



CROSS-GENERATIONAL PLAYGROUNDS

**DESIGNING FOR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES,
& THE FUTURE OF EXPERIENCE**

CROSS GENERATIONAL PLAY



Families are no longer looking for child-only activities—they're seeking **shared experiences that connect them emotionally, physically, and socially.** With demographic shifts, the rise of “kidult” (kid & adult) culture, and evolving consumer expectations, destinations must transform from single-age spaces into **inclusive, cross-generational environments.**

This white paper explores the cultural, behavioral, and economic forces shaping the future of multi-age play. It also outlines how Soft Play applies **research, insights, and design innovation** to create play experiences that support **all ages and all abilities**—and why that matters for long-term business growth.



WHAT IS CROSS GENERATIONAL PLAY?

Cross-generational play environments are intentionally designed spaces that support active participation across all ages—from toddlers to teens to parents to grandparents.

These environments promote connection, shared joy, and belonging, offering families a reason to stay longer, engage deeper, and return more often.

“KIDULT” CULTURE IS TRANSFORMING THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

From nostalgia to stress relief, “kidult” culture has gone mainstream:

- Adults 18–44 now drive nearly 1/3 of all global toy purchases
- Kidult categories are growing 25–30% annually
- Adventure gyms, climbing structures, and immersive experiences are rapidly expanding



“More and more, we are designing playgrounds where the entire family can play. Parents are looking for experiences where everyone can participate, and no one is left out.”

– Matt Fallows, Director of Design Innovation, SoftPlay





DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS DEMAND NEW THINKING

Declining birth rates, rising life expectancy, and expanding multigenerational households mean businesses must appeal to:

- Adults
- Older siblings
- Teens and tweens
- Caregivers & grandparents
- Neurodivergent users
- Full family groups

A child-only model narrows reach. A multi-age model unlocks **six generations of engagement.**

CHILDHOOD IS ACCELERATING

Early access to technology is reshaping how kids behave and what they're drawn to:

- The toy window has shrunk from **ages 3–12 to 3–7**
- Kids ages 8–12 spend **4–6 hours/day** on digital media
- Parents are seeking **real-world, active, imaginative, and social alternatives**

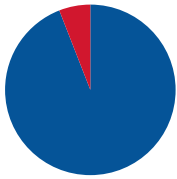
Cross-generational play is the antidote.



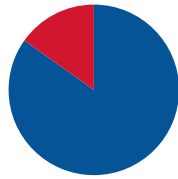
WHY PLAY MATTERS ACROSS GENERATIONS

Play isn't frivolous—it's essential to human development and mental wellbeing. For children, it fuels motor skills, creativity, and learning. For adults, it restores joy, connection, and emotional health.

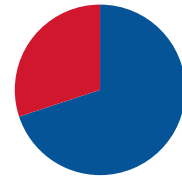
PLAY IS UNIVERSAL



94% believe play is for all ages*



85% want more play in their daily life*



70% of adults say they're still "part child"*

PLAY STRENGTHENS HUMAN CONNECTION

Shared activities, especially physical, cooperative, and imaginative ones, strengthen:

- Family bonding
- Memory building
- Emotional closeness
- Social belonging

These outcomes directly influence how consumers choose where to spend their time and money.

"Parents weren't sitting on the sidelines anymore. They were part of the adventure. And that changed everything."

— Kelly, Entertainment Center Operator



HOW SOFT PLAY DESIGNS CROSS-GENERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

Soft Play uses a research-driven, insight-led model that combines **movement science, behavioral psychology, inclusivity design, safety engineering, and real-world operator feedback.**

DESIGNING FOR ALL AGES & ABILITIES

For Toddlers & Elementary-Age Kids

- Sensory-rich zones
- Imaginative play
- Soft, safe materials
- Climbs, slides
- Choice-based entertainment



For Tweens & Teens

- Challenge elements
- Height experiences
- Social zones



For Adults

- Low-impact routes
- Balance challenges
- Elevated viewpoints to participate with children





MARKET FORCES REQUIRING BUSINESSES TO EVOLVE

Consumers have placed a new set of demands on public spaces, retail centers, entertainment venues, and mixed-use developments.

They want:

- Experiences they can share
- Environments that feel social and uplifting
- Activities that offer health + emotional benefits
- Destinations with multi-age appeal

“5 WAYS CROSS-GENERATIONAL PLAY BOOSTS REVENUE”

1. Longer Visits = Higher Spend

Families stay significantly longer when everyone has something to do.

2. Broader Audience = More Traffic

Multi-age design attracts adults, grandparents, teens, and nontraditional visitors.

3. Experience Stacking = Package Revenue

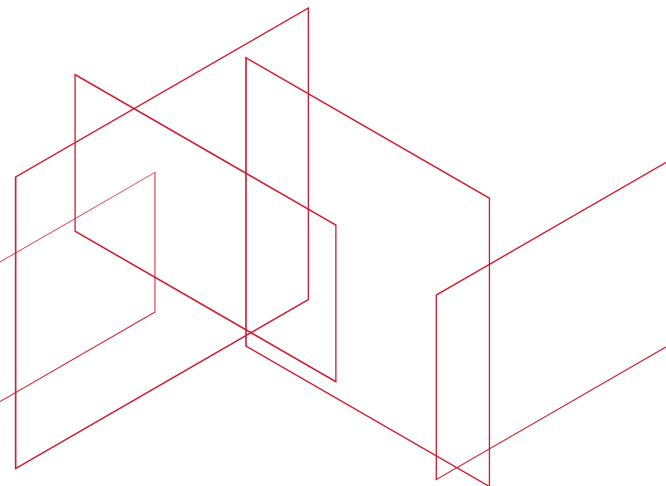
More activities enable upsells in food, retail, memberships, and programming.

4. Repeat Visitation = Sustainable Revenue

Shared memories drive repeat trips 2–3x more than child-only experiences.

5. Brand Affinity = Long-Term Loyalty

Families bond emotionally with destinations that support meaningful connection.



THE SOFT PLAY POINT OF VIEW: THE FUTURE IS CROSS-GENERATIONAL

**PLAY IS A CATALYST FOR CONNECTION.
CONNECTION BUILDS COMMUNITY.
COMMUNITY DRIVES GROWTH.**

Our research-backed approach ensures:

- Multi-age design aligns with modern consumer behavior
- Play supports emotional wellbeing
- Shared experiences create strong brand attachment
- Modular systems produce lasting ROI
- Inclusive environments strengthen community equity

The next decade will belong to destinations that **embrace inclusive, cross-generational design**. These spaces foster joy, strengthen family connection, support mental health, and create deep community impact.

Soft Play is committed to shaping this future with environments that invite everyone—**every age, every ability, every generation**—to play together.



Sources:

[ASD Marketweek](#)
[National Institute for Play Article 1](#)
[National Institute for Play Article 2](#)
[American Academy of Pediatrics Article 1](#)
[National Library of Medicine Article 1](#)
[National Library of Medicine Article 2](#)
[National Library of Medicine Article 3](#)

