

# GET KIDS TO PLAY

## HANDBOOK

For Parents, Schools and Communities

*Created by Children for Children*

# Pitch4Play

Knowledge Partner



Sports and Society  
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## When Children **Pitched For Play**

*This is an **insights report** on ideas & solutions conceived by children for sports participation in schools and communities.*

### **Overview**

Most conversations, developments, and research studies in the world of grassroots sports and physical education are initiated by professionals working in the sector. Yet, these conversations are often bereft of the voices of children—who are, in fact, the largest and most important stakeholders in this ecosystem.

To bring children into this conversation, Sportz Village's [Get Kids To Play](#) campaign returned with [Pitch4Play](#) a first-of-its-kind gamified primary study designed to capture the Voice of Children who aspire to break barriers that prevent them from actively participating in sports.

The insights emerging from the initiative function as primary qualitative evidence, aggregating children's perspectives across geographies. The ideas pitched by the children are important starting points—offering evidence that can inform community leaders, sports experts, school leaders, and education boards, while contributing to the broader conversation on making sports more accessible in schools and communities.

Across the six cities that hosted [Pitch4Play](#), a common yet powerful message emerged: children want to play—but they need a supportive and enabling environment that encourages active participation in sports.



## Insight 1:

### **Rising parental concerns around safety and injury: And how schools can bridge the gap through sessions, workshops and safer play frameworks**

*Shifting parents' mindset from gatekeepers to partners in building lifelong healthy habits in children*

Injury risk is a top 2–3 parental concern globally which is highly mirrored in India. This is majorly due to lack of safety protocols, low tolerance for 'risk' and lack of sports medicine awareness in schools. Through their presentations, children urged the parents to be partners in building lifelong healthy habits rather than holding them back.

#### **Insight 1 → Solutions**

To achieve this, children proposed several innovative ideas such as:

- ◆ Monthly parent awareness sessions with doctors and coaches to build trust in outdoor play and demystify safety concerns.
- ◆ Parent awareness workshops that would provide parents with regular updates on their children. Adequate knowledge transfer with regards to safety audits and quality checks, with parents.
- ◆ Develop a range of frameworks and solutions to make play spaces safer and more accessible. Some frameworks included community infrastructure audits involving local stakeholders, student-led weekly safety monitoring of school and community grounds; and private schools opening their facilities for community use in the evenings and on weekends.



## Insight 2:

### Girls are dropping out of sports at twice the rate of boys: Here's what school leaders, parents, communities and policymakers can do

*India cannot get more kids to play if approximately 50% of the population does not play*

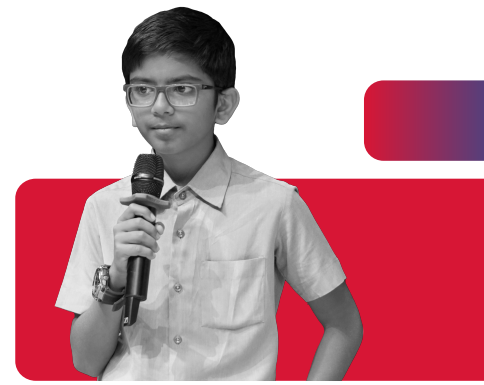
According to global studies, by age 14 the rate at which girls drop out from sports is twice that of boys. Gendered expectations, dress-code discomfort, safety concerns, and limited encouragement continue to narrow opportunities. The near-absence of female coaches, lack of safe transportation to after-school academies, and very few visible role models in sport compound the barriers that already exist at home and in school.

#### Insight 2 → Solutions

To achieve this, children proposed:

- ◆ Schools could conduct mother-daughter sports days and family workshops to shift attitudes at the household level.
- ◆ Provide financial incentives for families that support girls' participation through a 'Family Inclusion Economy' – especially for underprivileged communities.
- ◆ Flexible, modest sportswear options, better-lit play areas with CCTV, and girls-only play zones to make environments safer and more welcoming.





