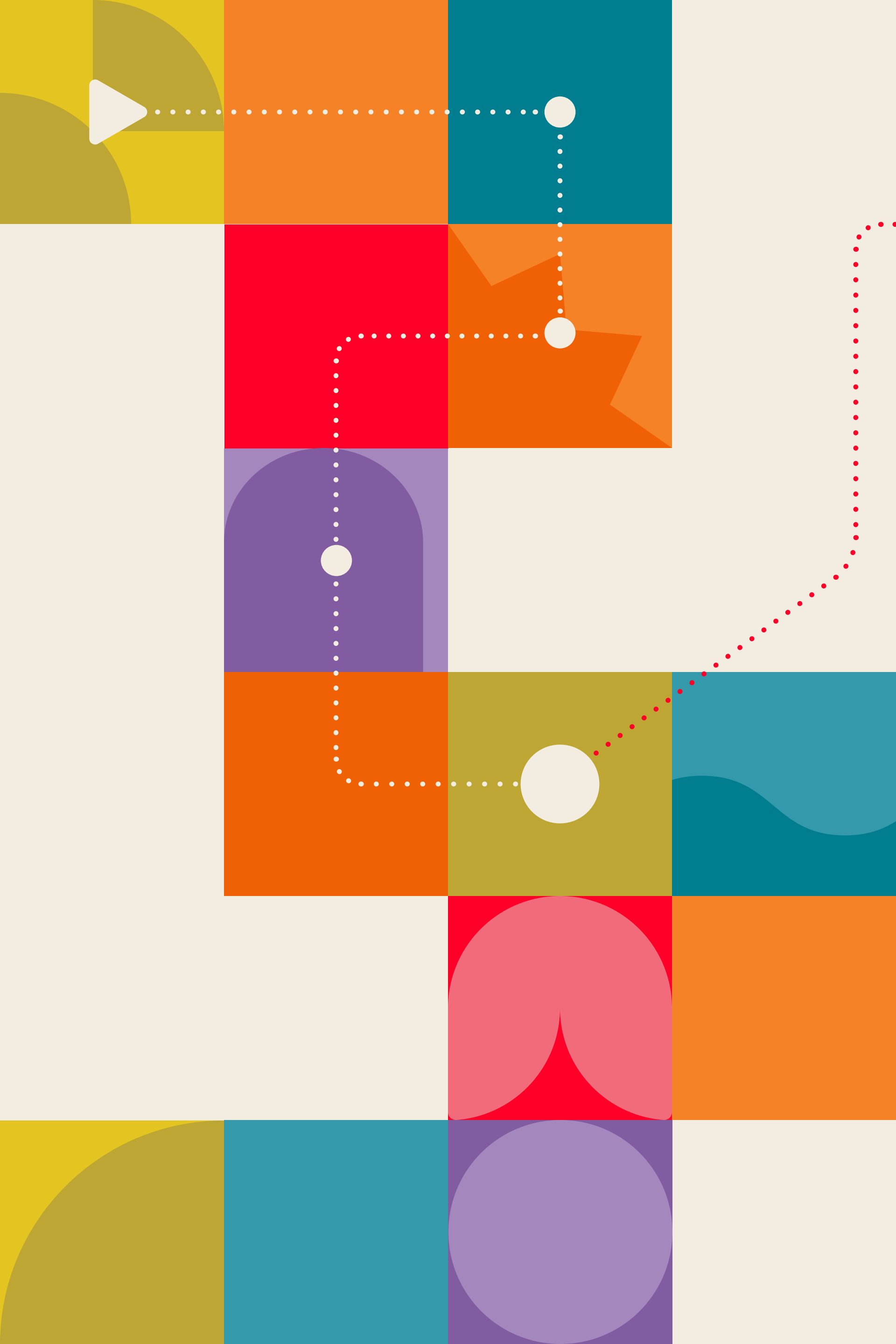
Germany



**Why are you most often driven to play?
List out your favorite ways to have fun and connect
them to the reasons you love doing each one.**

[illegible]

WHY AREN'T WE PLAYING?

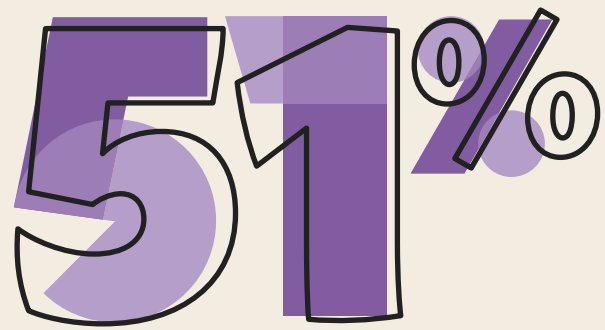


Many of Us Feel Too Busy, Too Lonely, Too Unsafe.



of people say they don't play enough.

Due to our exponentially faster, global, and digitally-connected world, how we play today has fundamentally shifted. Just one generation ago, many children experienced the freedom of roaming unsupervised if they came home when the street lights went on. These days that freedom is rare. Kids are spending more time online and less independently experiencing the physical world. For older kids and adults, busy schedules and the pressure of achievement culture can make play feel like an afterthought or indulgence, not something necessary and immutable.



of people say, “I don’t have enough time.”

Feeling “time poor,” when someone has too many things to do and not enough time to do them, is linked to lower well-being, physical health, and productivity₆. The global wealth gap widening has also led to more pressure for kids to achieve and for adults to put in ever-more hours at work. Countless people we surveyed expressed feeling overwhelmed by daily stress and pressure to perform.

“I face a lot of stress from my studies and my life. I finish my homework at 10pm. In my spare time, I play to relieve stress.”

13-year-old, China



of people say, “I don’t have someone to play with.”

Childhood feels like it’s shrinking, with “phone-based childhood” largely replacing “play-based childhood,” causing a rise in teen anxiety, depression, and even self-harm₇. Living during the 4th Industrial Revolution means we have access to the greatest amount of information, ideas, and communication paths than any other time in human history—yet we feel more disconnected than ever before. We learned the lack of playmates is a key barrier for people of all ages.



of people say, “I don’t feel safe.”

Over the past 15 years, the world has become less peaceful, according to the Global Peace Index₈. Even for those of us lucky enough to not live in a place experiencing intense ongoing violence, because of our hyper-connected, 24-hour media universe, we have a constant front-row seat to our fellow humans’ suffering, and our hearts ache. Violence, instability, and fear aren’t conducive to play, and in our current world, unfortunately not everyone has the privilege to play. For example, globally 49% of girls drop out of sports during adolescence, a rate six times higher than for boys, largely due to concerns around safety, according to a 2024 UNESCO report₉.

Potential Solutions

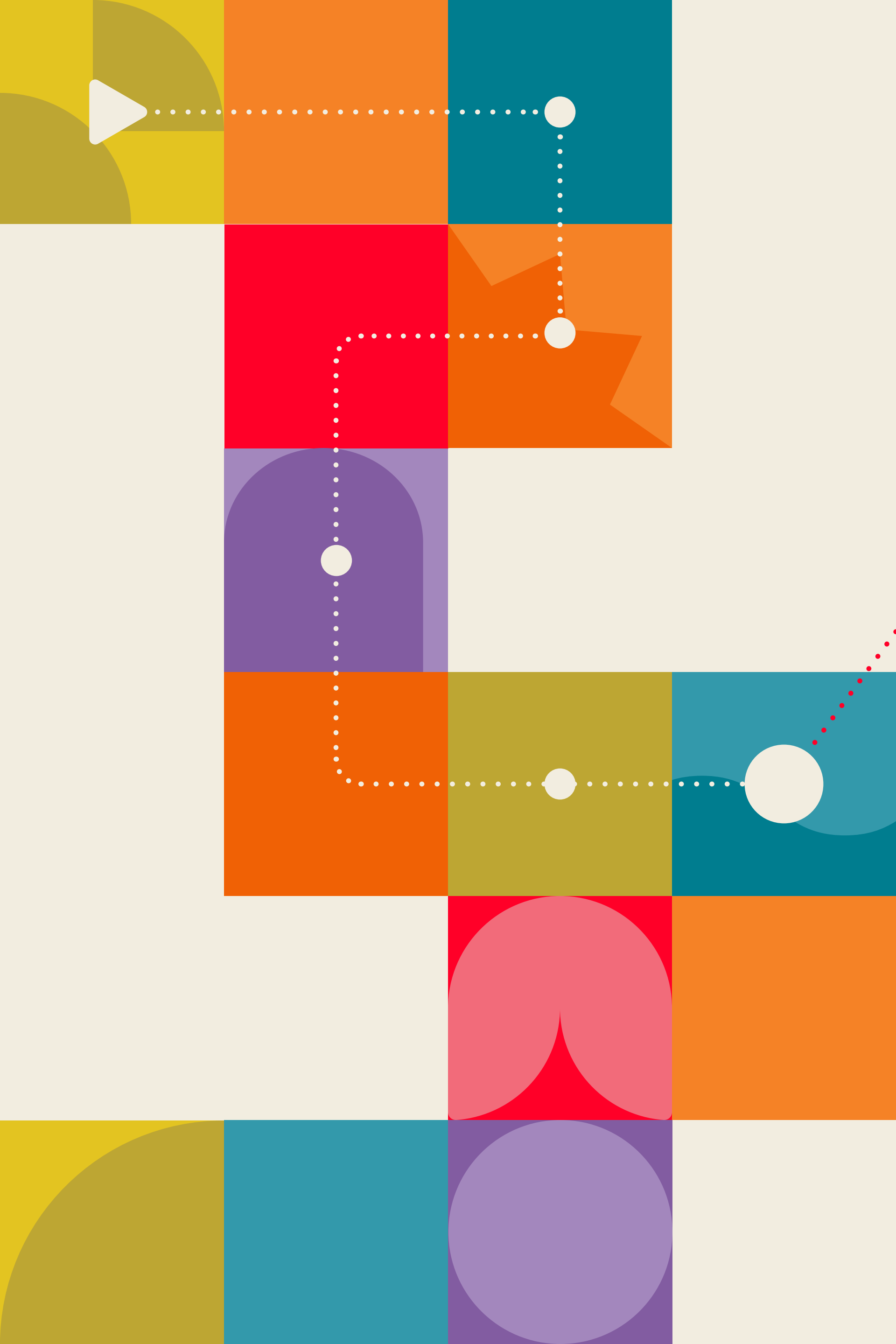
Making Play Possible for All

Mattel works with global philanthropic partners to Play it Forward to children all around the world, regardless of where they live. We believe that everyone deserves the right—the safety, the time, and the community—to play. We see play as a connective tissue that can heal us as individuals and bring us together as a global society.

