



RESEARCH BRIEF:

A mixed-methods assessment of play beliefs and behaviors in a large sample of caregivers of young children

Description

Prescription for Play (P4P) is a social impact program of the LEGO® Group, supported by the LEGO® Foundation, that provides free training and resources for healthcare providers seeing 18- to 36-month-old patients for well-child checks. The program offers free LEGO® DUPLO® bricks and educational materials for participating providers to distribute to these patients and their caregivers, with the goal of supporting child development through play. The Weitzman Institute (WI) previously collaborated with the LEGO® Group to oversee a pilot study, which **showed** that the P4P program is feasible to implement in a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). WI later extended this work through a multi-site investigation of P4P implementation at six (6) FQHCs across the United States; results of this large-scale implementation study **demonstrated** that P4P can be implemented as designed across varied FQHC settings and is highly acceptable to providers. Given that P4P reaches a wide range of children and their caregivers, WI recognized the importance of ensuring that P4P is appropriate, acceptable, and relevant for all program recipients. As such, WI conducted a mixed-methods study to better understand variability in play beliefs and behaviors in a large sample of caregivers of young children.

Purpose

This mixed-methods investigation aimed to inform development of the P4P program by:

1. **Identifying variability in play beliefs and behaviors among caregivers, and**
2. **Gaining a deeper understanding of how caregivers play with their children, where they get information about play, and what recommendations they have for play programs like P4P.**



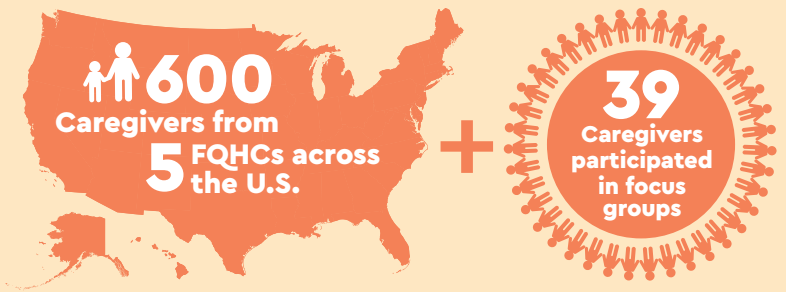
Research Questions

1. **How does the frequency and type of play vary across families?**
2. **Do caregivers report varied beliefs about the importance and utility of play?**
3. **What barriers to play exist for families receiving well-child care at FQHCs?**
4. **What resources do caregivers rely on for play information and what recommendations do they have for play-promotion programs?**



Study Population

- **600 caregivers from five (5) FQHCs** across the United States completed validated survey measures to assess their play beliefs and behaviors.
- **39 of these caregivers participated in focus groups** to further contextualize how they think about and support play with their children and to identify barriers to play.



Key Findings



Caregivers overwhelmingly report enjoying and prioritizing play with their children.

- On average, caregivers play almost daily with their children.
- Caregivers engage in a variety of different types of play, with gentle play (e.g., tickling) and playing with toys (e.g., building blocks) being the most commonly reported.

"Just as much as you need to set aside that time for your rest and to re-gear, I would just say if you can just put 10 to 20 minutes aside...once or twice a day [to play with] your child, it doesn't matter what you're doing with them, they're going to love it."



Caregivers use play to teach their children skills and values.

- Caregivers view play as an important tool to support child development.
- Caregivers choose playful activities that instill values like confidence, respect, and empathy in their children.
- Caregivers incorporate their own traditions into play through activities like dancing, singing, and cooking.

"[Through play] I'm teaching [my son] to celebrate his achievements...and also teach autonomy."



Caregivers are both cautious of and accepting towards technology.

- On average, caregivers reported that their children use digital media at least once or twice per week.
- Caregivers recognize that screen time can be both beneficial and problematic.
- Caregivers generally allow their children some screen time but always coupled with monitoring.

"We usually give [my son] his iPad when either we need a break...or if I am on the go...So I give him his iPad with pre-downloaded content so that he can just browse it without an issue."



Caregivers face many barriers to play.

- Caregivers expressed that their daily responsibilities, including work, household duties, and other obligations, leave little room for dedicated playtime.
- Despite competing demands, caregivers find unique ways to incorporate play into the times they do share with their children.

"I work all day, so it's hard for me. So I try to fit [play] in right before bed. I don't know if that's good, but I like to do that right before bed. And then I make sure that on the weekend, when I am off, that I'm playing with [my daughter]. I make sure to give her my full attention because, during the weekday, it is very hard."



Caregivers provided several recommendations for play-promotion programs.

- Incorporate practical and affordable recommendations about play that are easy for caregivers to fit into daily routines.
- Keep the messaging about play motivational.
- Be sensitive to the different ways that families play with their children.

"I think it would be like focusing more on finding simple things to play with sometimes. The truth is, we don't need to have special toys, so sometimes we need to start drawing [or] jump rope."



Caregivers get information about play from many different sources, including friends and family, healthcare providers, social media, the internet, and parenting apps.

For further information on this research, please contact: **Rebecca Tavernier**, Principal Investigator of the Prescription for Play Program at Weitzman Institute; Email: tavernr@mwhs1.com

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