

RECESS: No Longer Just Fun & Games

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Not all kids look forward to recess. For some, it's a stressful and negative experience that they would rather avoid. But recess is a valuable and necessary component of a child's education. It is the only time of day that a child has free choice of activity and a chance to choose who they want to play with. This is essential for the social development of a child but also allows for a child to discover enjoyment in physical activity.

As educators, it is not only important to recognize the value and benefits of recess but also realize the need to step in and help create a positive recess experience for all students. Recess can be fun and free of conflicts and bullying. However, it does not happen magically. It requires effort and teamwork.

The first step is to identify what the typical issues are that happen on a playground. We may think we know, but Peaceful Playgrounds actually did the research and has identified the 5 most common issues that occur on every playground to some degree.

The Peaceful Playgrounds **CREED**

1. **C**hildren Lacked Problem Solving Skills
2. **R**ules (Too many variations for each game)
3. **E**quipment (not enough/broken/lost)
4. **E**xpectations
5. **D**esigns (Not enough for kids to do)

Now that the issues are identified, you can apply strategies that will minimize these issues and create a positive environment and fun recess for all.

1. CHILDREN LACK PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

- Help children solve problems on their own. Focus on Play rather than arguing.
- Make sure you have plenty of choices of activities and available equipment so they can go to another game rather than be forced to stay at the one and only Four Square game that has the one and only playground ball.
- Teach the students ROCK /PAPER/ SCISSORS...yes it is that simple...IT WORKS!

Helpful Tips: Everyone must do it the same way! Rock/Paper/ Scissors Go...123 Go etc. **CONSISTENCY** is key.

One time not 2 out of 3 AND do not allow for creativity (No Bombs, explosions, etc.)

1. RULES

- One set of rules for every game and make sure they are written down, not in someone's head. Rules need to be public information and everyone needs to have access to the rules.
- **NO DO-OVERS**...yes...this alone will make a huge difference on your playground. You have to be black or white...no grey! The kids will get it because very quickly they will discover the benefit of **NO DO-OVERS**. The lines move fast and they are back in the games really quickly.
 - Finally, take the time to make sure students know and understand the rules and procedures of your playground. Implement FREEZE at the bell. For safety purposes more than anything else, having the students freeze at the end of recess allows you to take control of the transition of coming on and off of the playground.

3. EQUIPMENT

- You must provide students with equipment. You must offer a wide variety of equipment to appeal to all the interests of students. Yes, many students do love soccer but not everyone. Your goal is to get everyone active and to do so you need to have equipment that students who want to play individually or just with a partner or small group. Kids need more than playground balls; hula-hoops, beanbags, and jump ropes are a must.
- You **MUST** take the time to not only set up an equipment check out system but you must teach the students the procedure. Simply putting the equipment in a cart and rolling it out and assuming the students will return the equipment at the end of recess is **NOT** a system.
- Take the time to bring out the label maker and organize your cart. Create homes for the various types of equipment so it will be very easy for the students to know where to put the equipment away rather than just throwing everything in a "Trash Can". I guarantee you that at the bottom of that trash can you will find broken equipment and popped balls. Taking care of the equipment starts with the adults setting the example.

4. EXPECTATIONS:

The number one necessity to create a fun and positive recess for all is to have everyone on board (administration, teachers, students & parents). You may be the most positive and committed PE/classroom teacher to make recess better but very simply it can not be done alone. Everyone must be on board to be consistent with the rules and procedures and to support one another. Even if the classroom teachers do not do recess duty they do effect what happens on they playground. Very innocently they could share how they played Four Square when they were little, if it is not the rule that is being taught on the playground, that teacher has caused major chaos. "Well my teacher said this...my teacher said that".

5. DESIGNS

You have to keep the kids busy and to do that you need to help them "play". Just telling a student to "play" is not enough. You often get the blank look response "Play What?" Sound familiar? You can teach children games but after 10 days they will forget them. By painting your playground with many designs and with a variety of activities children will be active. When you have plenty of equipment and choices of games the children are spread out on the playground and the lines are shorter. When the lines are shorter the students are playing more rather than being frustrated by standing and waiting for a turn. You need to not only have a wide variety of games but they need to be age appropriate.

Recess should be fun for all not stressful. It should be that welcomed break in the day not the dreaded part of the day. What happens on the playground does carry over into the classroom.....with a little effort you can make it a positive experience for your students.

References:

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TEAM FOUR SQUARE

Same rules as regular four square. A serves to D to start. Fingers point down, no fists, no holds, no backstops. Lines are out....AND no do-overs. The game is set up with one player in each square and a line of students for each square. As a player hits the ball they are to run to the end of their line and then the next player jumps in the square. If a person messes up...the entire team rotates. This is a very fast paced game because everyone has to be paying attention not just the four players in the squares but everyone in line as well. This is an appropriate activity for upper elem, middle and high school levels. I love this game because it is not about points. It is just constant play.