Micro-Moments of Joy

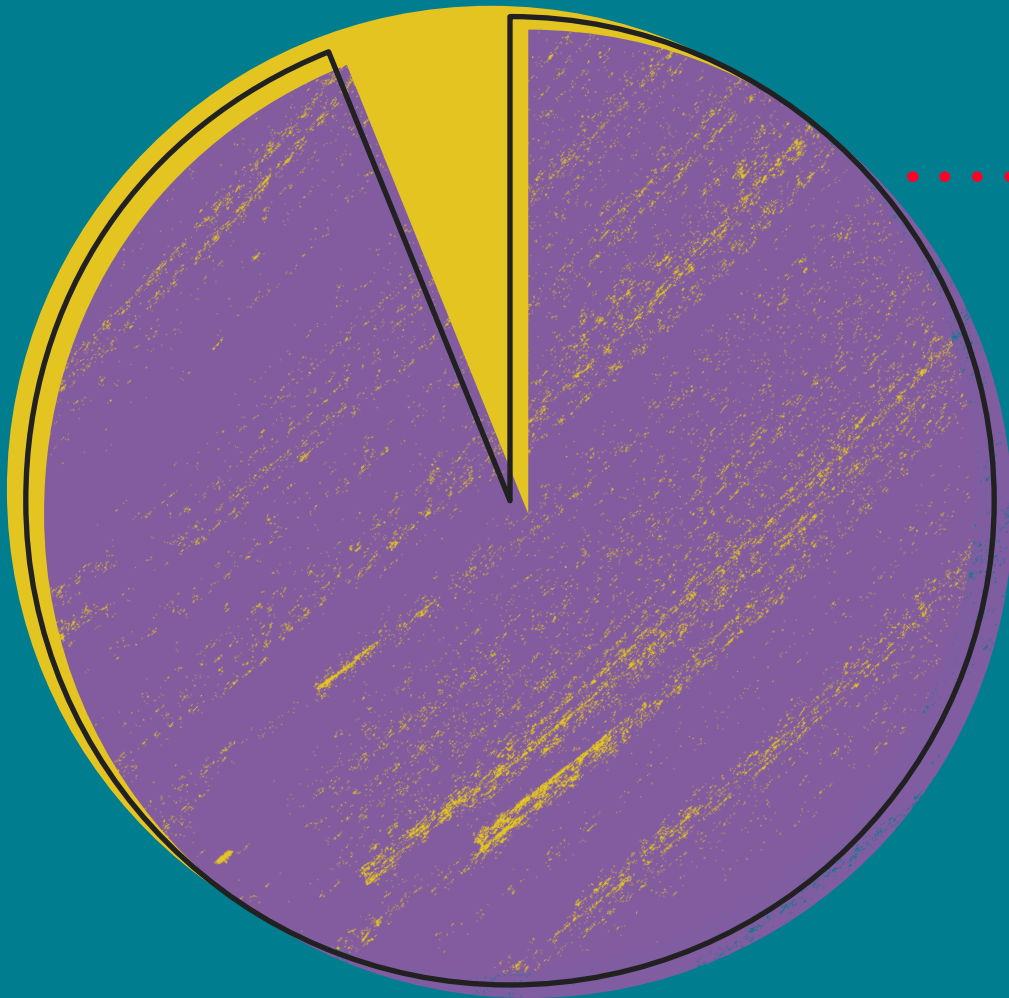
Our research found that 40% of people today typically play in 10-30 minute doses, and we spoke with some who even do bursts of under 10 minutes. That could mean a quick game on your phone while waiting in line at the grocery store or even making everyday tasks fun, like challenging your kid to see how many “baskets” they can make throwing laundry into the hamper. A micro-moment of play may not seem like much, but in a world where nearly everyone wants to experience more happiness and relaxation, that’s a way to bring more joy into even the busiest lives.

DO WE EVER OUTGROW PLAY?



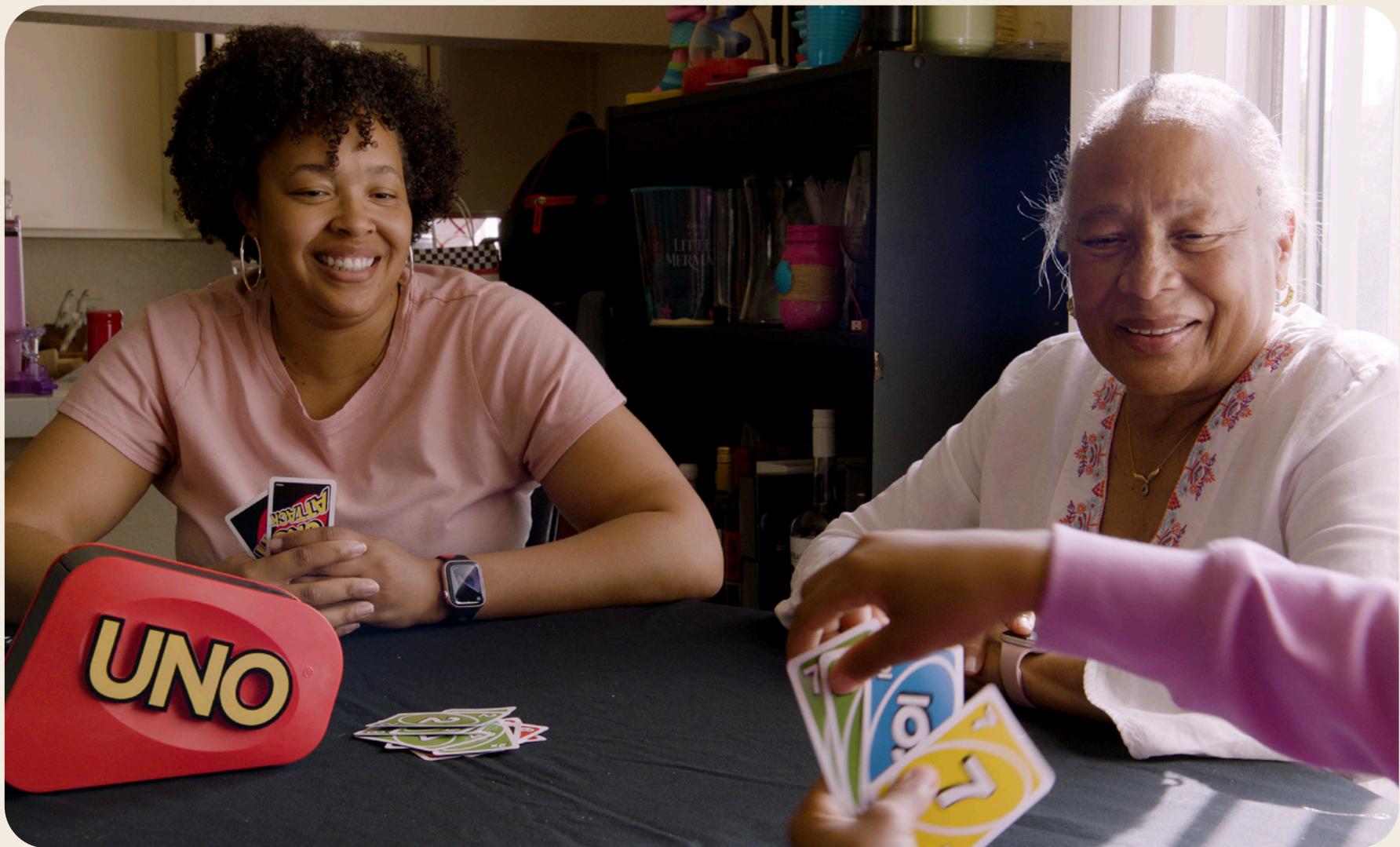
We're Never Too Old to Play!

No matter someone's age or where they live, we found people overwhelmingly agree that play isn't just for children. But there are many pressures and preconceptions that can deter adults from playing as frequently or in the same free ways they used to as kids. Through our research, we tracked how and why playing shifts over our life stages.

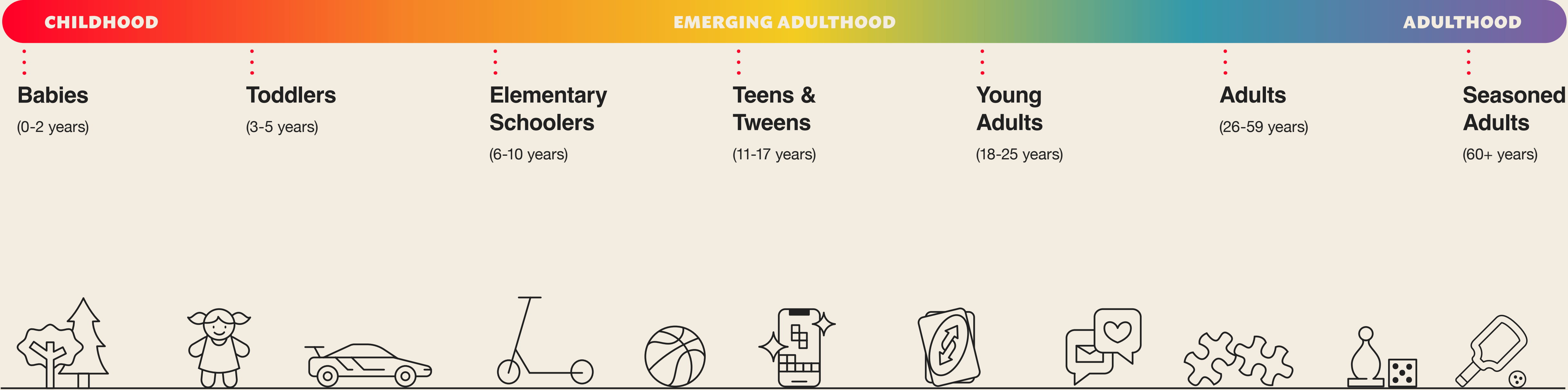


94%

of people agree that play is for all ages.



