

# School Recess: Safety Situations and Assumable Risk

Subjects: [Education & Educational Research](#)

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[school recess](#)[transition](#)[safety](#)[risk](#)[education](#)

## 1. Recess at School

Recess at school takes place during the school day to provide the children with a change from academic activities. In the field of education, rest times within the academic activities at school are necessary for the healthy development of children and as tools to promote learning [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]](#), bringing health, social, cognitive, and developmental benefits.

The regulations indicate that recess is part of the school day, so that it should be as important and have the same value as other areas of the curriculum [\[5\]](#). It is a space and a period of time in which the students can rest from the academic sessions to play and socialize with their peers, allowing them to gain energy to continue with the classroom sessions that take place after recess [\[6\]\[7\]](#). Nevertheless, in researchers' context, research studies indicate that, in general, recess at school is not considered to be a first-order educational space [\[8\]\[9\]](#).

The activities conducted at recess can be open or designed by the teachers, especially to ensure participation [\[10\]](#). A good organization of play time can help improve psychomotricity and physical activity, and can also have an effect on the social, cognitive, and emotional areas of the students [\[11\]\[12\]\[13\]](#).

It is mandatory that the school yard space used for recess comply with technical requisites to guarantee the safety of the children, and schools must manage this safety with contextual and organizational criteria [\[14\]](#).

## 2. Safety and Risks in School Recess

Traditionally, school recess is the period of time during a school day with the greatest number of risks for children, because it occurs in an open and free space, created for playing, in which students can perform motor actions that are very different from those that are performed in the classroom [\[15\]](#). In fact, some studies have shown that the space utilized for recess at school is one of the main places where injuries occur [\[16\]\[17\]](#).

In this entry, when researchers talk about the concept of “risk”, researchers do not limit ourselves to the possibility or danger of the child suffering a physical injury (due to equipment, in the space itself, through interaction with peers, etc.), but researchers align themselves with authors such as [\[18\]](#)[\[19\]](#)[\[20\]](#), understanding risk to be a situation in which children can recognize and evaluate a challenge and decide the course of their action. Therefore, researchers place themselves in the range of risk perception and risk management. Researchers also relate this risk to conflict management, i.e., to problems arising from the interaction between boys and girls (arguments, fights, etc.), and to the management that can be performed by schools. The design of the space where recess takes place, the maintenance, the availability of equipment, and the participation of adults contribute to the avoidance of safety problems and exclusion practices [\[21\]](#)[\[22\]](#). Likewise, the intervention or not of teachers directly affects the behavioral patterns of children during recess [\[23\]](#)[\[24\]](#)[\[25\]](#).

Another important element is the transition, that is, the moving from the classroom to recess, or the entry and exit from the school premises. Traditionally, the students form a line at the start and end of different activities: to enter, to exit, to go to recess, to return to the classroom, to go to the sport courts, to obtain food, or to go to the library [\[26\]](#). Ultimately, schools use mechanisms of order that indicate the start and end of different activities, and which allow them to maintain a certain level of student safety.

Different factors have an influence on the safety of the school recreational spaces [\[27\]](#): personal influences (taking risks, preventing boredom, and bad behavior); interpersonal relations (responsibilities of the teacher, teacher support, support between students, and bullying problems); influences of the physical space (surfaces, protection against adverse climatic conditions, safe structures, and protection equipment); and political and organizational influences (designated play areas, guidelines, level of supervision, and maintenance). Therefore, in the area of safety at recess, various agents are responsible for looking after the physical and moral integrity of the children.

Research studies have shown that although it is probable that accidents may occur at school, most of them could be avoided. In general, the accidents during recess occur because the fixed or mobile equipment (climbing ropes, support bars, etc.) do not meet the safety guidelines or the space is not well-designed [\[28\]](#)[\[29\]](#).

Nevertheless, the traditional concept of school safety has been redefined and improved because, to protect users and guarantee healthy environments, it is necessary to consider multiple dimensions that include different types of risks: static risks (the conservation and maintenance of the installations by groundkeepers, etc.) and dynamic risks (those risks that are associated with the process of interaction with people) [\[30\]](#)[\[31\]](#).

The evolution of the concept of risk has also brought with it the publication of works that are opposed to an approach that is free of risks for children’s play, focusing the perspective into an approach of cost and benefit analysis [\[32\]](#). Zero risk does not exist, so researchers must advocate for the empowerment of children to facilitate its management. Favoring participation, informing, preventing, and awareness should be basic aspects for improving safety at school recesses [\[33\]](#)[\[34\]](#)[\[35\]](#)[\[36\]](#)[\[37\]](#).

## **3. School Recess Guidelines**

In Spain, Royal Decree 132/2010 <sup>[32]</sup> dictates the minimum requirements that must be met by the common use facilities at primary and secondary schools. Article 3 establishes that the school playgrounds must have a surface area of at least 900 square meters, be partially covered and, if needed, be able to be used as a sports field. It also establishes the safety requirements of the equipment and facilities at schools (the size of the playground is calculated considering the number of classes), as well as the recess periods for the children. The Spanish guidelines are based on a European guideline <sup>[38]</sup>, which specifies the general safety requirements for the equipment and surfaces of children's public parks that are permanently installed.

Within the context of Catalonia, the recess activities are regulated through different regulations <sup>[39][40][41][42]</sup>. Recess is described as an educational activity that is part of the school schedule, which must respect the principles of the education project of the center. The outside playground must have a minimum of 2 square meters per child for simultaneous use, and a minimum of 75 square meters.

As for the creation of new school buildings, the Department of Education of Catalonia establishes regulations such as the inclusion of water fountains and benches in the playgrounds and access to bathrooms outside of the main school building <sup>[42]</sup>. Additionally, other guidelines establish that the entry to the playgrounds must be paved and that access should be easy, especially if the entrances must be used by very young children <sup>[43]</sup>.

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