

# Active Outdoor Recess

## Overview

Recess plays a key role in a child's academic success, including their physical, social, and emotional well-being. Recess provides students with time to be active to develop healthy bodies, enjoy moving more, and accumulate the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Recess is also a time for children to release energy and reduce stress, which improves attention and reduces disruptive behavior in the classroom.



## Take Action

Elementary schools should incorporate a minimum of 20 minutes per day of recess for all grades and 30 minutes for primary grades. The benefits of recess also extend to secondary grades, too! Even if it's just for 15 minutes, older students also benefit from regular physical activity breaks.

Try these simple tips to incorporate active recess at your school:

- Review current recess policies and activities with school administration. Ask the following questions: Is your school providing the recommended number of minutes for recess? Are students active during recess? What things are working well and what areas need improvement?
- Spruce up your playground by reviewing and improving your recess areas.

- Provide inexpensive playground equipment to encourage students to be active (jump ropes, hula-hoops, bean bags, etc.). If you are looking to purchase more equipment, consider [applying for a grant](#) to help support your active recess!
- Utilize [professional development](#) days to role model and support teachers on how to teach and interact with students to increase physical activity during recess.
- Practice active supervision of the playground to minimize injury, encourage active play and ensure safe behavior.
- Determine stations or create set areas for activities. For example, ball bouncing and wall passing station where wall space is available; jump rope area; field game area for games of soccer, kickball, speedball, flag football, running/walking on playground perimeter, [fitness circuit area](#), etc.
- Get your community involved! Partner with a local business to donate new or gently used playground equipment.
- Encourage older students to role model and support younger students by teaching new activities during recess.
- Host a recess week to introduce new activities, activate physical activity during recess, and to ignite active recess throughout the school year.

## Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help students explore...

**Social Awareness:** outdoor recess provides free time that allows children to use their imaginations and engage in meaningful ways with friends through unstructured play. Unstructured play helps students develop empathy and see different perspectives for others' ideas. Students may have unique ideas for how to play with a jump rope or a soccer ball and learning to be open to ideas different than their own is an important skill in social awareness.

**Relationship Skills:** Incorporating active outdoor recess into the school day benefits children socially by allowing them to explore who they are in context of their peers with minimal adult guidance. Children develop skills in communication, conflict

resolution and teamwork through games and activities while also learning how to respect the needs of their peers.

## Tips

-  Advocate for recess as a necessary educational support and remind staff to never use it as a consequence.
-  Create simple rules to provide safe play and share the rules with students and staff.
-  Regularly check play areas for safety hazards (broken equipment, holes, glass, nails or other objects that could cause injuries).
-  Schedule recess before lunch!
-  Be sure all recess activities are inclusive. Options should include activities that require varied levels of skill, non-competitive and more competitive activities, and team and individual options with options that require little equipment.
-  Implement games that have minimal wait time so students are active for as long as possible.
-  Have students pledge to be active during recess. Have students' use a physical activity tracker to monitor their active times throughout the day, and provide healthy rewards for being physically active, etc.
-  Ensure active recess allows for student choice and encourage physical activity for all students, regardless of skill or ability.
-  Consider moving game and sport activities away from the playground sets

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

## Additional Resources

[Recess for Learning Tip Sheet - ENGLISH](#)

([Action for Healthy Kids](#))

[Recess for Learning Tip Sheet - SPANISH](#)

([Action for Healthy Kids](#))

[Increasing Physical Activity Through](#)

[Recess \(Active Living Research\)](#)

[Recess and the Importance of Play](#)

([Peaceful Playgrounds](#))

[Recess Games \(Playworks\)](#)

[30 Classic Games for Simple Outdoor](#)

[Play \(Wired Magazine\)](#)

[Recess Plan Template \(SHAPE America\)](#)

## Related Activities

### Active Indoor Recess

Are your students restless from being cooped up inside due to rain or cold? Active indoor recess is a great way to get physically moving, regardless of space or equipment constraints.

### Fitness Circuit Course

Fitness courses consist of setting up several stations with different activities for students to rotate through in short periods of time (usually one or two minutes).

### **Recess Before Lunch**

Did you know that it's best practice to shift the school schedule so students play at recess first, then eat lunch?

### **Recess at Home**

All kids should strive to get 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Encourage recess at home to help reach these minutes!