

The Scout Association

**A study of attitudes and behaviour to inform the
development and promotion of outdoor activities**

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1. Objectives

There are two main objectives for this research

- 1) to understand the barriers young people (11-18) face in getting outdoors (in any way, shape or form) and what would encourage them to do so.
- 2) to build ideas and evidence for developing a policy and ideas platform for talking to central and local government, the wider media and of course young people and families themselves.

2. Methodology

Original quantitative and qualitative research was conducted among parents and young people in December 2007. This document presents a detailed overview of the headline findings.

2.1 Quantitative research

- Online surveys of:
- 1,027 parents of children aged 7-18,
- 1,083 children aged 7-18
- Accessed through a panel

2.2 Qualitative research

- In-depth interviews of:
- 12 parents of children aged 7-18
- 6 pairs of children aged 7-16

3. Key findings

- Kids say they spend an average of 3.4 days a week outdoors. 7% never go outdoors and 11% go outdoors everyday. Boys and younger age groups spend the most time outdoors.
- Parents spend about 5 hours a week doing outdoor activities, with about two fifths of this time spent with their children.
- Running, football, swimming, cycling and walking are among the most common outdoors activities. Activities such as camping, gardening and water-sports are popular though engaged in less frequently.
- Overall kids attribute positive adjectives to outdoor activities – three quarters select healthy, energetic and fun, though inactive kids have a slightly more negative perception.
- The most common obstacles to getting out more appear to be time and money pressures, lack of knowledge about activities in the area and concerns about safety, as well as issues surrounding image and peer pressure.

4. Current patterns in outdoor leisure activities

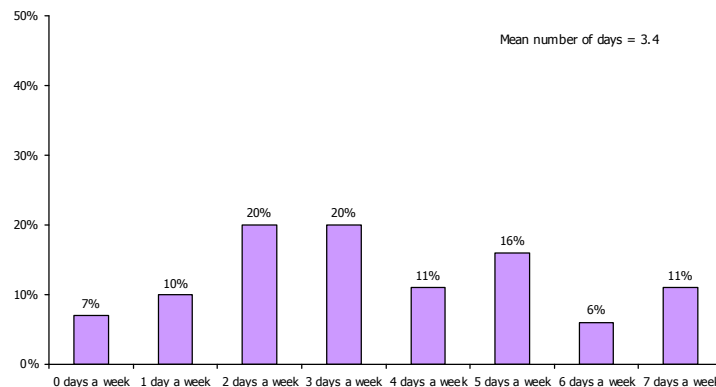
The first section of this report looks at the current trends in outdoor participation – how active or inactive is the average family, why does participation in sport vary for girls, boys and different age groups and how is the great outdoors currently perceived?

4.1 Not enough kids are spending time outdoors

Overall kids estimate that they spend an average of 3.4 days a week outdoors. However, a small but alarming proportion of kids don't spend anytime outdoors at all (7%).

Time spent outdoors

"In total, how many days a week do participate in any outdoor activities for 30 minutes or more?"



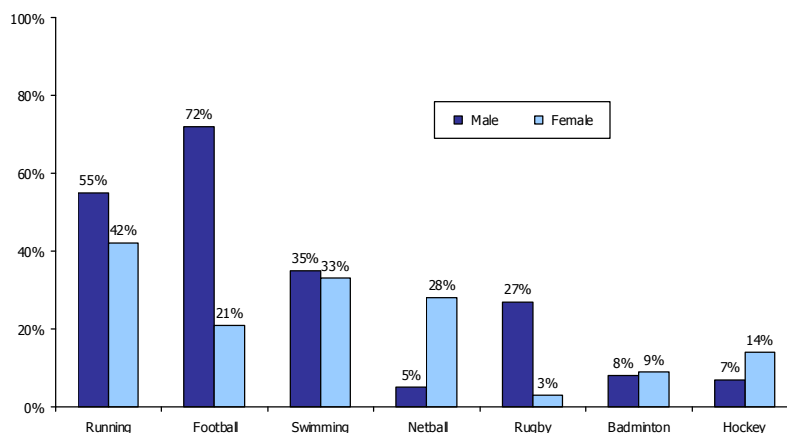
Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

Many outdoor pursuits appear to be participated in by kids on a somewhat ad hoc basis – the majority of those who go camping, gardening, rock-climbing/abseiling and water-sports/sailing do so less than once a month.

