

Set Simple Recess Guidelines

- **AGE 5 – 12 ALL STUDENTS**

Topics:

- **SAFETY**
- **BULLYING**
- **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**



Recess should be a time of joy and discovery.

Through play, kids stretch and grow physically, emotionally, and socially. But like any game, clear rules and guidelines are essential to help kids play well and play fairly.

Use this checklist to make sure your recess rules and consequences are as effective as they can be:

Recess rules should be:

- Short: 5 rules or fewer.
- Understood and agreed upon: Staff and students agree to follow the same guidelines.
- Positive: Tell students what they can do, like “Use light butterfly tags,” instead of saying, “Don’t push.”
- Visual: Hang a clear poster on the playground—images are important, especially for younger students.

Consequences should be:

- Designed to teach: Punishments and unrelated menial tasks do not change behavior and only lead to frustration. Tie the consequence to the behavior so that students can connect their actions to an outcome.
- Part of a two-sided calm conversation: Allow children to express themselves—there may be more to the story—but don’t confuse excuses with explanations. After carrying through with the consequence, let it go. If you hold onto it, the child will too.
- Responsive and timely: Recess Team members should discuss the behavior with students immediately and encourage them to think about how to correct it.
- A progression: Consequences should be appropriate for the situation and only progress from less to more severe if behaviors are repeated. For example, the first time a student runs to be first in line, he or she is simply asked to return to the starting point and walk (effectively, losing their place in line to others who were already walking).

Avoid:

- Warnings like “You’re not going to be able to play that game again.” Make sure warnings connect to a better choice.
- Sending a student to the office without first trying to address the issue.
- Calling a parent without a positive plan in place.
- Speaking about a child in a negative way.

What you can try this week:

- Set 3–5 recess rules using positive language.
- Review how your Recess Team addresses problems and set new guidelines for correcting behaviors if needed.
- Display a poster of the rules where everyone can see it during recess.