

# PEACE POWER TOOLS

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## *Structured Recess*

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### **Summary:**

Structured recess is a planned and actively supervised break from regular instruction during the school day. Students engage in organized “play” or games that emphasize turn taking, helpfulness, rule following, and emotional control. By contrast, unstructured and lightly supervised recess is associated with increases in aggression and behavior problems.

### **Resources Needed:**

- None

### **Implementation Steps:**

- Identify target pro-social behaviors.
- Identify games that could be played during recess (i.e. jump rope and foot races). See the module on Cooperative Games and Sports for activities that are particularly useful for teaching positive social behaviors.
- Establish rules and routines associated with targeted pro-social behaviors expected during recess and include in a checklist for adult activity supervisors.
- Establish group contingency system of rewards (i.e. additional or extended recess time) and consequences (i.e. time out), which will help reinforce pro-social recess behaviors and sanction undesirable behaviors.
- Identify adults to help supervise each activity and ensure that they know and understand the rules, routines, rewards, consequences and delivery methods.
- Explain rules and demonstrate target behaviors (as well as those behaviors that are undesirable) to children.
- Model pro-social behaviors for students, allow students to practice and then review/offer feedback.

### **Variations:**

- Research shows that recess breaks have a “renewing” effect on most children, essentially decreasing off-task and fidgety behaviors noticeably below pre-recess levels.
- Further evidence shows that there are some children, such as those with unstable home lives or those demonstrating attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, may benefit from structured recess embedded in a school-wide system of positive behavior.
- Individual consequences may be useful in some cases along with group contingencies. When individual rewards/prizes (e.g., gold stars, points, decorative wristbands, etc.) are given, it is important that they are given immediately, frequently, and consistently to each child that exhibits positive behavior. Corrective consequences (e.g., being sent to the end of the line, etc.) for undesirable behavior should be delivered unemotionally, consistently and at the time of each incident.
- Increased active adult supervision alone significantly reduces problem behavior during recess.
- Growing evidence shows that when children who are at risk for antisocial behaviors are provided recess within an overall environment of support and recognition, the frequency of problem behaviors is reduced.

### **Rational and Evidence Base:**

There is evidence that structured recess games dramatically improve cooperative behavior in elementary age children. Research also shows that structured recess helps reduce bullying, aggression, obesity, behaviors associated with attention deficit hyperactivity

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disorder, and other behavior disturbances. In addition, structured recess has been found to help improve social norms, character, and academic learning during the school day.

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