The more staple outdoor activities participated in on a more regular basis are sports, walking and cycling, however participation varies widely within gender and age.

Weekly participation in sport

"How often do you participate in any of the following sports or activities for 30 minutes or more?" Those answering at least once a week



Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

Boys participate in a lot more sport than girls, especially football, rugby and running. Netball and hockey are more popular among girls but not enough to close the overall gender gap. Overall participation in almost all sports steeply declines with age.

Comments from parent interviews also reflect on the gender imbalance;

"I think hopefully she'll get to a certain age where all the other stuff becomes a bit boring and she wants to have a new challenge and a new outlook. I'll have to drag her along one day because you never know, something might happen might it, golf, cricket. But they're men's sports aren't they. You're doing it for them and not yourself sort of thing. So you've got to be careful there. But obviously give enthusiasm, watch it, turn up for it, say well done every now and again without overdoing it, that sort of stuff. So I'm just waiting."
Active father of inactive girl aged 11

Parents also commented on definable periods of change as the child goes through the stages of pre puberty, puberty and post puberty. With girls reaching these stages first the difference in participation of sports by age is much more pronounced compared to boys;

"I mean, at school, they can do a lot. She was doing music and dance and things like that with the school. And then, on a Saturday, she was going music and dance. And then, as soon as she started secondary school, it all stopped. And all she seems to want to do is just sit. She doesn't want to do anything. She's got to be really pushed to do anything. I mean, it sounds bad but she'd be happy to sit on the computer all day if you let her."
Mixed activity family with inactive girl aged 12

The biggest challenge to encouraging more kids to get outdoors will be to find activities that will appeal to some currently very reluctant audiences.

4.2 Parents can set good or bad examples – both can be ignored

Parents estimate on average that they spend about 5 hours a week outdoors. About two fifth of this time is with their children.

Active parents do not necessarily have active children and active children do not necessarily have active parents. However, interviews with parents did reveal a tangible trend for the more active to encourage outdoor activity and inactive parents with inactive children to perhaps push the responsibility a little more to other organisations, for example schools, as well as to accept barriers to activity more readily.

There are some interesting variations in which outdoor activities kids are most likely to engage in with their parents, and also siblings. For example, walking and gardening are done with either or both parents, and swimming and cycling are activities most likely to include the whole family. Football is unsurprisingly male dominated, most likely played with dads and/or brothers, though there does not appear to be an equivalent female activity played with just mums and/or sisters.

Interviews with parents found that more active families with younger children reported spending a lot of time together after school, weekends and holidays in outdoor activities like walking in the local park, cycling in nearby parks, camping in the summer, swimming at the local pool and on holiday. Whilst inactive families spend less time on group family outdoor activities preferring to spend their leisure time shopping, going to the cinema, eating out and meeting friends.

"My wife takes the children to the park every single night, depending on the weather, because its good to get them out in the fresh air. And when they're playing, they don't even know they're having the exercise really, which is fabulous. We're always doing something as a family. We take two cars and five bikes as I can't get a cycle rack that fits five bikes. And we normally go to Virginia Water. It's beautiful. We love it round there ... between Christmas and New Year, we must have been over to Virginia Water five times, at least."