In Our Research, We Learned from 7 Distinct Age Groups Spanning Babyhood to Elderhood.



CHILDHOOD

86% of newborns to 2-year-olds play multiple times per day.

Infants & Toddlers

0-2 YEARS

Perhaps it's not surprising that when your main life responsibilities are eating, sleeping, and pooping, you have the highest frequency of play; 86% of parents said their newborn-to-2-year-old plays "multiple times per day." At this age, play's purpose is teaching babies about the world around them and how to interact with it. As a result, they tend to enjoy moving, exploring, learning, and experimenting with independence.

Top activities: Cuddling plushies, playing with toys, being outdoors, playing with dolls, stacking blocks, doing developmental activities, and activating sensory features (yes, putting everything in their mouths).

81% of 3-5 year-olds play multiple times per day.

Preschoolers

3-5 YEARS

Pretend playing, building, exploring, and learning are most toddlers' favorite ways to have fun. Creativity and imagination are what often drive them at this life stage. 81% of parents said their 3-to-5-year-old plays "multiple times per day." Physical movement and fostering independence are important aspects of play at this stage, as well as socializing-- learning to share and communicate.

Top activities: Vrooming vehicles, cuddling plushies, riding bikes or scooters, playing with dolls, learning through games, puzzles, and building.

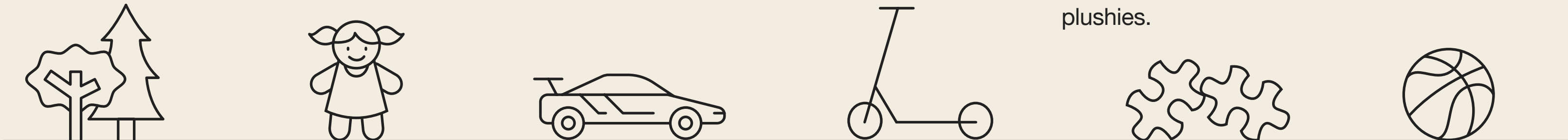
65% of 6-10 year-olds still play multiple times per day.

Elementary Schoolers

6-10 YEARS

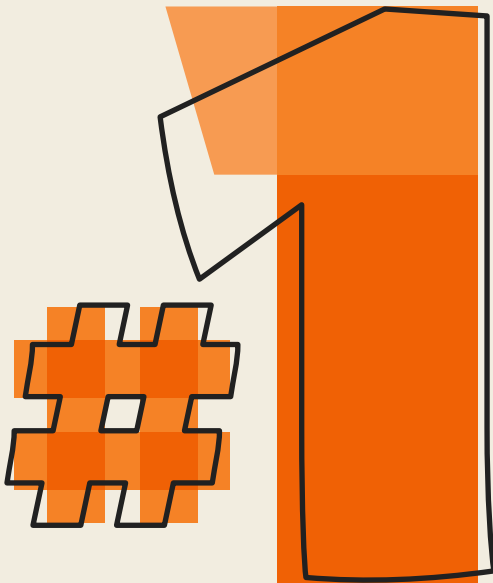
By just 6 years old, we start to see kids spend more time in school and less time playing. While 65% of kids ages 6-10 still play multiple times per day, an increasing share (14%) plays only two or three times per week. Physical movement, experimentation, and collaboration are usually important components of play to these kids. At this age, we find there's a digital gaming on-ramp, where gaming moves into the number-one type of play. It's followed by physical movement/exercise, exploring, creating/designing, and role playing. Expression is also a major reason kids this age want to play, especially imagining or building new realities.

Top activities: Being outdoors, riding bikes or scooters, digital gaming, doing puzzles, playing sports, getting into board games, and cuddling plushies.



CHILDHOOD

The Digital Gaming On-Ramp



Most common play activity from age 6 to 60.

Our research found that when kids reach age 6–10, digital gaming blasts onto the scene and instantly becomes their top-ranked way to play, dethroning physical movement, which is the favorite from birth through age 5. And digital games—on computers, phones, or gaming consoles—aren’t just a phase for elementary schoolers; our research revealed that digital gaming remains the most common way to play from age 6 to 60.

In the U.S., tweens and teens log an average of nearly three hours₁₀ playing digital games each day, and kids age 8 and younger clock 23 minutes. We often hear warnings₁₂ about what the increase in digital gaming can mean for kids, such as poor social skills, less time spent outdoors and less exercise, more exposure to violence, and even gaming “addiction.”

Studies by Mattel have shown that physical play and analog toys have critical value for development; for example, playing with dolls increases brain activity in the posterior superior temporal sulcus region₁₁, which is heavily involved in social and emotional processing skills including empathy.

In moderation, playing age-appropriate digital games can be healthy too, according to experts who say it can help grow similar skills₁₀ that emerge from analog play such as problem solving, fine motor skills, forming an identity, and building community. The issue, then, is about excessive time spent playing digital games, to the point that it creates an opportunity cost to other types of activities. On the whole, we see families striving for a healthy balance between digital and analog play to harness the benefits and the joy of both.



EMERGING ADULthood

41% of teens and tweens play multiple times per day.

22% of young adults play multiple times per day.

Tweens & Teens

11-17 YEARS

At this age, we see a marked decrease in frequency of play because school becomes more difficult and extra curriculars take up more time. Unfortunately, more kids in this group drop down to only playing a couple times a week. Still, 41% of teens and tweens play multiple times per day. That often looks like pursuing challenges, experimentation, and competition through activities like digital gaming, exercising or playing sports, competing, and creating/designing. Possibly because of increasing life stress—both from increased schoolwork and social pressure—relaxation emerges as a new important play emotion, with self-expression and wellbeing emerging as the most important play motivations.

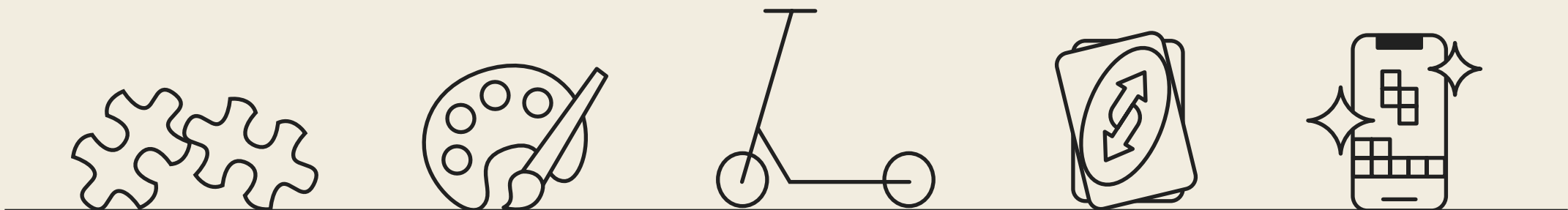
Top activities: Digital gaming, playing sports, being outdoors, playing board games and card games, riding bikes or scooters, and doing puzzles.

Young Adults

18-25 YEARS

By this age, average frequency of play drops to two to three times a week, with the goals of experiencing wellbeing, connection, and self-expression. A “lifelong learning” mentality emerges as people finish school and want to keep exploring. Compared with younger groups, nostalgia and peace jump to the top of the list of feelings people try to achieve when playing.

Top activities: Digital gaming, playing card games and board games, spending time outdoors, playing sports, completing puzzles, and doing arts and crafts.



EMERGING ADULthood

Growing Up with Social Media



For all of us, but especially for teens, there are pros and cons to the proliferation of social media. The downsides are clear, both the increase in users’ depression and the opportunity cost of time on our phones that otherwise could be (and before 2015 likely would’ve been) spent outdoors, talking with friends in real life, dreaming up pretend scenarios, or playing sports.

This is especially true for tweens and teens, whose social media use tends to be more obsessive than casual, according to the results of a 2023 Pew Research Center survey of 13-to-17-year-olds in the U.S., with a third who say they’re on it “almost constantly₁₃.”

Yet in our research, we also heard the upsides. Of the teenagers we surveyed, 64% consider content creation on platforms like TikTok and YouTube to be a form of play, more than for the adults we surveyed. We talked with tweens and teens who create videos or edit photos they post as their form of self-expression. We talked to people who watch makeup tutorials to learn or giggle at dog videos as a way to relax. In short, our research uncovered that social media is a growing factor to consider in creating healthy play habits and ecosystems for young people at these critical times in their development, and the way they explore and express their identities.



64%

of teens consider content creation on platforms like TikTok and YouTube a form of play.

EMERGING ADULthood

Nostalgia Matters

85%

of people say toys are powerful connections to childhood memories.

Interacting with, or even remembering, things from childhood help us reconnect with core memories of joy we experienced. A surprising finding in our study was that nostalgia isn't just for middle-aged and elderly folks — it actually is most common among 18-25-year-olds. Perhaps because they're first experiencing "the real world" as grown-ups, and adulting is hard...and can make us long for the good old days of carefree playing. We even witnessed nostalgia in tweens and teens, for times as recent as seven years prior.



“A lot of the games I like to play now are nostalgic to me because I remember playing them with my sisters when I was 5 years old.”

