

THREE QUARTERS OF PARENTS OF UNDER FIVES WORRY THE PANDEMIC HAS IMPACTED THEIR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

- *New findings from research commissioned by Fisher-Price and Family Action that are released today, shows two years on since the start of the pandemic, a third of parents are worried their children have been held back*
- *The survey of 1,000 UK parents of under-fives found 26 per cent are concerned about their little one's speech as a result of the pandemic, while 35 per cent are worried about how their emotional intelligence may have suffered*
- *In response, Family Action has joined forces with Fisher-Price Play Lab in an initiative which will provide funding, resources and Early Childhood Development-focused toys proven to help with social, language, motor skills and numeracy.*

(Press release London, UK) Friday, 18 March 2022: Fisher-Price and Family Action have joined forces to launch a charitable partnership and programme of parent and child-focused activities to help alleviate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on 0 to 5-year-olds' early years learning and development.

The year-long initiative will comprise a range of activities and resources focused on supporting young children and their parents and carers with early childhood development (ECD) and reaching key milestones that may have been impacted during the pandemic. It will focus on how caregivers can incorporate simple techniques through play in the home environment to help support children's learning. Family Action will also roll this learning out as a special programme at some of their centres.

The new partnership is being launched after research commissioned by Fisher-Price and Family Action found three quarters of parents worry about the impact Covid has had on their child's early years development, leaving a third fearing their children have been held back.

The survey of 1,000 UK parents of under-fives also found:

- 26 per cent are concerned about their child's speech due to the pandemic
- 35 per cent worry about the impact on their child's emotional intelligence
- 70% feel their understanding of developmental milestones has been affected, as they've had less interaction with other parents and families
- 60% of parents spent more time at home because of the pandemic, with 30% feeling separation anxiety as a result of the pandemic
- 31% of children also experience anxiety when saying goodbye to their parent or carer
- Of those who experience separation anxiety either for themselves or their child, 74% believe this has been made worse by the pandemic
- 65% choose to address their child's development by talking to them, using educational toys and play/activities
- 39% feel they've missed out on quality time because of pandemic-related pressures

It also emerged that the ability to play with others, understand their own emotions, and literacy skills were other concerns parents had about their child's development. Their child meeting fewer new people, seeing less of friends or family than they would usually, and not attending groups for children the same age had the biggest impact on their child, according to their mums and dads. Fewer visits to public hot spots, spending more time at home and generally being out and about less were other issues caused by the pandemic.

As a result, 43 per cent would welcome help from early childhood development experts to ensure their child is meeting milestones that might have been impacted by restrictions in the past couple of years. At the moment, parents and carers typically head online or to their health visitor for advice on their child's development – with a quarter speaking to friends with children to compare.

David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive of Family Action, said: "*Vulnerable families have been disproportionately affected by the impact of the global pandemic, facing a variety of challenges brought about by the uncertainty of the last two years.*

"Family Action's experience supporting families, parents and carers for the past 153 years tells us the best way to support them is to empower them with knowledge and resources. Our partnership with Fisher-Price will invest in that work, giving families the resources and opportunities to support their children's development and build brighter futures."

Funding provided by Fisher-Price to Family Action as part of the initiative will also allow some of the country's most vulnerable families to be given further early years support through new programmes delivered by Family Action across the UK. These will directly address some of the issues and concerns raised by the research such as speech and language development. Resources are also being developed and produced around several areas of focus and will be released at key moments throughout the year.

Kelly Philp, Mattel's UK Marketing Director and spokesperson for Fisher-Price Play Lab, said: "As a cornerstone within Fisher-Price for 60 years, the Fisher-Price Play Lab has particular expertise in ECD and supporting families and young children and we are proud and honoured to be working with Family Action to support their important work on early childhood development throughout the UK at such an important time."

"This initiative with Family Action will empower parents and caregivers to help children thrive and get the best start to life. This is particularly important to us at Fisher-Price knowing what an important role play takes in their early years."

The initiative will harness the 60-years' experience within Fisher-Price Play Lab, the state-of-the-art toy research, design and testing facility where ECD Experts and tiny testers from new-born to five years old help create, evaluate and improve Fisher-Price toys. Play Lab will provide resources, funding and Early Childhood Development-focused toys developed by the Fisher-Price™ Play Lab that are proven to help with social, language, motor skills and numeracy.

Fisher-Price will also donate a significant number of toys that have all been designed and created to help with ECD, including social, language, motor skills and numeracy, which will be distributed throughout the UK. Each of these toys has been specially developed by a team of ECD experts at the Fisher-Price Play Lab, which is built on a rich history focused on the importance of play to children's development since 1961.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Press Contact:

Mark Collins, MCPR

markc@markcollinspr.com | 0044 7974 215 334

What is the Fisher-Price™ Play Lab?

As the first kid-led testing facility in the industry 60 years ago, the Fisher-Price™ Play Lab has always been at the forefront of toy development. Each year, the Play Lab hosts around 2,500 kids and 1,850 parents to take part in various methods of research. The dedicated team of Early Childhood Development Experts collaborates with fun-loving, tiny testers to play with, review and evaluate every Fisher-Price® toy that goes onto shelves. The experts are on the cutting edge of language development, causal learning, cognition and education. The team works in lockstep with the Fisher-Price design and development teams to evaluate every detail of every toy.

About Mattel

Mattel is a leading global toy company and owner of one of the strongest catalogues of children's and family entertainment franchises in the world. We create innovative products and experiences that inspire, entertain and develop children through play. We engage consumers through our portfolio of iconic brands, including Barbie®, Hot Wheels®, Fisher-Price®, American Girl®, Thomas & Friends®, UNO® and MEGA®, as well as other popular intellectual properties that we own or license in partnership with global entertainment companies. Our offerings include film and television content, gaming, music and live events. We operate in 35 locations and our products are available in more than 150 countries in collaboration with the world's leading retail and ecommerce companies. Since its founding in 1945, Mattel is proud to be a trusted partner in empowering children to explore the wonder of childhood and reach their full potential.

About Family Action

Family Action is a national charity committed to building stronger families and brighter lives. Since the charity was founded in 1869, we have continued to help children and families overcome the challenges they face through a wide range of practical, emotional and financial support. Today we work with more than 60,000 families in over 200 community-based services, as well as supporting thousands more through our national helpline, FamilyLine, which offers free and immediate support to adult family members and national schemes like the National School Breakfast Programme. We help families and individuals to manage their mental health and wellbeing, working with families to reduce the impact of social isolation, poverty, addiction and other significant sources of stress and pressure. We also support families affected by adoption, special guardianship, separation, special educational needs, disability, domestic violence and sexual abuse. In addition, we provide thousands of welfare and educational grants every year to people in financial crisis. For further information, please visit our website at www.family-action.org.uk

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