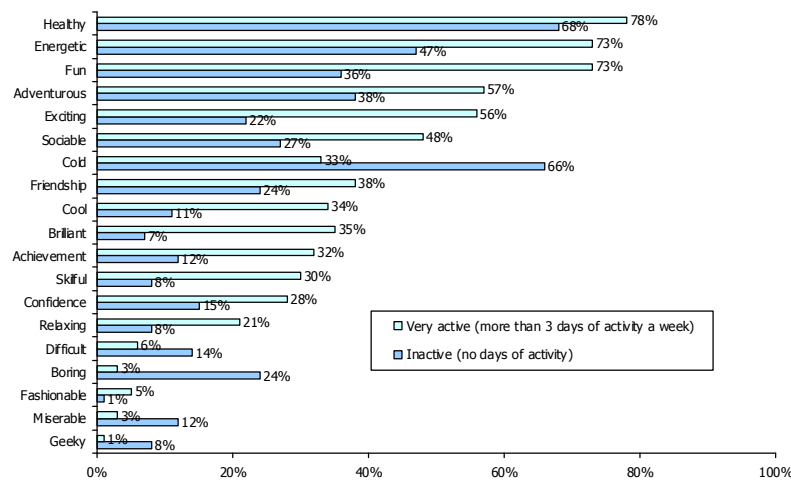
Father of active family: girl age 5, boy age 7, boy age 12

4.3 Current image of outdoor activities is encouragingly positive

Overall, perceptions of outdoor activities are encouragingly strong. Unsurprisingly however, there is a stark variation between the word associations made by those who are heavily involved with outdoors activities compared those who are inactive.

Perceptions of the outdoors

"What words do you associate with being outdoors?"



Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

The very active are much more likely to focus on the benefits and positive side of being outdoors while the inactive are more likely to attribute negatives. For example, physically active children are twice as likely as the inactive to say outdoor activity is fun (73% compared to 36%) and exciting (56% compared to 22%).

Active kids are also much more likely to appreciate the social side (48% compared to 27%) and aspects of friendships (38% compared to 24%) to the outdoors, as well as the intrinsic benefits such as increased confidence (28% compare to 15%) and sense of achievement (32% compared to 12%).

These positive perceptions of outdoor activities elaborated on by kids who were interviewed;

"It's a nice feeling after training, you just feel as if you've just worked everything off. You feel a bit ... you feel like powerful ... I don't really know what the word is. Fulfilled."
Active male age 16

"If I score a goal it brings me joy and makes me happy and excited."
Active male age 12

Conversely inactive children are more much likely to focus on the perceived negative aspects. They are eight times more likely to describe outdoors activities as boring (24% compared to 3%) and four times more likely to describe them as miserable (12% compared to 4%). Rather cynically the word inactive kids are most likely to associate with the outdoors is "cold" (66% compared to 33% of active kids)!

Interviews with parents revealed a similar pattern of thought - all parents felt that outdoor activity was crucial to their child's overall development and often felt they should do more. Perceptions of the positive effects included the benefits of fresh air, good for health and development of strong bones, positive aspects of overall fitness, mixing and interacting with others, good for independence and an opportunity to have fun. However, active families (those with an active child) additionally perceived more mental attributes to the positive effects of

outdoor activity including positive effects of teamwork, the beneficial effects of competing, developing friendships, opportunities for parental bonding and coping with personal challenges.

"He makes friends and learns skills with his football and he has to learn how to lose... he has to cope with losing because he doesn't like that at all. We used to have tears and tantrums initially. It's nice to see him get out of the house because if they're indoors they're in front of the computer or playing their X boxes or play stations There's a sense of achievement for them. Friendship too especially on the Saturday. He's met so many new boys older and younger and he just loves it."

Mother of active family: boy aged 11, girl age 18

It is difficult to know how far experience of the outdoors informs perceptions or whether perceptions of the outdoors influence the probability of kids trying the outdoors, i.e. are active kids more likely to express such positive views about the outdoors as a consequence of their heavy involvement or was it their positive perceptions that lead them to get more involved in the outdoors. Perhaps most plausibly it's a combination of both – kids with positive perceptions of the outdoors are more likely to participate in activities and become more enthusiastic about them with the more time they spend outdoors. The best way to challenge the negative view of the outdoors, therefore, is to encourage kids to give it a go.

5. Barriers to spending more time outdoors

Regardless of how long they spend on outdoor activities, few kids feel that it is long enough (33%) and two thirds claim they would like to spend more time outdoors (64%). These views are closely echoed by kids' parents, of whom only a quarter feel their children get out doors enough (25%) with over 80% wishing their children would spend more time outdoors. So what's stopping them? The next section of this report looks at the barriers to participating in outdoor activities, to who they are most pertinent to, and how they can be overcome.