Sabrina
Age 13, USA



- Play Along
- Sense memories are often the fastest way to transport us back to childhood. Circle any that bring on feelings of nostalgia for you:
- Freeing a doll or action figure from its packaging for the first time
 - The exact way to angle a Barbie shoe so it fits on her curved foot
 - Sinking your hands into clay or dough
 - Scratching your nail over a scented sticker
 - The smell of a crayon or a freshly-sharpened pencil
 - Cotton candy dissolving on your tongue

ADULTHOOD

19% of adults play multiple times per day.

Adults

26-59 YEARS

If someone is a parent during this life stage, play can come roaring back into focus because of spending hours playing pretend or kicking a ball back and forth with their kids—but playing how a kid wants to is different than how an adult would in most cases. While many adults look back at the “good ol’ days” of seemingly endless free time, in reality this age group still plays for their own enjoyment as often as their younger 19-25-year-old counterparts, most commonly two to three times per week. Yet this life stage can be incredibly stressful, between paying rent or a mortgage, caring for aging parents, working a demanding job, and parenting; a recent study by the American Psychological Association revealed that 48% of parents say most days their stress is completely overwhelming, leading the U.S. Surgeon General to issue an advisory on parental stress and mental health¹⁴. It makes sense that for this age range, “relaxation” and “alleviating stress” jump to the top of the list for the ideal feeling while playing. People in this age group are also increasingly likely to seek out connection with others for their play.

Top activities: Spending time outdoors, digital gaming, playing card games and board games, doing puzzles, playing sports, and doing brain teasers.

18% of seasoned adults play multiple times per day.

Seasoned Adults

60+ YEARS

Some might expect that with retirement, time to play balloons, but in fact this age group still plays about as much as the average 19-59-year-old, most commonly two to three times per week. One change we do see here is physical refocusing, with digital gaming dropping from its perch of the most frequent way to play for everyone 6-59 years old, replaced by movement/exercise. Wellbeing to optimize physical and mental health, connection to community, and feeling a sense of accomplishment skyrocket here...could this explain the explosion in the popularity of pickleball for seniors, because it hits the trifecta of wellbeing, community, and accomplishment?

Top activities: Spending time outdoors, playing card games and board games, doing puzzles, playing sports, doing brain teasers, and digital gaming.



“When I was younger, my play was performance-focused and I felt I must develop and always move forward. Nowadays, all of that type of pressure is gone, and I just play for fun and relaxation.”

Marja
Age 75, Finland

ADULTHOOD

Adults Love Toys, Too.



Some people reconnect with their favorite childhood toys in adulthood (which may explain why vintage toys are the most popular among adult fans), and some never took a break from playing. According to a Mattel survey, adults tend to buy toys to play, collect, use as decor, feel a sense of nostalgia, or as a financial investment¹⁵.

For example, Ke, a 36-year-old father in Shenzhen, China, finds joy collecting cars and figurine models. Ke says “Cars are the common hobby to both me and my son...For me personally I really fancy the special shapes of the cars...You can see those designs are very special and different, unique.” Throughout our research we heard that adults love immersing themselves in the colorful and imaginative world of toys throughout the processes of searching, collecting, care-taking, and playing.

43%

of adults buy toys for themselves.¹⁶

76%

of adults believe that physical toys make play activities more enjoyable.



ADULTHOOD

We Can Tap Into Our Child-Like Spirit at Any Age.

70%

of adults feel like they are “part child.”

Through our research, we found that our self-perception doesn't always match our calendar age. That speaks to the fact that many of us feel like we're in limbo between childhood and adulthood—or a happy mixture of both.

62%

of people say play is a mindset or attitude.

One way to keep that feeling we often associate with childhood—freedom, wonder, exploration, imagination—going into adulthood and even old age is by playing. Play helps connect us to that loose, creative, joyful feeling that we can access no matter our physical age.

“I play because I'm an eternal child. I like the freedom of being a child regardless of age.”
Adult
Brazil

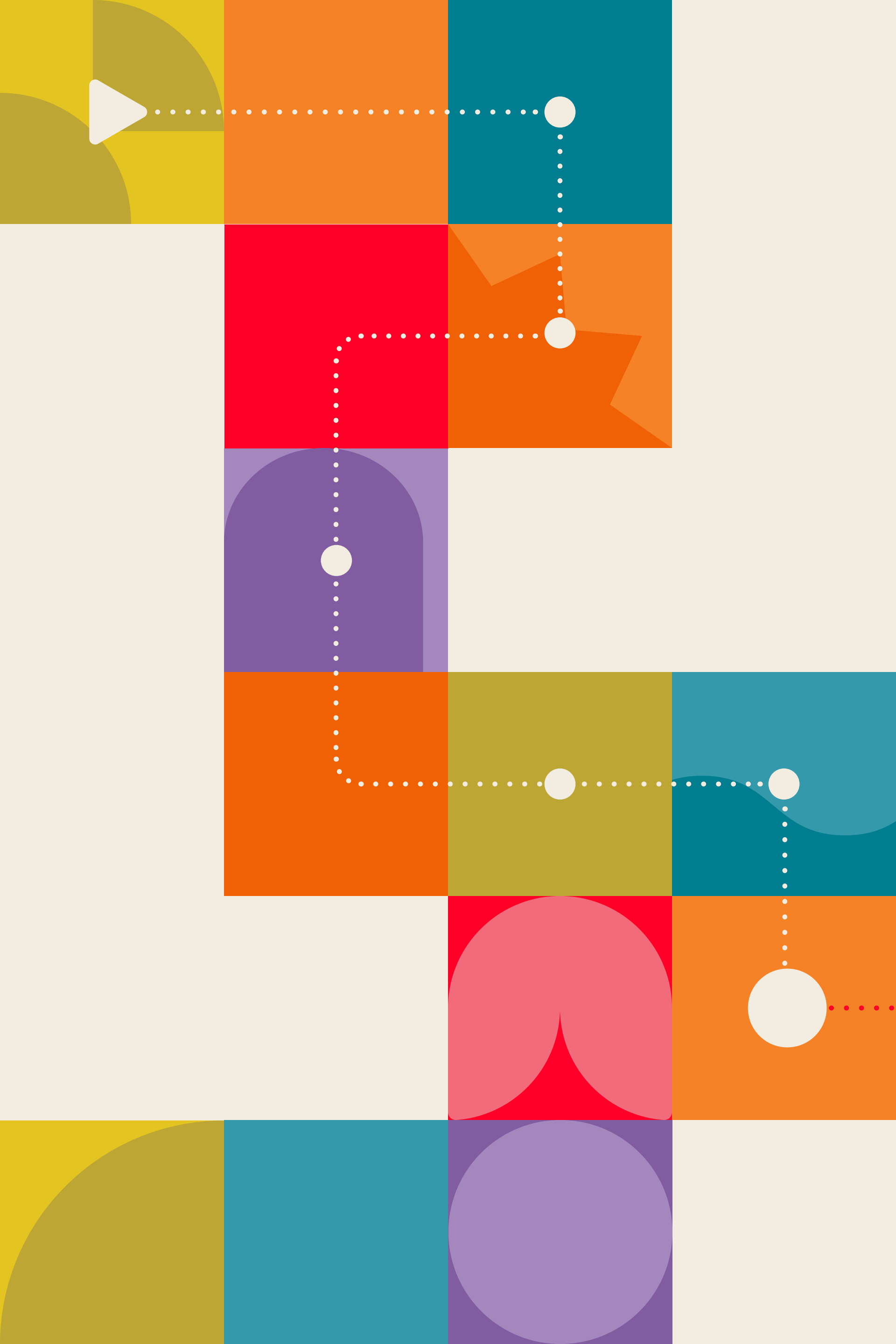




Play Along
Chart out the types of play you’ve enjoyed at different ages. What play activities make you feel nostalgic for younger years? What do you hope to play when you’re older?

CHILDHOOD			EMERGING ADULthood		ADULTHOOD	
<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Babies (0-2 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Toddlers (3-5 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Elementary Schoolers (6-10 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Teens & Tweens (11-17 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Young Adults (18-25 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Adults (26-59 years)</div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>Seasoned Adults (60+ years)</div>

WHAT'S YOUR PLAY PERSONALITY?



There's No One Right Way to Play!

Through our global survey of over 33,000 people, we identified 6 unique Play Personalities—distinct mindsets that are telling about what’s universal and what’s unique about how and why we prefer to play.

The Play Personalities help us see how diverse and expansive play is today. What one personality finds thrilling, another finds boring or even uncomfortable. People approach play in many different ways, and that’s a beautiful thing—one type isn’t better than any other!

The Play Personalities exist across global regions, genders, and ages, and you might identify with just one, or be a blend of several. Knowing your Play Personality or the Play Personalities of your children, friends, and family can help you choose experiences that will delight each other. Or you can use them to encourage each other to try something new outside of your normal comfort zone. We think exploring our Play Personalities helps us understand ourselves better. At Mattel, we’re building upon these Personalities as the foundation for how people like to play and to generate new experiences, toys, and games to give people more options.

Interested to see which resonates with you or your child? Take our quiz.



What's Your Child's Play Personality?

Use for 3-11 year olds. For 12+, see page 50.

1

Your child's happy place is...

- A.** Unleashing their creativity and dreaming up new ideas.
- B.** Exploring the world, asking questions and trying things out.
- C.** Engaging with complex challenges, feeling proud of their growth.
- D.** Enjoying quiet, independent play inside or outside.
- E.** Making happy memories together, as a close unit or group.
- F.** Socializing and interacting with big, fun groups of people.

2

The animal that your child most reminds you of is...

- A.** A butterfly flitting about, landing on whatever flower calls to them.
- B.** An otter cracking open a clam — then doing a fun flip just because.
- C.** A beaver determinedly building its dam.
- D.** A koala relaxing solo in a eucalyptus tree.
- E.** A bear hibernating in a cozy cuddle puddle of other bears.
- F.** A dog scanning the park for friends to hang out with.

