



# REFRESHING RECESS PROGRAM

Refreshing Recess is one of several model programs developed as a part of an Ohio Department of Education (ODE) funded project entitled Every Moment Counts: Promoting Mental Throughout the Day (see [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)). The focus of this initiative is to embed strategies throughout the day to help all children and youth become mentally healthy in order to succeed in school, at home and in the community.



## About the Refreshing Recess Program

This 6-week program was developed by occupational therapists (OTs) to be embedded during recess with the purpose of creating a positive recess experience so that all students can enjoy playing and socializing with friends. The ultimate goal of the program is to provide the recess supervisors and students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources needed to sustain a positive recess environment. Specifically, Refreshing Recess was designed to support school personnel during recess and to give them strategies for fostering friendships, engaging children in a variety of play activities, resolving conflicts, promoting positive behavior, and creating opportunities for inclusion of all students. Any structured activities that are provided are strictly optional, so students may choose whether or not they would like to participate.

## What Does the Program Involve?

This is a 6-week, 1 day/week, program embedded into recess involving a combination of education, creative activities, and OT coaching.

- **Educating** recess supervisors, school administrators, teachers and students about how to create a positive recess experience for all students by offering a variety of activity ideas and embedding strategies for promoting positive behaviors and social interactions during recess using a variety of methods such as an orientation session, newsletters, talking points, posters and bookmarks.
- **Embedding weekly activities** in order to encourage children to engage in active play, develop new interests, form friendships, interact positively with peers, include others, and decrease bullying.
- **Occupational therapy coaching** with recess supervisors to model positive social interaction with students, help problem solve behavior challenges, suggest a variety of enjoyable recess activities, and create opportunities for inclusion of all students with and without disabilities.

## Developed by Occupational Therapists (OTs), but Implemented by All

Although the program is lead by OTs, it requires the support and participation of recess supervisors, school staff, administration, students and families. Why OT? Occupational therapists are skilled in knowing how to help individuals participate successfully in their daily activities, including recess, by providing enjoyable activities, enhancing skills or modifying the environment or the activity.<sup>1</sup> OT's analyze the social, emotional, physical and sensory aspects of participation in order to make the modifications needed for successful participation.<sup>2</sup>

## Why is This Program Needed?

There is positive relationship between active play during recess and academic performance.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, many schools are cutting recess to increase the amount of instruction time.<sup>4</sup> School personnel and administrators are generally uninformed on the importance of recess and strategies that can be used to improve recess. In addition, recess supervisors generally do not receive the education and support needed to create a positive recess experience. As a result, supervisors may view their job as 'watching' students and providing discipline when conflicts arise rather than promoting positive activities and social interaction.

**For students,** recess should be an enjoyable part of the school day to:

- Have fun and take a break from classroom work<sup>5</sup>
- Engage in a variety of active play activities and/or games<sup>6,7</sup>
- Socialize with friends and learn how to be a good friend

**For recess supervisors,** outdoor and indoor recess are important times to interact with students in positive ways and encourage active play and positive social interaction.



## Guiding Principles (based on current literature)

1. Promote positive social interaction and friendships, which includes educating recess supervisors about strategies for promoting social interactions and teaching students conflict resolution.<sup>8</sup>
2. Promote positive behavior and prevention of bullying. Teach adults to model appropriate behavior and how to foster cooperation, acceptance of differences, and inclusion
3. Provide both unstructured and adult guided play opportunities to promote inclusive participation in enjoyable activities for indoor and outdoor recess.<sup>4,7</sup> Promote active play to help prevent obesity and promote academic performance.
4. Provide attractive and safe play materials. Ensure all playground equipment is updated, safe and offers a variety of play opportunities. Provide outdoor game materials (e.g. jump ropes, hula hoops); paint the playground pavement with games, and offer games that are accessible to students with disabilities.



## Weekly Themes

- Week #1:** Kickoff: Let's get started! Orientation: How to refresh recess. Students receive Refreshing Recess bookmark. OT provides PPT orientation to recess supervisors; explores challenges and needs.
- Week #2:** Let's make friends and have fun together. Children participate in a friendship scavenger hunt. Supervisors learn about fostering friendships.
- Week #3:** Let's play and work together. Children create something together with a variety of art materials. Supervisors learn about teamwork and conflict resolution.
- Week #4:** Let's get fit and get along. Children engage in Fitness Trail. Supervisors learn about Positive behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)
- Week #5:** Let's respect differences and include everybody. Children engage in Magic Tag. Supervisors learn how to promote inclusion.
- Week #6:** Let's make sure everyone has fun. Children engage in Untying Knots game. Supervisors learn about bully prevention



## Program Outcomes

Preliminary findings from survey data indicate that the Refreshing Recess program resulted in improved student perceptions of recess being fun, activities being enjoyable, and peers and supervisors being friendly. By the end of the program, recess supervisors reported positive changes in the following areas: feeling adequately trained to supervise recess; having the necessary supports to promote play; knowing how to interact socially with children; and knowing how to successfully resolve conflict.

<sup>1</sup> Bazyk, S. (ed.). *Mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention for children and youth: A guiding framework for occupational therapy*. Bethesda, MD: The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> American Occupational Therapy Association. (2012). *Recess promotion*. Retrieved from <http://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Practice/Children/SchoolMHToolkit/Recess%20Promotion.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Singh, A. et al. (2012). Physical activity and performance at school. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.*, 166, 49-55.

<sup>4</sup> Ramstetter, C.L., Murray, R., & Garner, A.S. (2010). The crucial role of recess in Schools. *Journal of School Health*, 80, 517-526.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2010). *The state of play Gallup survey of principals on school recess*. Retrieved from <http://www.rwjf.org/content/rwjf/en/research-publications/find-rwjfresearch/2010/02/the-state-of-play.html>

<sup>6</sup> Beighle, A. (2012). *Increasing physical activity through recess* [Research brief]. Retrieved from <http://www.activelivingresearch.org>

<sup>7</sup> Bundy, A. C. et al. (2008). Playful interaction: Occupational therapy for all children on the school playground. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 62, 522-527.

<sup>8</sup> National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2005). *Recess and the importance of play*. Retrieved from North Kansas City Schools website: <http://w4.nkcisd.k12.mo.us/~rbeckett/RECESS%20AND%20THE%20IMPORTANCE%20OF%20PLAY.htm>

## VISION STATEMENT

Our school will provide positive outdoor and indoor recess experiences so that all students will enjoy playing and socializing with friends and adults.

## TEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. **Know your stuff.** Read annotated bibliography on recess best practices.
2. **Observe recess** to get a feel of the challenges and needs of supervisors and children.
3. **Meet the relevant stakeholders -** recess supervisors.
4. **Develop a plan of action.** Decide what grade level and what day of the week to implement the program.
5. **Make a case.** Obtain principal buy-in and support. Summarize assessment findings and program details.
6. **Sell the program.** Share marketing brief with school staff, students, and families before the kick-off.
7. **Kick off the program.** Orientation to recess supervisors and students.
8. **Just do it!** Implement the six week program!
9. **Reinforce the message** with follow-up support and monthly newsletters.
10. **Do it again!** Replicate the program in other grades. Spread the joy!

## For further information:

Visit: [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)

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