5.1 People just don't know where to start looking

There are several barriers to getting outdoors but one of the most fundamental to address is that people simply do not know how to go about getting more involved in outdoor activities - 58% of kids don't know what kind of outdoor activities are available in their area and a third of parents when asked where they would go to find out more about getting involved in outdoor activities said that they didn't know (33%), rising to 42% among DE households.

This lack of knowledge was also demonstrated when kids were interviewed;

"I'd like to be more active actually but I can't seem to find something that I want to do ... It makes me feel better that I'm actually doing something instead of sitting around but it can get boring after a while when you think oh I don't want to do it anymore you're comfy doing the same thing and then you think oh I don't want to do it ... my favourite sport would be tennis or trampolining but my favourite activity is shopping, window shopping."

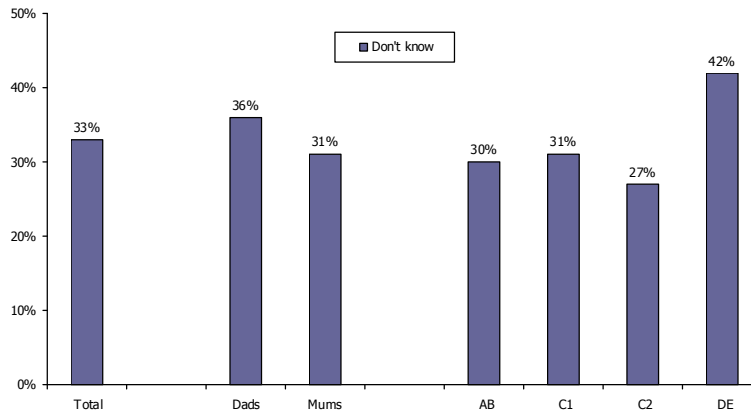
Inactive female age 13

If people don't have access to a local sports centre, parks or open spaces, or don't know where about activities are going on in their area it will be difficult to make any inroads.

Some kind of resource or source of information enabling both parents and children to find out more about the opportunities for outdoor activities in their areas could therefore potentially catapult levels of outdoor involvement.

Not knowing where to look

"Where would you go to find out more about getting involved in outdoor activities in your area?" **Unprompted**



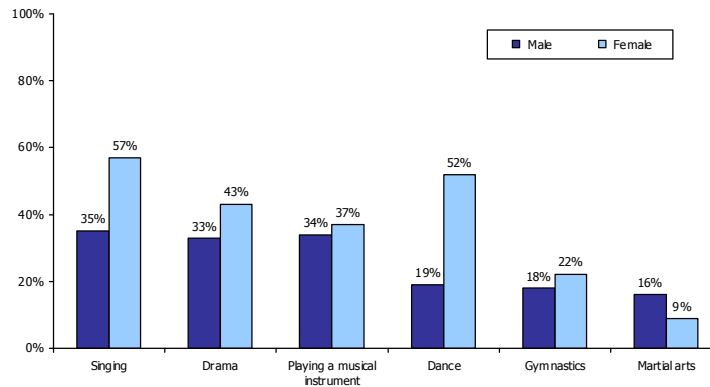
Base: 1024 parents (of 7-18 year olds), 18-65, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

5.2 The pressures and demands of modern day life

A significant fifth of kids say that they do not spend time outdoors simply because they don't like it (18%) and prefer staying indoors (21%). Outdoor activities face heavy competition from indoor forms of exercise, especially among girls for whom activities such as dance (52%), drama (43%) and gymnastics (22%) are noticeably more popular than outdoor sports.

Participation in indoor activities

"How often do you participate in any of the following sports or activities for 30 minutes or more?" Those answering at least once a week



Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

While increased participation in physical activity of this kind negates some of the worry that girls are reluctant to engage in any exercise outdoors, it should be noted that similar to outdoors pursuits, indoor activities also suffer a sharp decline in participation with age.