3

Why do you think your child likes to play?

- A.** To express their creativity.
- B.** To follow their curiosity
- C.** To realize their potential.
- D.** To relieve stress and recharge.
- E.** To have a sense of belonging with siblings or peers.
- F.** To work together with others and compete as a team.

4

How much does your child care about winning?

- A.** Not at all, as long as they can have fun and express themselves.
- B.** Not much; they know you win some, you lose some.
- C.** Somewhat, but they care more if they perform well.
- D.** Some, but they don't want to stress out about it.
- E.** Losing doesn't matter if they have fun with others.
- F.** A lot — they want to cream those suckers!

5

Your child's favorite toy or game is...

- A.** A figurine or doll; wearing costumes; decorating with crayons/stickers.
- B.** A puzzle; engineering block towers.
- C.** A bilingual book; flashcards.
- D.** A comforting blanket; a stuffed animal.
- E.** Peek-a-boo; a collaborative board game.
- F.** Tag; UNO games; any social game where he can win.

Tally up how many answers you got from each category to see your child's predominant Play Personality— then turn to page 52 to learn more about it.

What's Your Play Personality?

Use for 12-100+ year olds.

1 On a Saturday afternoon, you can find me...

- A. Getting imaginative and making original, colorful creations.
- B. Following my curiosity and exploring something new.
- C. Diligently focusing on solving complex puzzles.
- D. Finding some alone time to escape and recharge.
- E. Taking part in a group outing, making memories together.
- F. Socializing through a high energy team game.

4 When I'm out to dinner with friends, I'm most likely to...

- A. Play a few notes on a piano we pass or make up an interesting backstory about our server's life.
- B. Open an unlabeled door just to see where it goes.
- C. Ask a million follow-up questions about where noodles were invented.
- D. LOL, out to dinner?! I clearly made up an excuse to stay home!
- E. Repeat our inside jokes and convince everyone to take group photos with silly props. #Memories!
- F. Place bets on who will have the cheapest tab; loser has to pay for everyone. Hey, is that a dart board over there?

2 The most relatable sentiment about playing is...

- A. "It makes me feel like a kid and doesn't need a serious purpose."
- B. "It lets me roll my sleeves up and just follow my curiosity."
- C. "It helps me realize my potential."
- D. "It helps me relieve stress, heal, and recharge my mental and physical health."
- E. "It brightens up my life and gives me a sense of belonging."
- F. "It's a fun way to collaborate with others and compete."

5 The game that best describes me is...

- A. Pictionary®* — It's fun to play games that encourage a creative flourish.
- B. UNO® — it's fun how every game turns out differently.
- C. Blokus®— I love strategizing my way across the board.
- D. Solitaire — it's more relaxing to play a card game solo.
- E. Apples to Apples® — I love hearing what wild things my friends come up with.
- F. Bounce Off™— the action, excitement and competition make a night with friends more enjoyable.

*Pictionary and associated trademarks and trade dress are owned by Pictionary Inc

3 In my downtime, I'm absolutely not interested in...

- A. Developing my leadership skills or optimizing my health.
- B. Sitting still learning trivia or facts.
- C. Alleviating stress and relaxing.
- D. Connecting with other people.
- E. Learning a new skill to "improve" myself.
- F. Letting my mind wander peacefully.

Tally up how many answers you got from each category to see your predominant Play Personality— then turn the page to learn more about it.

The 6 Play Personalities



The Skill Seekers
Mostly C's: See Page 56



The Solo Navigators
Mostly D's: See Page 58



The Curiosity Cultivators
Mostly B's: See Page 54



The Memory Makers
Mostly E's: See Page 60



The Colorful Creators
Mostly A's: See Page 52



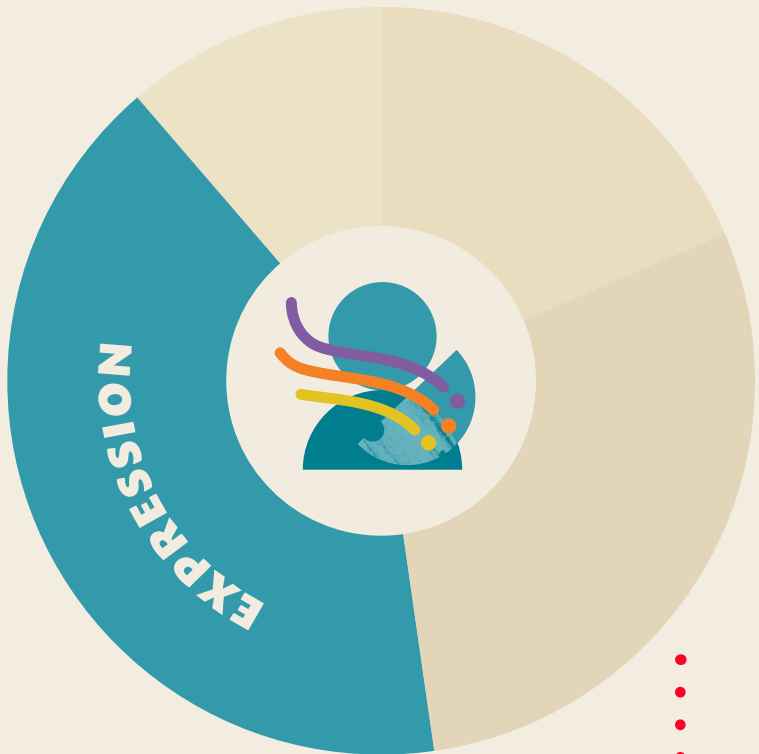
The Social Sparklers
Mostly F's: See Page 62



“Play unlocks the full force of my creativity!”



The Colorful Creators



These creative people love using their imaginations to express themselves and their ideas.

Colorful Creators are fun-loving creatives who believe play is a pathway to express new ideas. They tend to value play for its role in stimulating their imagination and flexing their storytelling muscles. They enjoy dreaming up vibrant worlds where they can experience awe and wonder — the more possibilities, the better! Colorful Creators are driven by the desire to experience amusement and indulge in sensory pleasure, like the joy of listening to music, squishing a blob of dough between their fingers, or creating a one-of-a-kind art project.

Imagination • Exploration • The Senses

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Think play has the power to bridge social differences
- Believe the ability to come up with ideas helps them play
- Enjoy arts and crafts
- Prefer toys that are customizable, tactile, and aesthetically pleasing

THEY PLAY TO...

- Experience awe and wonder
- Imagine and build new realities

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Develop skills
- Optimize health

Meet Some Colorful Creators

Emlika

Age 3, Finland

Play for Emlika is joy, optimism, emotional growth — and chinchillas!



Emlika is a vibrant, energetic big sister to a human little sister and several pet chinchillas. “Watching Emlika play, she lights up,” says her mom. “Her mission is to play all the time, and we see imagination in every form of her play.” Emlika loves using her imagination for drawing, roleplay, getting physical outside, and creating stories. When she plays with her toys, she likes to try on different personalities of each character (is she the kind helper today, or the villain?). She imitates the characters’ qualities by acting out what they might think, say, and do, she expresses and experiments with different parts of herself.

“Her mission is to play all the time, and we see imagination in every form of her play.”

In addition to acting out scenes and roles with toys, Emlika loves using her body for physical play—everything from cuddling her furry pets to making up a silly new dance to howling like a wolf. Awoooo!



Tina

Age 45, USA

Play for Tina is breaking out of the black and white world and living in full color.



This mom of four lives, plays, and parents by the mantra, "fun and imagination without boundaries, "infusing creativity, joy, and self-expression into her daily life. That means a lot of variety, doing everything from tactile making (sewing clothes, knitting, and collaging mood boards) to baking cookies to walking on the beach.

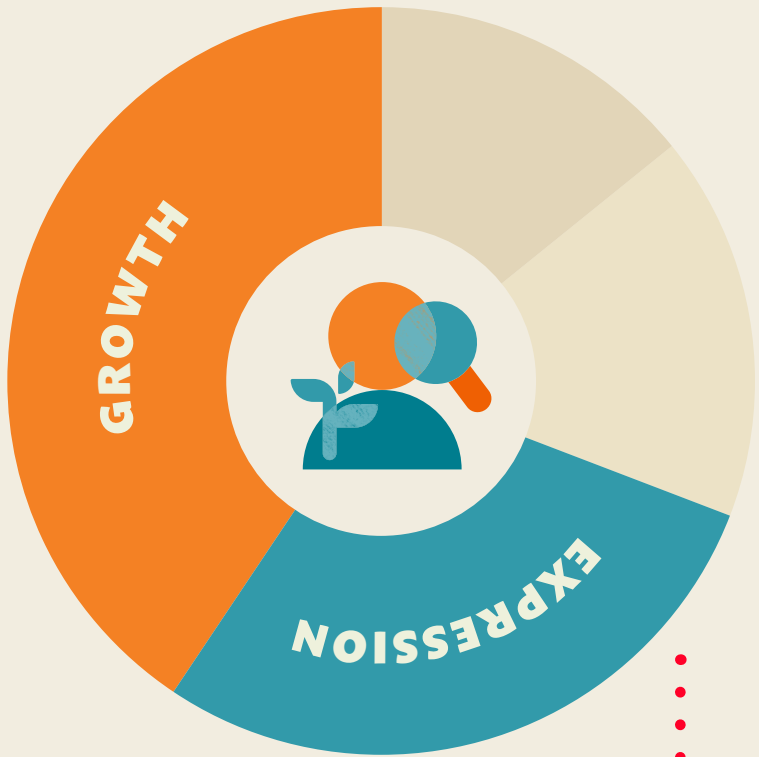
“My mantra is: fun and imagination without boundaries.”

Even for formal events like a wedding, Tina shows how she brings moxie, fun, and personalization: her and her husband had their wedding party wear superhero costumes under their formalwear, which they busted out after the ceremony to surprise the other guests. As she’s gotten older, Tina maintains a joyful, childlike attitude, which she says is bolstered by seeing her kids experience exciting small moments, like the first time they made snow angels. For Tina, life is better in color.

