

LET GROW

CASE STUDY

Let Grow Play Club



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Especially for some of the kids who really need an outlet...it's a lot better day.

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CASE: STUDENTS ARE ANXIOUS, ARGUING, AND PICKING FIGHTS

SOLUTION?

Get them to play together/solve own spats.

BACKGROUND

Students were tattling and fighting more than before COVID, expecting the adults to soothe them. Chris thought free play might help kids become more mature and self-regulating. In Play Club students organize their own fun and solve their own conflicts. An adult is present, but only as a “lifeguard.”

Chris started a before-school Let Grow Play Club two mornings a week open to all the kids. He had 72 participate, with the K – 2nd graders one morning and the 3rd – 5th graders another.

BUMPS ALONG THE WAY

“At first the kids were bewildered by the lack of structure. They were like, ‘You’re supposed to teach us something,’” says Chris. “They struggled. But finally they kind of got into their own groups and started playing. It took about three weeks. The big kids were a little more hesitant or scared. The little kids were faster to just go play.”

WHAT ACTIVITIES DID THEY DO?

Basketball, football, cup-stacking. One group put scooters under mats and raced around the gym. *“They were a little bit reserved at first, because even our recess is so structured and there are so many rules. But I was like, ‘This is pretty much free range, so long as you’re not hurting anyone.”* The scooter kids ended up inventing a game where they were jousting with pool noodles.

WHAT ABOUT FIGHTS?

The kids were so used to having an adult solve every problem for them, they expected Chris to solve their disagreements. To change that, he set up a “[Conflict Corner](#)” where a poster instructs the kids to:

- Face each other, palms up.
- Explain the problem.
- Listen to each other.
- Brainstorm a solution together.
- Shake hands.
- Give a compliment.



EXTRA TIP

When a student wants a referee, ask, “Is this a kid problem or an adult problem?” Most kids realize: Oh! Kid problem.

If they came to him, he directed them to The Conflict Corner, and at first, it was used a lot. Later, kids didn’t want to waste their time there, so they’d just resolve the issue and keep playing — exactly what Chris hoped would happen.

ANY SURPRISE BENEFITS?

“My own son, he’s a third grader, and he has anxiety and possibly ADHD, and I noticed on Play Club days he was way more calm after school, and his teacher would say he seemed less anxious or upset. He wasn’t having the big emotional reactions he would have at recess. There was definitely a difference in days he had Play Club and days he didn’t.”

“I heard from one parent that on Play Club days their kids were getting up on their own, getting dressed on their own. There was no arguing, no fighting, no dragging them out of bed.”

WHAT DO YOU WANT OTHER SCHOOLS TO KNOW?

“You have to do it. It’s amazing, especially for the kids who really need an outlet before school — my son included. They’re dripping in sweat and had fun and it’s a lot better day.”

HOW CAN I GET THIS FOR MY STUDENTS?

Just request the free Play Club Implementation Guides at letgrow.org. You can get expert advice from a teacher who’s been running Clubs for years on our recorded webinar, [*Nuts and Bolts of Play Club from Someone Who’s Done It*](#). And you can always talk to us, just email schools@letgrow.org.