When interviewed many parents also commented on a culture in which their children are quick to try an activity but equally quick to give it up and move on to the “next” thing;

“So she got into the recorder and she lasted for about three months, and then that was it. Yes, its boring, boring. Yes, can’t be bothered. As I say, the recorder, fine, £10 wasted, alright. But when its like all these other things that they get into and then they’re out of them.”

Active father with inactive child age 11

Arguably though, this is just natural child behaviour and however frustrating it can be for some parents it should be acknowledged and accommodated in the provision of choice and flexibility to maintain an interest in the outdoors through multiple activities that will change overtime, rather than demanding commitment to just one.

When it comes to indoor activities though perhaps the biggest threat to getting kids out is the universal popularity of more sedate activities – all kids watch television for longer than thirty minutes on a daily or weekly basis (100%), and the vast majority will use a PC (94%) and play on computer games (85%) for at least 30 minutes a week. And when kids were asked what their favourite activities were these three come out top with the nearest outdoor competitor being football. This is of clear frustration to some parents interviewed;

“... Unless I instigate some sort of activity for them to do, they are quite happy to lounge about, all of them are at school all week and I went home tonight, got in from work at about 6.15pm and I’ve got my son asleep on the sofa, my daughter is in bed upstairs ... I really do want to put them into some sort of physical activity. I think it is really important because it niggles me, you know coronary heart disease and all that”

Mother of inactive children: girl age 12, boy age 16, girl age 18

It is important to account that there is a stubborn group of couch potatoes walking (or at least sitting) among us and it is going to be particularly difficult to appeal to this audience – but it will be of relief to parents to realise they are not alone in the challenge.

5.3 Life in the UK today can leave little time for getting outdoors

Kids today have many demands on their time – one of the key pressures being school. 42% say they are not able to spend more time outdoors because they have to spend too much time on revision and course work. Among 16-18 year olds this proportion increases to two thirds (64%), by which age commitments such as part-time jobs and helping around the house also restrict the amount of time that can be spent outdoors.

It may be tempting to dismiss school work as an excuse not to exercise, however a significant proportion of parents back kids up on the issue, saying their children do not spend more time outdoors because they need to spend too much time studying (39%), especially parents of 16-18 year olds (51%).

Interviews with parents reiterate these concerns:

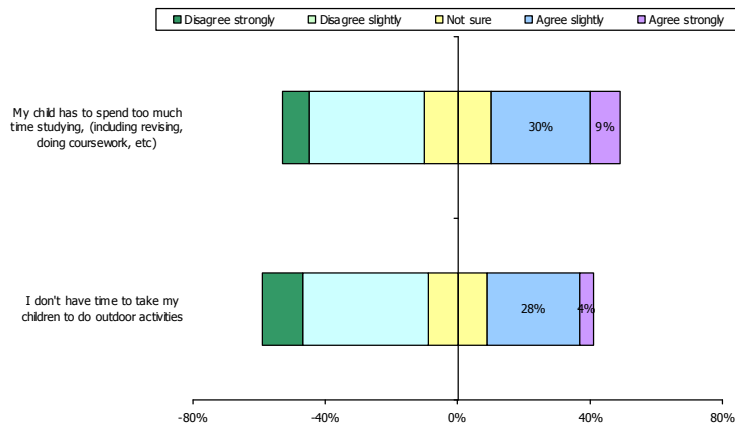
“they come home with so much homework, both of them, by the time we get home from school it’s quarter past four, and they do a bit of homework, go and sit and watch some telly and chill out, we have dinner and before you know it it’s time for bed.”

Mother of inactive girls ages 9 and 11

Barriers

Time pressures

"To what extent do you agree with the following statements about why **your children might not spend more time outdoors** on their own?"



Base: 1024 parents (of 7-18 year olds), 18-65, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

Many parents themselves also feel the stresses of modern day life mean they don't have as much time to spend with their children as they would like (60%). And only 37% feel they spend enough time with their children.

Parent interviews found time pressures to be particularly pertinent to mothers who work full time - not being available for post school activity or being too tired to do more with daily routine. Single parents work hard to make up any perceived gap.