“Play is how I freely explore and experiment.”



The Curiosity Cultivators



These inquisitive people play to discover more about themselves and the world around them.

Curiosity Cultivators love to learn through hands-on play where they can actively participate and fully engage their inquisitive nature. They value the freedom and flexibility of a playful mindset and tend to thrive on following their curiosity and intuition rather than taking a set path to a specific goal. They might enjoy tinkering and building an impromptu race track or fort in the backyard or mastering a new trick on the skate ramp with friends. Curiosity Cultivators aren't afraid to experiment, in fact; they embrace a little messiness in their play!

Curiosity • Experimentation • Physical Movement

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Play only when there's access to space and supplies
- Enjoy being outdoors or playing with plush toys, dolls, educational games, arts and crafts
- Prefer toys that are customizable and open-ended

THEY PLAY TO...

- Express themselves
- Learn and gain knowledge

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Optimize health

Meet Some Curiosity Cultivators

Zihao

Age 3, China

Play for Zihao is discovering how the world works.



Don't call Zihao's living room a mess—call it an exploration lab. He's constantly curious, moving from one activity to another and trying new things to experience what it feels like and see what happens. One moment he's clicking together



“I made this so Zihao could express himself beyond the edges of a piece of paper.”

a train set, then zooming cars through the Hot Wheels garage, then building a tall tower with blocks, then knocking over the tower, then calmly listening to his mom read him a book. Next he's off to draw on his chalkboard wall, which his mom installed, “so Zihao could express himself beyond the edges of a piece of paper.” Rather than hoping for him to become the next Picasso, Zihao's mom's true wish is that his play is helping him learn and develop his character; as a result, when he's experimenting with play, she often extends his playtime because she sees it as beneficial beyond the moment. Score!



Jack

Age 8, USA

Play for Jack is skateboarding!



Most Curiosity Cultivators prefer to discover and learn by diving into physical activity, letting their bodies help them explore the world around them. That resonates for Jack, who says, “When I'm learning in a classroom, it's a lot harder to just sit there for a long time. When I'm playing, I can learn while I move around, and that's a lot easier.” While he enjoys physical activities like wrestling his brother and bouncing on the family trampoline, Jack's favorite is skateboarding. He hopes to go pro one day, and loves to spend hours on his board at skate parks and competitions, practicing in the yard, and even using a scaled-down finger-skate deck to practice moves with his hands. In addition to learning by doing, Jack's dad points out that his son's version of play involves an incredible amount of perseverance. In skateboarding, “you fall, you get back up. So learning to be a better skateboarder is also practicing how to show up as a better person.”

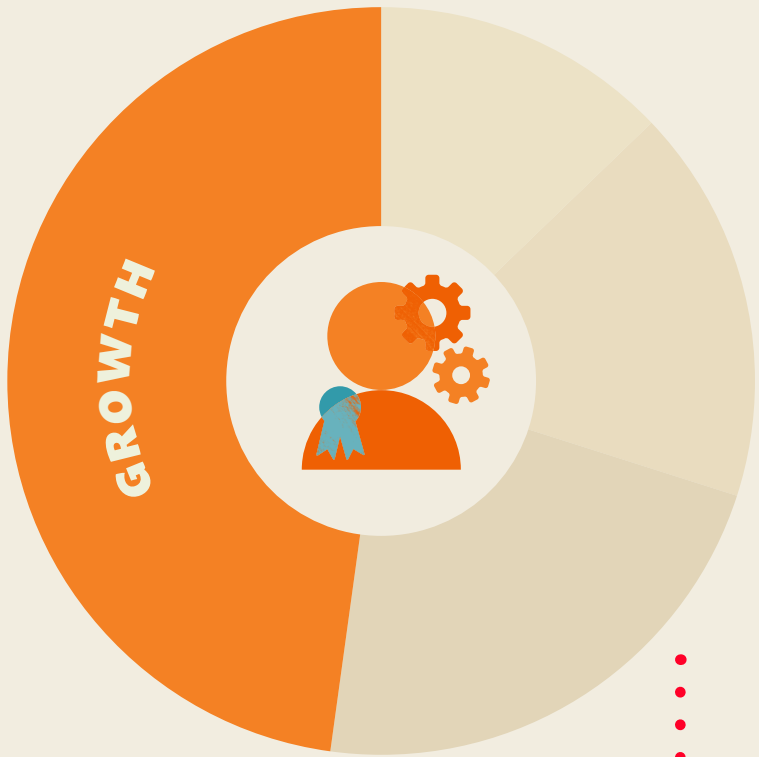


“You fall, you get back up. So learning to be a better skateboarder is also practicing how to show up as a better person.”

“Play helps me realize my potential.”



The Skill Seekers



These driven people play to learn, grow, and build skills for the future.

Skill Seekers are curious lifelong learners who believe play can also help them achieve important goals. They tend to understand play’s value in helping them develop new skills they can use even outside of the game, such as leadership qualities, resilience, or emotional intelligence. They enjoy the feeling of trying their hardest and achieving something, whether that’s small or large, together or independently. Skill Seekers are focused, open-minded, and probably would make a great strategy game partner!

Challenge • Knowledge • Confidence

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Believe play can be used to achieve important goals
- See play as a physical activity
- Enjoy sports, puzzles, building toys, and battling games

THEY PLAY TO...

- Learn and gain knowledge
- Build confidence and character
- Build emotional intelligence

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Alleviate Stress

Meet Some Skill Seekers

Charles

Age 12, USA

Play for Charles is feeling his mind grow and being as good as he can be.



Even though Charles is a tween, he’s already thinking about the future. That means using his leisure time to practice leadership, like by serving as the captain of his flag football team. Charles also loves to hone his existing skills and learn new ones, like solving a spatial puzzle game even faster, reading about new concepts, competing in speech and debate club, and developing new designs for video games.

“Play is an opportunity to learn.”

"Play is an opportunity to learn," he says. "Puzzles definitely help my mind grow because they require you to learn new algorithms and always be better than your last solve." He likes that these skills don’t just make him a better puzzler but help him develop the soft skills—he names maturity, confidence, and public speaking—that will help him grow intellectually and emotionally.



Liyana

Age 5, USA

Play for Liyana is learning new things and practicing empathy with family.



“She’s very inquisitive, and she always wants to know more.”

Liyana is so interested in finding out new facts and committing them to memory that she can recite all 50 states and their capitals; she also gleefully calls out the name of each U.S. president (in reverse order from present day back to George Washington, of course). Did we mention she’s 5 years old? Like her fellow Skill Seekers, Liyana thrills at opportunities to learn, memorize, and challenge herself. Rather than considering this drudgery, learning “makes me feel happy and excited,” she says.



But growth to her is more holistic than growing only her book knowledge. Liyana plays with her grandparents often and appreciates soaking in their intergenerational wisdom. Her mom notes Liyana’s empathy and kindness and that she also has always had a knack for learning. "She's very inquisitive, and she always wants to know more. She is happy to put in the time and effort to learn about things that interest her," her mom says. Check back on Liyana at age 35, when she will likely be adding herself to that list of U.S. presidents!



“Play helps me clear my mind and relax.”



The Solo Navigators



These people enjoy independent play to find peace and renewed energy.

Solo Navigators are happy to play on their own and believe play can be a healthy escape. They tend to understand play’s value as a foundation to their wellbeing because of how calm it makes them feel. They enjoy seeking out moments of focused play that relaxes them or taking on the “good stress” of being absorbed in a challenging game. Solo Navigators especially appreciate how immersive play can be — using their full attention to dive into a fantastical world or engaging their senses through music, water, or other tactile materials.

Relaxation • Focus • Fantasy

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Play alone or independently
- Play only when they feel safe and in the mood
- Enjoy being outdoors or using puzzles and fidget toys
- Prefer toys that stimulate their senses

THEY PLAY TO...

- Alleviate stress and heal
- Optimize physical and mental health
- Build resilience

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Socialize or strengthen relationships

Meet Some Solo Navigators

Taoran

Age 9, China

Play for Taoran is quiet time where he can dive in without interruption.



Taoran says his grandparents love playing raucous poker games, but that’s the antithesis of his perfect day. “I don’t like this noisy feeling. I prefer playing at home where I can be quieter,” he says. His own room is a workshop where he can pursue his interests—drawing, writing, and racing Hot Wheels cars—without having to consider someone else’s preferences.

“I never feel lonely when I’m swimming, playing, or reading.”

And rather than playing team sports, Taoran prefers to clock hours in the pool long-distance swimming, his perfect individual sport. “I never feel lonely when I’m swimming, playing, or reading,” he says. “I can be myself without anybody interrupting.”



Yuka

Age 23, Finland

Play for Yuka is escaping into fantastical worlds of her own making.



“I tend to dream away to different worlds.”

Yuka fantasizes of peacefully living in the forest, a combination of two things she adores (being in nature and being on her own) because they recharge her so much. She’s incredibly creative and spends her time dreaming up fantasy worlds, then bringing them to life. To do that, she makes detailed dioramas, develops characters for her own comic books, sews costumes, designs props, and takes photos “from a fairy’s perspective”—think super close-ups of moss that play with scale so they look like a forest. “Imagination and creativity are truly essential aspects of who I am,” she says. “I tend to dream away to different worlds.”

“Play unites us so we can support each other.”



The Memory Makers



These team players use play as a way to bond and build life-long memories.

Memory Makers are relationship-centered and happiest when they feel closely connected to their favorite people. They tend to understand play’s value as a path to building a sense of community and belonging. They enjoy relaxation and competition in equal measure—that might mean a lively family game of UNO, gathering friends to play at recess, or delighting in a special trip to the amusement park with teammates. Memory Makers are generous and see play as a gift to themselves and others; they savor playtime and are always looking out for new ways to bring people together.

