

# Kids react to the ‘lonely balls’ ad

It’s an effort to inspire active play, one emoji at a time. The latest public service announcement in ParticipACTION’s “Make Room for Play” series shows a variety of abandoned balls with downtrodden emoji-inspired faces, with the 1960s song “Mr. Lonely” in the background. The ad is clever, poignant, and has an important message about making time for outdoor play. **Still, I was curious: would kids get it?**

I showed the 45-second video to small groups of Grade 2 students (30 kids in total) at an elementary school. Although it was not a formal research study, it was interesting to observe their reactions and hear their interpretations.

Here are some highlights from our mini question-and-answer sessions.



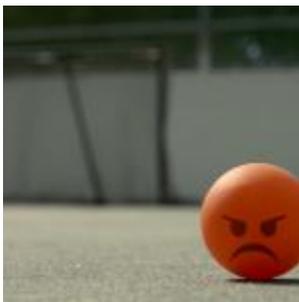
**Why were the balls sad?**

“No one was playing with them, and the kids just wanted to have screen time.”

“The basketball would be happier if he was bouncing.”

“When you’re playing on a screen, the ball kind of feels left out.”

While watching the video, many of the kids smiled when they saw the cute faces painted on the balls. They seemed to instantly connect to the emotions being portrayed. There were a few sympathetic reactions of “awwww” to the basketball crying a single tear, and giggles for the road hockey ball that one student described as having “a frowny face.” Near the end, the line “Screen time is taking away play time” helped clarify why the balls were so bummed out.



**What is screen time?**

“Watching TV or playing video games.”

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“Using a device or electronic thing.”

“Playing on an iPad.”

Interestingly, while students were familiar with the term “screen time”, they had difficulty explaining why too much of it could be a problem. The answers that came out were mainly cliché parent lines like “it’s bad for your eyes” and “it will rot your brain.” One girl even said, “you might go blind if you watch too much TV.”



**What is the video trying to say?**

“You shouldn’t have so much computer time and actually play in real life.”

“Stop watching TV because it makes you forget about playing stuff that you usually play.”

“You need to go outside!”

It was clear that the majority of the students understood the ad’s message, but in the next question, many of them couldn’t articulate why outdoor play was important.

### **Why is it a good idea to go outside and play?**

“We need exercise because... I don’t know.”

“Maybe because it gives you energy?”

“If you just lay around, you might be lazy, so they want you to get up and move around.”

“When you grow up, you will be big and strong.”

“Your body needs it to be healthy.”

“It helps your brain learn.”

“Getting fresh air is good for you.”

### **Did you like the commercial?**

The answer was a resounding yes. They thought the tag line “Don’t visit our website” was funny, because it was the opposite of what you would normally see in advertising and media. When

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asked why ParticipACTION would discourage this, one student explained, “it’s about less screen time and technically, you’re going on a screen to visit their website.”

Some of the kids offered feedback to improve the video. One suggested, “I think they should have ended the commercial with some kids coming to play. Then the balls would have happy faces.”

One boy had a new twist for the campaign: “I think they should say, ‘Let’s try taking away video games’, and then the controllers would be sad.”

“Yeah,” added the girl next to him. “Then they could put a sad face on the back of an iPad or on a TV.”

Creating a commercial with joyless joysticks and sad iPads – now wouldn’t that be a ball.