"With my son the school does have a football team and a rugby team and they play on a Saturday but the thing is I think you have to be at Twickenham at 8.00am on a Saturday morning and after a full week at work my husband and myself, to try and get up and out, it is quite a lot really ... I really don't have time, I would love to but by the time I get in from work, I leave home early in the morning, come home in the evening and by the time you have helped them a bit with their homework, I can't commit myself to it, much as I would love to."

Mother of inactive kids: girl 11 yrs, boy 12 yrs, girl 18 yrs

On the positive side however, 60% of parents say they spend more time with their children than their own parents spent with them.

A significant challenge therefore is not only convincing people of the benefits to making time outdoors more of a priority but to also provide flexibility and "value for time" from activities.

5.4 Some outdoor activities are being perceived as costly

Two fifths of kids say they cannot afford to do more outdoor activities (40%). This perception is echoed by parents, 45% of whom say they cannot afford for their children to do more outdoor activities. This proportion rises to almost two thirds of those in DE social grade households (60%), but is even complained about by a third of AB households (31%).

Given that many outdoor activities are relatively inexpensive or even free, is claiming cost to be a barrier simply a cop out? Maybe, but parents may also be considering indirect costs to activities that are on the face of it free, such as transportation or the need to take time off work. It may well also be that kids and parents are including more modern and popular activities in their definition of outdoor pursuits – extreme sports, rock climbing and sailing for example – which

undeniably are not as cheap. An important factor in the promotion of outdoor activities therefore still needs some focus on cost effective options.

5.5 Child safety fears in the UK are making parents cautious about outdoor fun

Parents in the UK are increasingly worried about the safety of their children. Over three quarters don't feel it is as safe for children to spend time outdoors as when they themselves were children (77%). This concern appears to be highly relevant when it comes to letting their own children participate in outdoor activities – half of all parents say worry about their children's safety presents a barrier (49%). Parent interviews expanded on some of these anxieties about local dangers and loss of freedom to allow the exploration of the local and wider environment, (road traffic, local crime, gangs and paedophiles) and a perceived loss of community ties.

A good third of children recognise safety is a concern of their parents (36%) and a fifth are worried themselves about their personal safety in spending more time outdoors (21%).

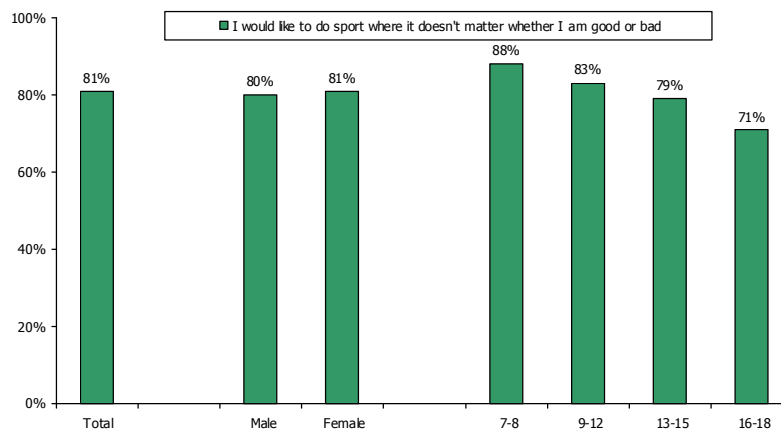
Parental concerns over safety will have to be acknowledged while stressing the importance of allowing young people more freedom in finding adventure and independence.

5.6 Elitism in sport puts people off

Another barrier to participation in many outdoor activities is the perceived professionalism and skill necessary for many activities. Eight in ten kids say that they would like to be able to do sport where it doesn't matter whether they are good or bad at it (81%).

The taking part that counts

"To what extent do you agree with the following statements about spending more time doing outdoors activity?"



Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

However this is not their current perception of most sports: almost a third of kids feel that they don't have the necessary skills to participate in outdoor activities to a high enough standard

(29%) and that team sports are too competitive for them (30%). One case study exemplifies how these factors can be off putting to even the most active of kids;

"I used to play cricket at Harrow, one of the top cricket clubs in Harrow. I had to apply to play, and I had to have trials. They pick eleven players and at first I was put in the second team and had to make my way up - Harrow is the top team. It was very hard, I had to work a bit, but that was last year - I haven't really played since, because now I like to play in my leisure time, with my friends."

Active male age 16

There may well be a niche, therefore, for "club" activities that focus just as much on the social element of taking part without the need for national or country aspirations.

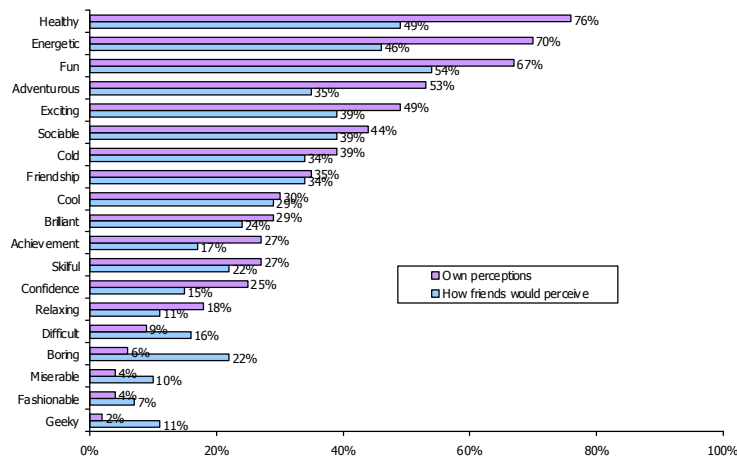
5.7 Peer pressure will make or break the popularity of any activity

This barrier is particularly pertinent – peer pressure and a desire to feel they fit in will make them naturally cautious of any activity that will attract negative attention from other kids. Around a fifth of kids shy away from outdoor activities from fear of not fitting in (23%) and their friends laughing at them (19%).

And it would appear kids consider the risk of their peers disapproving of outdoor sports to be quite high - notably kids think their friends are more likely to perceive outdoor activities more negatively than they themselves do. For example, just 2% perceive outdoor activities to be geeky, yet 11% say their friends do. Conversely, while three quarters of kids themselves think the outdoors is healthy (76%), energetic (70%) and fun (67%), only half think their friends feel the same. Portraying a positive image of outdoor sports and equipping kids to defend this image is therefore fundamental to encouraging and maintaining participation.

Perceptions of the outdoors

"What words do you associate with being outdoors?"



Base: 1083 respondents 7-18, UK, December 2007
Source: The Scout Association, nfpSynergy

When interviewed, kids admitted peer participation was crucial;

I would like to do something like that. But if you said you played to your friends, they'd be a bit like, a bit weird. But if they suggested it to me I would go. Yes, if it wasn't me that started it, if it was someone in my class who said, 'Oh, there's a tennis club after school at Charing Cross, do you want to go?' something like that I'd go."

Inactive girl age 14

"If your peers aren't really into sport then it's less likely that you're going to get into sport, but if all your peers were playing football, you're more likely to join them and play with them ... you basically follow your peers."
Active male age 16

There is however a positive side to peer influence, for example, older kids act as role models as cited in one child interview.

"The other scouts are about 11 to about 15 because there are some older ones. They are good leaders and they are good examples as well but they are going to move on soon to Explorers. We do all sort of things like wood chopping and things. I get pride from it to be honest. It just helps you when you are older, you can use the skills you learnt when you were young."
Active male age 12

Central to getting more kids outdoors therefore is to some how harness peer pressure to encourage rather than deter participation.

5.8 Parents are beginning to push away responsibility for getting kids outdoors

Related to the availability of opportunity and awareness of what's out there are issues surrounding responsibility for its provision. How much responsibility will individuals take and what bodies do people think are well placed to enable kids to get outdoors more?

A key player in providing opportunities for kids to get outdoors is school. The vast majority of parents would like their children to do more exercise in school (77%) and play more sports in school (73%). Similarly three quarters of parents would like their children's schools to provide more outdoor activities both in and out of school (74%).