Sharing • Belonging • Relaxation

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Play card games and improv/joking games
- Include physical movement, relaxation, and belonging in their play
- Prefer toys that stimulate their senses, are aesthetically pleasing, and represent worlds they like.

THEY PLAY TO...

- Strengthen personal relationships
- Socialize with others
- Alleviate stress

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Gain new knowledge
- Build confidence
- Use their imaginations

Meet Some Memory Makers

Marja

Age 75, Finland

Play for Marja is building and maintaining her communities.



Marja has had a 60-year-plus love affair with diving. “It makes me feel alive, like I’m flying forever, even though it’s only seconds,” she says. But it’s not just the sensation of gliding through the air, nor her countless trophies from competitive diving, that Marja loves most—it’s the community she’s built through diving. She coaches younger divers and is still in touch with her former coach, who’s now nearly 90 years old. Making new friends and



Loneliness is one of the worst things, and having several different communities helps me connect with others and share our joy.”

maintaining her relationships over the years is critical to Marja’s enjoyment of both work and play; though she’s retired, she keeps in touch with former coworkers and is also close with her extended family. “Loneliness is one of the worst things, and having several different communities helps me connect with others and share our joy,” she says.



Ke

Age 36, China

Play for Ke is having fun with his coworkers, friends, and family.



I try to bring play into all of my relationships.”

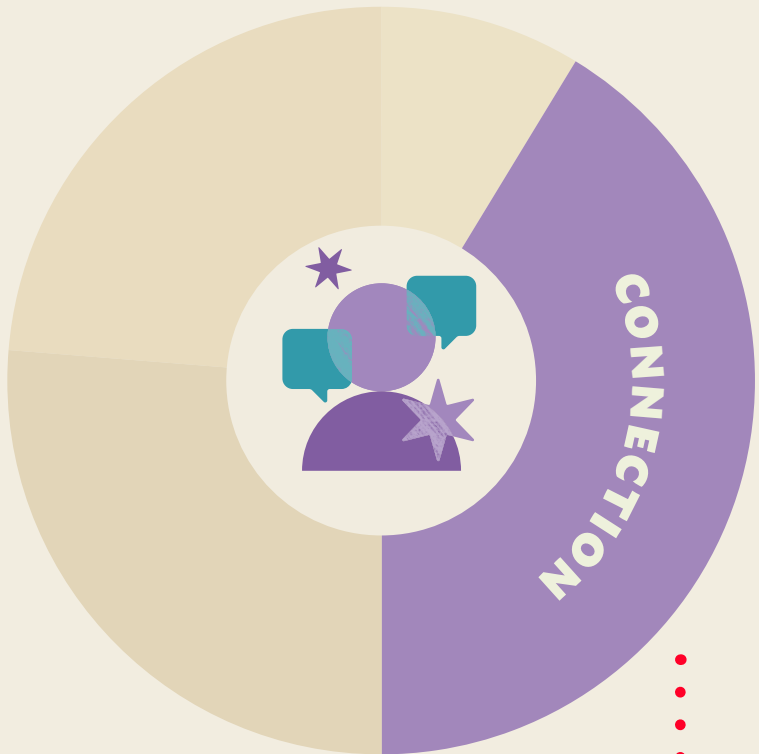
Let’s face it: getting older, especially moving up at work and having a child, can mean play gets crowded out by responsibilities. “I’m very busy with work and don’t have a lot of time for play,” says Ke, “so I try to bring play into all of my relationships.”

At work, he’s a media team leader, and he makes room for his employees to bond through shared adventures like an escape room or LARPing (live action role playing), which he’ll also do for 10-hour stretches with friends when they have time. “I don’t want to be too alone. It’s important to me to socialize,” he says. Ke connects with his family, especially his young son, by playing together with Hot Wheels cars or board games, and going together to look for collectible cars whenever he gets home from a business trip.

“Play is my favorite way to make new friends.”



The Social Sparklers



These people shine through highly-social play and delight in the energy of friendly competition.

Social Sparklers are outgoing and compassionate individuals. They value play as a way to forge new connections with people—whether it’s through dynamic team challenges or simply hanging out together. They enjoy spending time with friends, which is why they seek out social play experiences like team sports, group board games, and role-playing games. Social Sparklers love the feeling of winning — especially when they achieve it as a team. They are inclusive and warm-hearted because they truly believe in the saying, “the more, the merrier!”

Confidence • Compassion • Competition

MORE LIKELY TO...

- Play with others, like sports and team activities
- Enjoy challenge and competition
- Feel both confidence and compassion while they play
- Prefer toys that stimulate their senses, are customizable, and depict characters they like

THEY PLAY TO...

- Socialize with others
- Strengthen personal relationships

BUT NOT NECESSARILY TO...

- Optimize mental health
- Heal

Meet Some Social Sparklers

Robin

Age 23, Finland

Play for Robin is anytime he's together with friends.

“It's always more fun to do something together than alone,” says Robin. His favorite ways to play are role-playing games or hiking with friends, chatting with hikers he meets around the shared bonfire, and even just driving around and talking with his buddies. A self-described extrovert, he says playing as a group uplifts everyone, regardless of what they're actually doing. “You get to learn something new together or just share the experience with other people,” he says.



“It’s always more fun to do something together than alone”

A fantasy role-playing game he plays with friends has been going on for a year and a half, and he feels a sense of pride when friends immediately recognize new figurines are his hand-painted creations—being known deeply by those around you, as well as competing with them and rooting them on, makes him feel part of something larger than himself.

Emersyn

Age 7, USA

Play for Emersyn is being with her friends and family.



Emersyn lives with her mom and grandma and loves playing games with them, especially UNO Attack!®, as well as leading family dance parties. The main thing she’s looking for is a fun group hang and in classic Social Sparkler style, she considers everyone a friend or a friend-to-be. Emersyn creates new bonds everywhere she goes, even chatting up new buddies as



“Play feels like kindness.”

they wait in the checkout line. “It’s important for everybody to have a friend,” she says. While many kids enjoy playing with Barbie dolls on their own, Emersyn prefers to make up stories about her Barbies and other dolls and act them out with friends and family. She even Facetimes with friends and relatives for Barbie time, asking them to voice the parts of some of the dolls so they can interact. To Emersyn, this kind of social play, “feels like kindness.”

The Meaning and Power of Play is Expanding.

As we criss-crossed the globe chatting with people of all different races, beliefs, genders, and economic classes, we heard one common theme: people truly believe in the power of play. The great majority told us that more time playing can make our lives better as individuals and can also change our global society for the better.

We encourage people of all ages to make more space for play every day. Our hope is that adding in more play will make our wild, precious lives more engaging and meaningful. And even more than that, we believe that playing more can help us create a more connected, caring world.

After all, we heard thousands of people around the planet agreeing that:



Play can improve people's health and wellbeing (81%)



Play can solve isolation and loneliness (87%)



Play can even bridge social differences (79%)

There's Inspiration Everywhere.

We learned from inspiring figures across the world on how play can help build a brighter tomorrow.





Meet Pat Rumbaugh

Executive Director of Let's Play America, aka "The Play Lady"

“Start small but dream big. Play is limitless.”

"In the future, play will be totally accepted by everyone. It will become the norm. It will no longer be on the back burner. Play will now be on the front burner. And so when an adult 30-something or 50-something, or super-senior says, 'I'm going to go out and play for an hour,' that'll be common. Play will be just part of our lives and society as a whole will be so much better off."



Meet Edgard Gouveia Jr.
Global Game Organizer, LiveLab, Brazil

“**Play can solve the world’s problems.**”

"Play has the power to re-enchant life and bring out the best of humanity —and to do it unbelievably fast. In the 500-person games I’ve designed, like scavenger hunts and collective adventures, a whole town, city, or even a whole country can play together to solve a collective challenge. Games create a field of trust, safety, love, and empathy —when you create that, everybody wants to join and help. Individually we don’t know how to solve big issues like climate change...but playfulness gives us a superpower."



Meet Takaharu Tezuka

Architect of Fuji Kindergarten,
Tezuka Architects, Japan



Play opens
a door to a
new world.



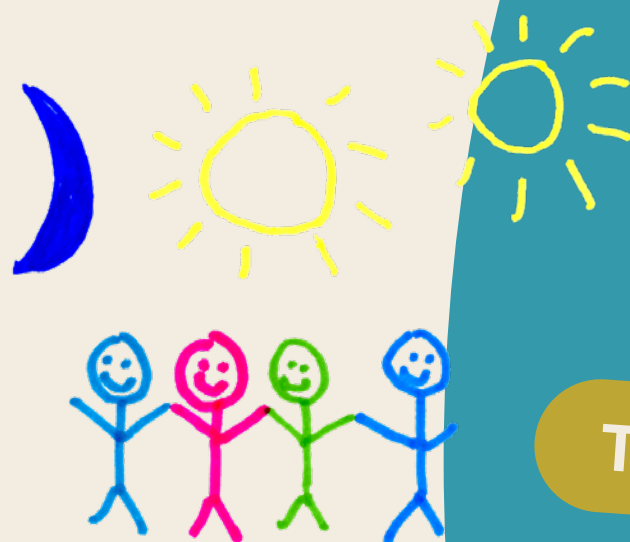
"When you play, you improvise. You have to explore. Play is spontaneous. Play is a kind of desire to seek knowledge or possibility. In some ways, play is a door to a new world, a new era. A future without play does not exist."

"Play has the power to help us share more. In designing spaces, when you want to encourage sharing, a square shape is not good. People on the corners are not included. A circle or oval shape is more natural. The openness is full of possibilities."

Let's Imagine a Future Filled with Play.

At Mattel, our research has long shown the positive effects of play. For example, we've learned how playing with dolls activates parts of the brain¹¹ that allow children to develop empathy and social processing skills. Other critical research also demonstrates the positive physical benefits of play, as well as its emotional and mental benefits, including building confidence, problem solving, and learning how to work in a community¹⁷.

