

How can whales and wedding cakes help make your playground trouble-free?

Core TFPG Principles:

Self-responsibility

Intrinsic Motivation

Inclusion-style of Teaching

Social/Emotional Skills

- Group Dynamics
- Conflict resolution
- Communication
- Empathy
- Self-control
- Self-awareness
- Motivation
- Stress management
- Self-responsibility

Cognitive Skills

- Problem-solving
- Decision-making
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking

What children learn is not as important as how they learn it.

- Curt Hinson

Recess 101..FYI

Very little is known about recess prior to the early 1900's. However, in early lithographs and old photos, children are seen running and playing outside of their one-room schoolhouses. This appears to indicate that recess was a regular part of the school day during the 1800's.

During the past century, the running and playing has turned into kids climbing on expensive metal and plastic structures; playing team sports; and chasing each other around the playground. What hasn't changed are the reasons why recess is a valuable

part of each school day. Today's recess offers several basic and vital components, such as:

- Recess is a time for children to exercise through movement and play. This helps to keep kids healthy and defends against obesity and obesity-related diseases.
- Recess provides children with numerous opportunities for social interaction. They learn important skills such as communication, cooperation and teamwork.
- Recess provides the body with fresh air which helps supply the brain with much

needed oxygen to keep it alert for learning.

- Recess provides the body with Vitamin D, which is absorbed from the sun, and is vital in keeping the immune system strong.

Few people understand or value the role that play has in the development of children. It is often an overlooked aspect of the educational process. Yet, it is vital to the overall growth and development of all children.

The Brain & Recess

According to John Medina, author of *Brain Rules* (2008), "Exercise improves children. Physically fit children identify visual stimuli much faster than sedentary ones. They appear to concen-

trate better. Brain activation studies show that children and adolescents who are fit allocate more cognitive resources to a task and do so for longer periods of time" (p. 18). This supports the need for daily recess where children are

active and engaged in developmentally appropriate physical activities that offer unlimited opportunities for movement.

Did You Know?

Today's primary-aged children receive fewer opportunities out of school for interacting freely with peers and, thus, fewer opportunities for developing social skills and competence, than children did 10 to 20 years ago.

(In *Social Life in School*, Blatchford, 1998)

Research has shown that the more fit children are, the higher they score on math and reading tests.

(University of Illinois, Hillman, 1995)

In a national survey conducted over a 5-year period in the mid-1990's, it was found that the amount of time children spent at recess in elementary schools decreased by 56%.

(In *The Role of Recess in Children's Cognitive Performance and School Adjustment*: Pellegrini & Bohn, January 2005)

Children are more sedentary at school than at home.

(In *Research Quarterly for Exercise & Sport*, 61, 307-314; Simons-Morton, et al.)

Regular, "playful" breaks during intense, sustained cognitive work, maximizes learning and achievement gains.

(In the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 51, 123-138; Toppino, et al.)

A study by the California Department of Education (2001 and repeated again in 2002 with the same results) on 954,000 students found that students who scored the highest on the FitnessGram fitness test scored twice as well on academic tests as their unfit peers.

(California Department of Education, 2001 & 2002)

The Trouble-free Playground Philosophy:

The philosophy behind the Trouble-free Playground program is based on three core principles:

Principle 1: Teaching Self-responsibility

- The ultimate goal of education should be to teach children to be self-responsible for their own learning; their own behavior; and taking care of themselves.
- It is often assumed that children come to school with a sense of self-responsibility already in place, but this is not always true.
- Children learn self-responsibility when they are given choices and are allowed to make decisions.
- Part of being self-responsible is having control of oneself.

Principle 2: Increasing Intrinsic Motivation

- Intrinsic motivation comes from within a person. You do things because they have meaning to you and you value them.
- The opposite of intrinsic motivation is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation typically comes in the form of bribes, threats, punishments, and rewards.
- Intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility are linked together. You can't have one without the other.
- Intrinsic motivation is accomplished through the 5 C's: Control, Challenge, Curiosity, Creativity & Constant Feedback.

Principle 3: Using the Inclusion-style of Teaching

- The Inclusion-style of Teaching is based on the premise that 100% of the children are participating 100% of the time at a level that meets their individual needs and abilities.
- Excluding children from games, which occurs regularly in traditional games such as: Dodgeball; Duck, Duck, Goose; and Musical Chairs, is detrimental to their development.
- Non-inclusion games and activities do not promote success for all students. They are actually set up for the majority of the children to fail.
- Inclusion-style activities are for everyone. Exclusion-style activities are only for the highly-skilled or elite performers.

