

Do Kids Need Recess? Heck Yes, and Here is Why!

 yourtherapysource.com/blog/2019/05/15/do-kids-need-recess-heck-yes-and-here-is-why



If you ask children what their favorite school subject is many will respond recess! Unfortunately, unstructured, free play for kids is becoming a thing of the past. Thirty to forty percent of elementary schools in the United States are eliminating, decreasing or considering eliminating recess. (1,2). Some schools are making these decisions due to increased academic pressures and state testing. So do kids need recess?

Heck yes, kids need recess and here is why! Recess provides learning experiences, social experiences and physical activity time that can not be accomplished in the classroom or even in a structured physical education class. (1) All students can benefit from increased motor skill practice time during recess which is needed due to the sedentary lifestyle of children today. It is important to promote the positive aspects of recess to school districts, teachers and parents.

Why Do Kids Need Recess?

It is crucial for all school staff, students and parents to be informed on the benefits of recess. Recess teaches children numerous important skills beyond just getting a break from the rigors of the classroom.

For example, children learn the ability to follow rules and self-control during a fun game of tag. Positive behaviors are achieved through turn taking and sharing. Cognitive skills such as mathematical concepts (counting, shapes, spatial awareness) and science skills (problem-solving skills) are reinforced on the playground.

Recess increases physical activity

During recess time children are physically active. Educate the school staff on all the benefits of children being physically active. The *American Heart Association* states that physical activity in children is important to control weight, reduce blood pressure, raise good cholesterol, reduce the risk of diabetes and improve psychological well being. (3) Physical activity also affects concentration, elevates mood, enhances creativity and facilitates memory. (4)

Recess Improves Behavior

More and more research has concluded that recess proves to be a positive experience for children across many domains. Children's behaviors in the classroom have been shown to improve if they experience at least 1 period of recess per day lasting a minimum of 15 minutes. (2) If recess is scheduled before lunch, research indicates healthier food choices, decreased visits to the school nurse by as much as 40% and improved behaviors. (5)

Recess Improves Academics

There is extensive research to support that children who are more physically fit have higher academic scores. (6,7) Additional research indicated the following:

1. higher levels of physical activity at recess were related to better reading skills.
2. participation in organized sports was linked to higher arithmetic test scores.

3. boys with higher levels of physical activity, especially walking and bicycling to and from school, had better reading skills than less active boys.
4. boys who spent more time doing activities involving reading and writing on their leisure time had better reading skills compared to boys who spent less time doing those activities.
5. for girls, there were only few associations of physical activity and sedentary behavior with academic achievement when various confounding factors were controlled for.

The researchers concluded that higher levels of physical activity during recess, before school and in organized sports may help to improve academic achievement, especially in boys. (9)

Don't Take Away Recess to Punish Students

Encourage teachers not to withhold recess as a punishment. The *National Association of Sport and Physical Education* states that “administering or withholding physical activity as a form of punishment and/or behavior management is an inappropriate practice”. (8) Offer alternative suggestions to withholding recess such as developing routines, include students in setting behavior goals and giving positive feedback when a student is doing something right.

Pre-Teach Skills If Necessary

Children with mild and multiple disabilities may feel isolated and left out during unstructured recess time. Students may need to be pre-taught recess skills. Having children practice negotiating the playground equipment is important, but don't forget other playground skills. Observe a student's class during recess to see what types of games the children play. Perhaps pre-teach the rules of hopscotch, four square, tag, and other games so that the student is prepared socially as well as motorically.

Recess and Inclusion

Due to physical limitations, some children will not be able to negotiate the playground equipment or participate in traditional recess activities. It is still important for these children to be included. Provide the teachers with ideas for the children to do during recess time.

Perhaps try water play, bowling, beach balls, bubbles, music and more (see Create Active Play Boxes below for more ideas). At first, an adult may need to be present to guide the children during the activities. The adult can modify the rules of different games to make it simpler for all children to participate.