In our travels around the globe, we asked people to imagine their ideal Play Planet—an alternate planet where everyone has the ability to play more. We were delighted to see how powerful the idea could be for our future.



People believe play can create a future world with more...





Play Along
Draw your own Play Planet.
How would people play here?
What makes this planet different from ours?

On My Play Planet...



We Invite You to Explore The Shape of Play with us.

We hope this report has inspired you to embrace play and its power to bring joy, growth, wellbeing, expression, and connection to you and those around you. Our mission with this work is to further the conversation around play, break down barriers, and inspire better futures.

We leave you with an invitation to participate in this movement and create a better world together with us.

That starts with asking...

- **How might you invite more play into your life?**

Whether through small moments of joy, creativity, or spontaneity, play can enrich your routine in unexpected ways.

- **Where could play help you try something new, or expand your community?**

Play fosters curiosity and connection—sparking new ideas, bridging differences, and bringing people together.

- **How might you utilize play in your workplace?**

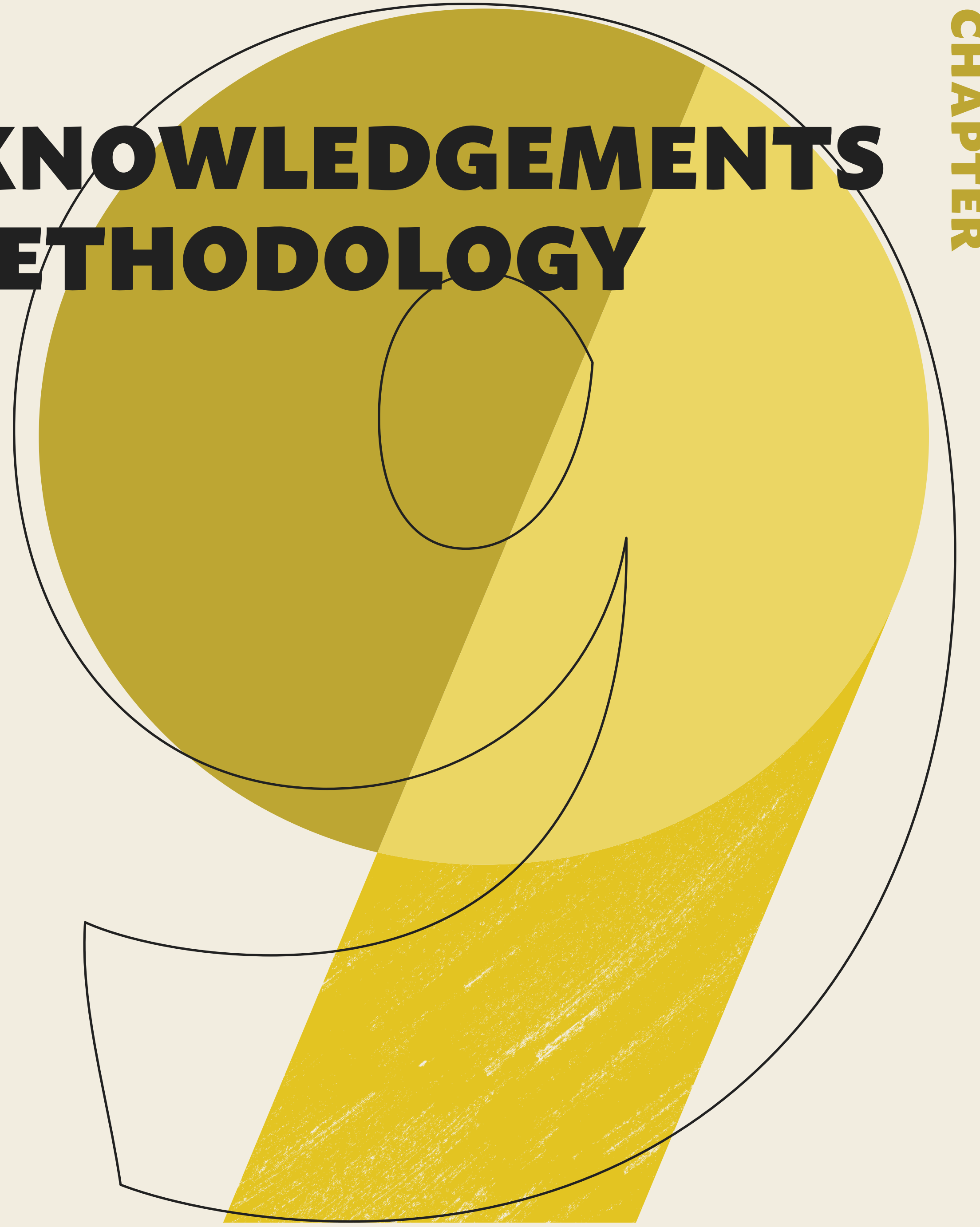
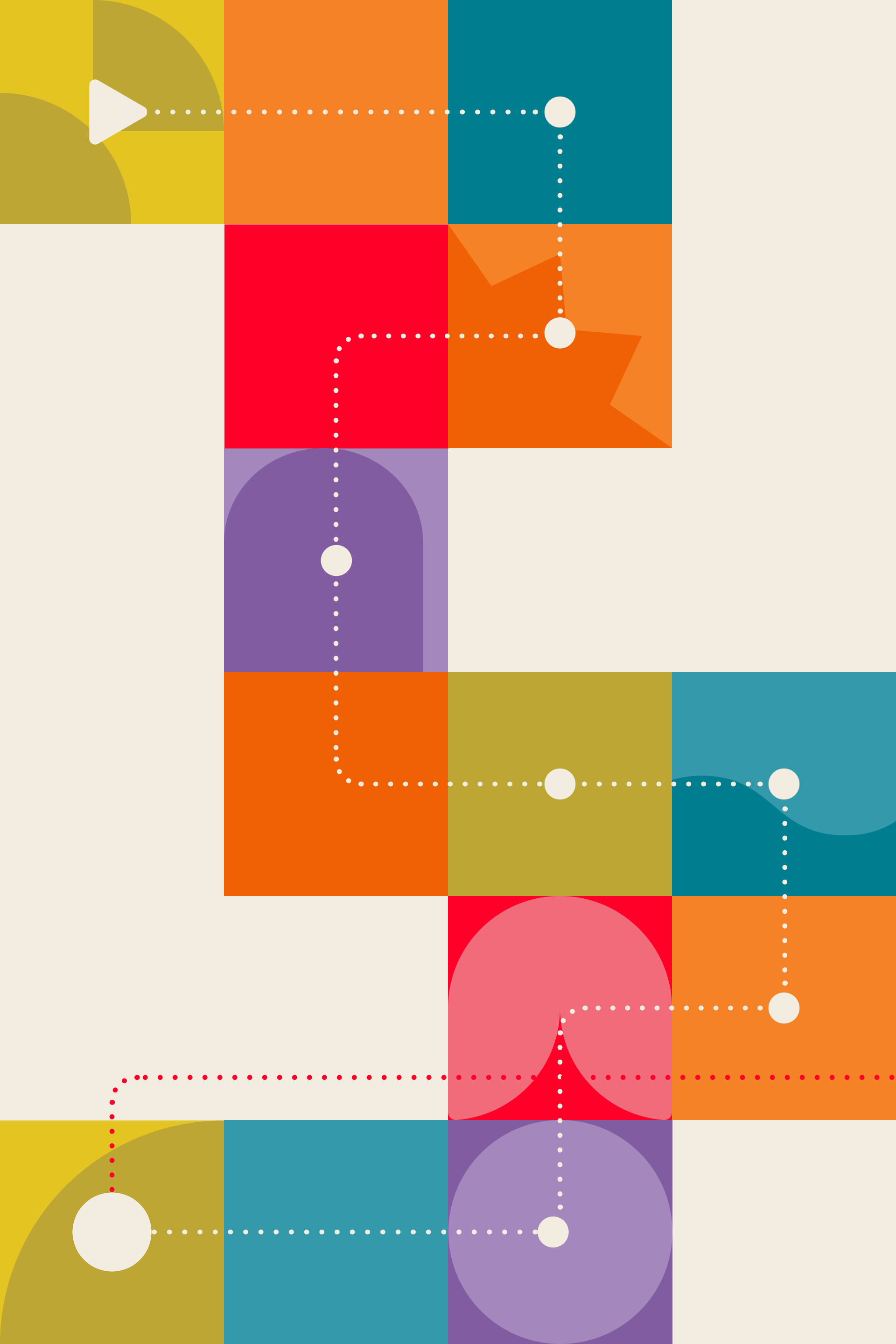
Play can inspire innovation, strengthen collaboration, and create a more engaging environment for working teams of any kind.

- **What brings you joy —what is *your* Shape of Play?**

Everyone has their own unique way of playing. Get in touch with what sparks joy, creativity, or flow for you!

Watch the documentary video and learn more at
<https://mattel.com/the-shape-of-play>

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With Deepest Gratitude

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Finally, to **the many teams across Mattel** whose support and contributions helped shape this project—your partnership made all the difference.

Methodology

Shape of Play Survey was conducted in partnership with MADO, supported by Dynata. Data was collected in March and April 2024. n=33,449 across 7 Countries: USA, China, Japan, Germany, Finland, Brazil, and South Africa.

Of people surveyed, 50% of adult respondents answered for themselves, and 50% of adult respondents were parents who answered with a child present and/or on behalf of a child, ages 0–18. Explicit consent was obtained for all age groups. Respondents reflect general population & census diversity for each region.

Shape of Play Ethnographic In-Home Interviews were conducted in 21 homes across three cities: Los Angeles, USA; Helsinki, Finland; and Shenzhen, China.

Some quotations in this report were translated to English from survey responses or in-home interviews conducted in native languages. Expert Interview responses were edited for clarity and brevity.



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You!**

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