

## Toybank's employing Power of Play to make Every Child Resilient during COVID-19

Toybank's ethos is firm — 'It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.' Through our Play Sessions, we promote at-risk children's mental well-being, cognitive and social-emotional development as well as resilience so that they grow up to be well-rounded adults. The nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 meant halting our sessions at Toybank's Play Centers and our beneficiaries deprived of happy and safe spaces, learning and friendships.

There are 20 million at-risk children in Maharashtra now cooped up in their homes, gripped with economic hardships, isolation and uncertainty, causing anxiety and stress. As school shutdown and separation from peers threaten their socio-emotional development, the adverse effects are becoming visible. Announced at a recent webinar (Charcha 2020), 37% of parents reported that the pandemic has adversely affected their children's mental well-being and happiness. 12 crore children in India are losing out on mid-day meals at schools and thus cognitive development. The 31% jump in unemployment rate may cause school drop-outs and spike child labor. Inadequate education among 77% urban and 70% of the rural population is preventing kids' learnings at home.

For the past 15 years, Toybank's Play Programs have kept our 56,000+ beneficiaries on track with their mental and behavioral development, and led to an increase in their curiosity, honesty, learning and a decrease in aggression. Due to our Play Sessions halting, these positive outcomes risk being reversed. To prevent that, the team pivoted into action as soon as we started working remotely. In alignment with our offline Play Programs, we are delivering digital #ToybankPlayAtHome kits with DIY games, activities and more to bring mental relief, routine-like normalcy, meaningful engagement and mental stimulation to the children. Our kits are curated to enhance their concentration, communication, self-awareness, self-expression, numeracy and many such life skills. In collaboration with our partners, we are daily impacting more than **22,871** children and counting through **1,197 teachers** and **3,668 parents** via **224 support groups** on WhatsApp

#ToybankPlayAtHomeKit is impacting children positively. For instance, Parth (name changed), who missed being on his feet since there were no play opportunities while social distancing. He says, "I enjoyed playing the Listening Game and Tail the Animal the most. I played them back-to-back for two-three days. I love games that make me move." For Niharika (name changed), Word Search puzzles are fun. "Every time she recognizes a letter and finds words by herself, she's delighted. She even got creative and found words that weren't on the list," says her parent.

We are treating online delivery of Play as our Mental Relief approach aligning it with our Play Program's fundamental focus of building resilience in children. Our goal to make [Every Child Resilient](#), needs our urgent intervention. We need to build stronger children so that they come out of this crisis unscathed.