6-Steps to a Trouble-free Playground

Step 1: Teach Social/Emotional Skills

- Adults who work with children teach social/emotional skills whether they realize it or not.
- Social/emotional skills are the skills needed to cope with our environment and the people and things in it.
- The best way to teach social/emotional skills is through “interactive” learning (touching, feeling, experiencing, doing).
- Children should be given “experiences” instead of just “information”.

Step 2: Change the Games to Make Them More Developmentally Appropriate

- Many of the games children play at recess are not socially, emotionally, mentally, or physically appropriate for them.
- Games need to be changed so that 100% of the children have an opportunity to participate.
- Smaller-group games increase the amount of participation, exercise, skill development and fun children have.
- The “Wedding Cake” Theory explains how only a few students control the playground, which can lead to discipline problems and bullying issues.

Step 3: Change the Perception of Recess

- Children and teachers often think recess is a time away from learning, when in fact it can (and should be) a valuable learning experience.
- When children view recess as “Free Time” they have a tendency to act in a less responsible manner.
- To help change the perception of recess, children must see that its content is valued and respected.
- The “Game Board” is a valuable tool in directing children to participate in an appropriate manner on the playground.
- The “Recess Evaluation Form” is a valuable tool for having children reflect on what they have accomplished and how well they accomplished it. It is a key step in developing self-responsibility.

Step 4: Develop Intrinsic Motivation & Self-responsibility

- Extrinsic motivation in the form of bribes, threats, punishments and rewards, is only a short-term solution to playground problems.
- Intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility can be developed through the use of “Action Levels” which help guide the children to make positive choices about their behavior.
- Using a 4-Question approach to implementing the Action Levels helps redirect children who have made poor choices. (What level are you? What did you do? Can you move to another level? How?)
- The “Whale Theory” explains how to redirect poor behavior and change the environment to diminish it in the future.
- Punishment is a short-term solution that creates other problems. Redirecting and changing the environment are long-term solutions.

6-Steps to a Trouble-free Playground...Continued

Action Level 1: Unacceptable

- Not following directions
- Not participating
- Arguing
- Hitting, pushing, or fighting
- Out of control
- Poor attitude

Action Level 2: Acceptable

- Following directions
- Participating
- Taking care of equipment
- Respecting others
- Under control
- Positive attitude

Action Level 3: Outstanding

- Being self-responsible
- Cooperating with others
- Returning equipment
- Helping others
- Acting as a role model

Step 5: Games Day

- Games Day is a day for children to learn numerous new games in a short period of time.
- Teachers, Aides, Parents, Administrators, etc., teach games to students on a rotating basis through stations.
- Games Day can be held as one full-day or broken down into smaller, shorter versions (half-day, by grade level, etc.).

Step 6: Integrate Recess Into the Classroom

- To help promote the importance of recess and encourage responsible behavior, it's beneficial to have classroom discussions about recess and the games being played.
- Using recess as a topic in language arts class (write a story about recess) or math class (measure the playground) can add excitement to a lesson and teach children that recess is a valuable part of the school day.
- Children can keep a "Recess Journal" that includes writings about what they do at recess.

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Curt Hinson, Ph.D., has taught at both the elementary school level and the college level over the past 30 years. He currently works as an educational consultant for PlayFit Education Inc. In addition, he teaches in the on-line graduate program at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY and as an adjunct professor at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. He holds a Ph.D. in Kinesiology, a Masters of Education degree, and a BS degree in Health & Physical Education.

Dr. Hinson is the author of three books, *Fitness for Children; Games Kids Should Play at Recess;* and *6-Steps to a Trouble-free Playground.* He has published over 50 articles related to teaching and is the creator of the "Trouble-free Playground" recess program for elementary schools.

Dr. Hinson has made presentations in all 50 states, as well as in Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. He was the 1992 National Association for Sport and Physical Education Eastern District Teacher of the Year and the 1991 Delaware PE Teacher of the Year. He is a member of the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance; the National Association for Sport and Physical Education; and the American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation.

Dr. Hinson has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal;* *Disney's Family Fun* magazine; and on the *Fox News Network.*