### Insight 3:

## Academics are winning, play is losing: It is high time we made P.E. a core examined subject

### *Academics & play should be complementary, not in competition*

Even though P.E. is built into school timetables, it often becomes a “buffer” for other priorities— with 28% of P.E. classes in Indian schools being cancelled or repurposed for academics or school events.

Sports & academics should be complementary to one another and not in competition with one another. Children harped upon this idea stating academic pressure as a “silent crisis,” where heavy workloads, tuition classes, and reduced sports during exams gradually remove play from daily life.

### Insight 3 → Solutions

Children recommended:

- ◆ To make P.E. a core-examined subject through at least Class 9.
- ◆ A dedicated, structured playtime protected in the school timetable, without any substitution.
- ◆ Report cards that give equal value to academics and sports thus creating a culture of balance.
- ◆ A balanced learning–sports model with structured practice slots and flexible academic deadlines.
- ◆ A gamified participation and rewards systems like ‘Fitcoin’ to motivate and reward consistent play.



## Insight 4:

### **Many children benched by bias: Mixed-ability games, structured wellness sessions and peer mentoring will ensure 'play for all'**

#### *Giving every child an equal shot at play*

Reports from Aspen University show that children who perceive themselves as “less skilled” are far more likely to quit sports early. The children highlighted how sports environments often unintentionally exclude those who are shy, less skilled, low on fitness levels or with disabilities. A bias, where few players dominate the playtime while others withdraw, reducing confidence and long-term participation in sports.

#### **Insight 4 → Solutions**

To ensure ‘play for all’ children suggested:

- ◆ Modified mixed ability/gender games, and basic skills training tracks to ensure every child participates without fear.
- ◆ AI tools that recommend sports based on a child’s interests and abilities, and augmented reality simulations that let beginners experience new sports safely.
- ◆ Advocating for daily structured wellness sessions, and blending yoga, mindfulness, and simpler games to help build confidence for all students, especially those hesitant to join competitive formats.
- ◆ A buddy system; pairing skilled players with beginners for peer mentoring, community sports equipment libraries to reduce the cost barrier, and modified sports rules that are skill-adaptive, ensuring that every child can participate.



## Insight 5:

### Early sports specialization often drives children away due to burnout: Exposure to multi-sport discovery models is the way back

*A play–discover–repeat framework is the key to lifelong health, performance and sustained play.*

A 6-year longitudinal study of children from Grades 7–12, published in Sage Journals, showed that sports participation declines and burnout increase as specialization rises in adolescence. In fact, another finding suggested that the burnout risk was ~4x higher compared to children who were exposed to discovery-based multi-sports diversification.

Children strongly harped upon the fact that exposure to multiple sports from early childhood is a more effective pathway for long-term health, performance and a sustained interest in play.

#### Insight 5 → Solutions

Children recommended:

- ◆ Creative alternatives, such as weekly multi-sport relays, mobile sports kits (“Sports-on-Wheels”)
- ◆ Introduction of multi-sport discovery models and a sports discovery festival, all part of a “play–discover–repeat” framework at schools to expose children to multiple activities before specialization.
- ◆ Sport passports, short discovery sessions, and monthly multi-sport challenge days to build physical literacy, confidence, and sustained interest in play.
- ◆ Digital platforms with sport discovery content, quizzes, and badges to build curiosity across disciplines, alongside student-led sports councils and peer ambassadors could champion multi-sport programs within schools and communities.



## CALL TO ACTION

**The children have spoken** – clearly, thoughtfully, and with conviction, and ideas, frameworks, and solutions. They asked for safer spaces, equal opportunities, protected playtime, and the chance to discover sport on their own terms. These are not abstract wishes. They are actionable signals – and they deserve an equally decisive response from the various stakeholders. The parents, school leaders, policymakers, and community leaders, each stakeholder holds a piece of the solution. The question is no longer whether children want to play. They do. The question is whether we, as adults, will act on what they have told us.



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