Parent interviews found that active parents appeared to give more encouragement to their children while inactive parents with inactive children perhaps pushed the responsibility a little more to other organisations such as schools:

"I think it is the encouragement from the school and the facilities that they have after school should be much affordable to the parents so that they can send their children for all these activities. I work part-time so I can't afford to spend all the time, I can afford it but it is just the principle isn't it, why would you pay?"
Mother of inactive boy age 14

Kids themselves are slightly more polarised as to how much they want to get involved in outdoor activities with their school. Overall around two thirds would like their schools to provide more outdoor activities both during school hours (71%) and as extracurricular clubs and activities (65%). This demand is highest among the youngest age groups at around three quarters, and tails off to around half those aged 16-18.

School is not the only route to providing opportunities to get outdoors however, kids are even more keen for there to be more youth clubs and outdoor facilities in their local area (74%), and interest does not fade quite so rapidly with age. Currently about 30% of kids are members of some kind of youth club. Interviews with kids demonstrate how enthusiasm among members develops for their clubs;

"Another thing they used to do at the youth club that I went to, there's a carnival actually on my road once a year in summer. Its just a very small carnival, just on one small road. And in the Masborough Club they get all the kids to build stuff, because there's like a procession with costumes, and they get people to make the costumes and decorations and stuff like that. So yes, that was good, because when carnival day comes it's a good time."

Active male age 16

Developing links with schools therefore maybe particularly effective in getting more kids outdoors but it may be equally important to promote that school is not the only option when it comes to outdoor activities and that parents and kids can take more personal responsibility if they want to. Parents will have to work in partnership with their kids – it will be essential for parents to show willingness and provide support.

6. Conclusion: So how do we get more kids outdoors?

Having established the current trends in outdoor activity, examined what's stopping people getting more involved and considered how these barriers may be overcome the report concludes by summarising some of the key hooks to increasing participation:

- **Solution 1: Provide local high-quality opportunities for outdoor activities:** Well run, affordable local programmes within easy reach are vital. Finding out what children and parents want locally is a key part of the process to meeting their needs.
- **Solution 2: Kids can rarely get outdoors on their own. Parents need to be supportive.** This means providing encouragement, providing transport, taking the initiative and demonstrating by example. There is nothing worse than a keen child whose parents can't play or won't play.
- **Solution 3: Parents need encouragement to get outdoors too:** Parents need reminding about the health, self-confidence and enjoyment benefits of getting outside. The benefits of getting outdoors are not exclusive to children. Parents also need to be helped to put the risks of getting outdoors into perspective.
- **Solution 4: Create a supportive culture among peers and find role models:** The peer group has to be central to encouraging participation. Few teenagers, particularly girls will do anything openly if it risks the disdain of their peers.
- **Solution 5: Not every boy and many girls want to play football:** Gender, individual differences and life stage need to be taken into account so that outdoor activities offer the choice and range that matches different young people's and children's interests.
- **Solution 6: Provide sporting opportunities that are not competitive:** Kids needs affordable 'club' type activities such as athletics, tennis, football, cricket, volleyball and badminton. These can provide a safe haven for children/teenagers with the aim of providing healthy exercise, social opportunities and fun without the stress of needing to be the best.
- **Solution 7: Make kids want to join the adventure:** Development and promotion of challenging, exciting, diverse activities that gives rise to real adventure rather than 'reality TV' adventure.
- **Solution 8: Provide better information about outdoor opportunities.** Too many parents and children don't know where to go for information. They need information and suggestions, on where and when local outdoor activities might be available. The web is an obvious solution.
- **Solution 9: Get a dog!** Simple, family-based, un-structured outdoor activities – walking, running, exercising the dog and cycling - remain the most popular in our survey and

probably have the most universal appeal. Indeed getting a dog is a great way to get everybody out more!

- **Solution 10: Regular exercise is good for the brain.** Our survey shows that the pressure of school and college work is often seen as a barrier to getting outdoors. All the evidence is that carefully combined, outdoors activities are good for homework-laden school children.