

RECESS

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Discuss the recess or playground rules, pointing how the different rules help to promote safety, kindness, fairness, and fun. When the class follows the playground rules, it saves everyone time, and this should allow additional recess time over the course of a week. Periodic discussion will help the children follow these rules.

Rehearse different recess situations, particularly those that involve conflict situations.

Set recess goals with the class. Some classrooms need to focus on everyone being included in a game or activity, while other classes focus on avoiding certain problem behaviors. Some groups focus on the transition from recess back to class, setting a goal for how quickly or calmly they can return to their room.

Review with the students how recess went. It is important to not only focus on how well the children behaved, but whether they had fun and how they managed to follow the rules. The review takes some time, but it saves class time in the long run.

Award "goal points" or extra recess time when the class meets their recess goals. The most powerful, natural, and logical connection is extra recess time.

Provide alternatives to the more exuberant, difficult to control recess activities. Students who are having trouble with self-control fare better with more structured recess activities. Consider an "indoor" or board game recess for students who don't enjoy the games the children play outside.

Weave student interests into the recess activities. If a student enjoys kites, perhaps a kite flying group can be form. Those youngsters interested in photography may be able to take pictures of recess activities. Others can form a juggling group or practice their magic tricks. Use class time to discuss different types of recess activities and how they match with what the children like to do.

Build recess skills by having the physical education or classroom teacher practice some of the games that are played at recess. Many parents are happy to help out by practicing wall ball or four square or other playground activities at home with their children. When children become more skillful and understand the rules better, they generally participate better and get more enjoyment on the playground.

Develop unique interest and talents in children who are having a particularly difficult time during recess. A student who learns, for example, to throw a Frisbee has a much easier time during recess if there is a Frisbee to throw.

Credit children when they resolve conflict and work to follow playground rules. Some teachers find it helpful to designate children as monitors who look for situations that their classmates handle well (we never want them to report on problems).

Monitor playground activity more carefully, perhaps by using older students from a high school or junior high as helpers.

Consequences for misbehavior on the playground should focus on restitution. The children should be required to do something to improve the playground, making it safer or cleaner or more fun. If a child hurts someone else, they should be required to make amends (not just with an apology but with some additional act of kindness). Teacher or principal time spent dealing with the problem might be "repaid" with a school chore.

Avoid grounding. Grounding children from recess for extended periods of time rarely teaches the children how to do better and it even more rarely gives the youngsters any sense of responsibility or ownership for their misbehavior.