Create Active Play Boxes

Playground equipment is not always available at a school during all recess times. Perhaps it is available, but the children are tired of climbing on it. Provide the teachers with play boxes or ideas to include in an active play box. These active play boxes can then be taken outdoors during recess time or at any time of the day. Maybe create a lending library of active play boxes for the elementary school teachers. An additional benefit to the play boxes is that research has indicated children increase moderate to vigorous physical activity time when there is more portable playground equipment. (7)

Here are some suggestions for different themed active play boxes:

- **Ball box** – include various sizes and textures of different playground balls
- **Bubble box** – include bubbles, different bubble wands and bubble trays
- **Jump rope box** – add traditional jump ropes, chinese jump ropes and double dutch ropes
- **Sidewalk chalk box** – have an art contest, create new black top games, hopscotch, etc.
- **Activity card box** – write one playground games on each i.e. Freeze tag, hide and go seek, obstacle course, etc. The children can pick out one card at a time to choose a game.
- **Science box** – magnifying glasses, bug containers, tweezers
- **Water paint box** – buckets for water, large paintbrushes and paint rollers to “paint” the black top with different designs
- **Beach party box** – include beach balls, tether ball set, paddle ball and Velcro mitt set
- **Celebration box** – include streamers and ribbon sticks to run and play with
- **Catch All Box** – Velcro mitts, Frisbees, soft footballs, small balls, recycled plastic milk jugs with tops cut off but handles left on to catch balls
- **Hula Hoop Box** – suggest hula hoop contests or use hoops to create obstacle courses
- **Race Box** – include stopwatches and cones. The children can set up races and time each other

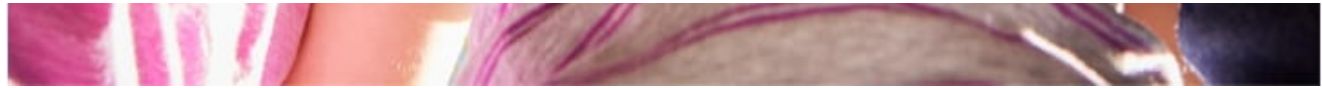
Don't forget to create some active free play boxes for indoor recess as well.

- **Pedometers** – children can see how many steps they take during recess and try to increase each time
- **Dance party box** – radio with batteries, dance music
- **Indoor balls** – balloons and cardboard tubes
- **DVD box** – a collection of exercise DVD's for kids – [here are some downloads to get you started!](#)
- **Bean bag box** – include bean bags and targets to throw at
- **Yoga Box** – Everything you need for **Yoga in the Classroom can be found here.**

Recess should be fun, engaging and productive for all students. Work on rallying teachers, parents and students to give recess the respect it deserves.

Do Kids Need Recess?

Heck yes, and here's why



References:

1. National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (2001) **Recess and the Importance of Play – A Position Statement on Young Children and Recess**. Retrieved from the web on 3/7/10 at <http://w4.nkcsd.k12.mo.us/~rbeckett/RECESS%20AND%20THE%20IMPORTANC E%20OF%20PLAY.htm>.
2. Barros, Romina M., Silver, Ellen J., Stein, Ruth E. K. **School Recess and Group Classroom Behavior** *Pediatrics* 2009 123: 431-436
3. American Heart Association Scientific Position on Physical Activity (Exercise) and Children. Retrieved from the web on 3/10/10 at <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=459>.
4. Rice, M. Bulk Up the Brain. Retrieved from the web on 3/10/10 at <http://physical-therapy.advanceweb.com/Editorial/Content/Editorial.aspx?CC=120347>
5. Parker-Pope, T. (2010) **Play, Then Eat: Shift May Bring Gains at School**. New York Times Retrieved from the web on 3/7/10 at <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/25/play-then-eat-shift-may-bring-gains-at-school/?8dpc>
6. Egger JR, Bartley KF, Benson L, Bellino D, Kerker B. **Childhood Obesity is a Serious Concern in New York City: Higher Levels of Fitness Associated with Better Academic Performance**. NYC Vital Signs 2009, 8(1): 1-4.
7. Dowda, Marsha, Brown, William H., McIver, Kerry L., Pfeiffer, Karin A., O'Neill, Jennifer R., Addy, Cheryl L., Pate, Russell R. **Policies and Characteristics of the Preschool Environment and Physical Activity of Young Children** *Pediatrics* 2009 123: e261-e266
8. National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2009). *Physical activity used as punishment and/or behavior management* [Position statement]. Reston, VA: Author
9. Medical Express. High levels of physical activity linked to better academic performance in boys. Retrieved from the web on 9/11/14 at <http://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-high-physical-linked-academic-boys.html#nwlt>