



Playground Activity Leaders in Schools

Champion Handbook



P.A.L.S. Program Objectives

P.A.L.S. is a playground leadership program offered by Niagara Region Public Health that encourages all children to participate in activities regardless of their gender, size, or ability.

A Public Health Nurse (PHN) trains one Staff Champion and two Student Champions to implement the program. The Champions then oversee the program with the PHN providing ongoing support. Students from grades 4 to 7 with leadership qualities are trained to act as playground activity leaders to plan and lead fun and safe activities on the playground for younger students.

The objectives of the P.A.L.S. program are to:

Increase physical activity

The amount of physical activity children participate in has decreased significantly over the last 15 years and childhood obesity is a growing public health concern. Only nine per cent of five to 17 year olds get the 60 minutes of heart pumping activity they need each day.

Daily physical activity has a positive effect on student performance and academic achievement as well as attitude, behaviour and creativity.

Source: ParticipACTION Report Card on the Physical Activity for children and youth 2016.

Decrease conflict and reduce the incidence of playground bullying

The most common place for bullying is on the playground. "Bullying is a crime of opportunity;" if children are bored, there is a lot of opportunity for them to engage in bullying behaviour (Debra Pepler). Organized and fun activities at recess can decrease bullying incidents.

Provide leadership opportunity for students

Opportunities to explore and develop competencies enhance a child's self-acceptance. Skill development provided through the program includes communication, problem-solving, organization and co-operation, as well as leadership.

Staff and Student Champion Responsibilities

The Staff Champion could be the principal, vice principal, teacher, other staff (CYW, youth counsellor) or a parent volunteer. It is the Staff Champion's responsibility to recruit two Student Champions. Student Champions can be any students in grade 7 or 8 who are great leaders, responsible, organized and are interested in the success of the P.A.L.S. program. Student Champions can apply by completing an application form (see Appendix). Ideally the school should have one Staff Champion and two Student Champions working together as a team to help do the following:

- **Promote the program to potential P.A.L.S. leaders**
 - Determine the grades eligible to apply. The P.A.L.S. leaders are generally chosen from students in grades 4 to 7.
 - Provide students with program information and outline commitment
- **Select the P.A.L.S. leaders**
 - Have interested students complete the application form
 - Provide selected P.A.L.S. leaders with a copy of the Parent Permission form
- **Train and orient the P.A.L.S. Leaders**
 - Meet with the Public Health Nurse to plan the leader orientation – ensuring Student and Staff Champions have equal roles
 - Arrange an orientation date, book space and notify leaders of details
 - Conduct leader training
- **Launch the program in your school**
- **Assign P.A.L.S. leaders to do regular P.A. announcements**
- **Develop a schedule for the leaders**
- **Schedule regular meetings to provide support, problem solve and train P.A.L.S. leaders on new games**
- **Provide support and mentoring during regular meetings with P.A.L.S. leaders**
 - You may wish to meet weekly for the first month
 - Allow time for positive and negative feedback
 - Spend time problem-solving and include them when making decisions
 - Spend time learning new games
 - Consider having the Student Champions lead these meetings
- **Oversee and support leaders on the playground**
- **Maintain the program through incentives, recognition and celebration**



Regular P.A.L.S. Leader Meetings

Holding regular meetings for P.A.L.S. leaders is a successful way to continue the momentum for the program throughout the school year. Through recurring meetings, P.A.L.S. Staff and Student Champions are given the opportunity to support and mentor P.A.L.S. leaders on a consistent basis. Consider having the Student Champions lead these meetings. Your school's PHN can provide support and additional games resources during these meetings as well.

Regular meetings provide an opportunity for P.A.L.S. leaders to share information on how well the program is running. With this information, P.A.L.S. Staff and Student Champions gain a better appreciation for the challenges that P.A.L.S. leaders may be facing and are able to modify the program to meet the needs of the school.

Staff and Student Champions may wish to meet weekly for the first month and then less frequently once the program is established in a school.

In these meetings P.A.L.S. Staff and Student Champions might have leaders:

- Spend time learning new games
- Review the P.A.L.S. leader's schedule
- Discuss concerns and problem solve solutions using the Problem Solving Worksheet Template at the back of the Champion Handbook
- Plan activities and menus for special P.A.L.S. celebrations
- Create P.A.L.S. equipment - elastic yogi ropes, bean bags, etc.
- Plan and execute fundraising activities to purchase new equipment
- Share positive and negative feedback on the program
- Develop marketing strategies for the program - P.A. announcements, posters, etc.
- Review the P.A.L.S. program objectives and P.A.L.S. motto "There's always room for one more"

Recruiting P.A.L.S. Leaders

The leader recruitment process can be handled in a variety of ways. Review the suggestions below or develop an alternative plan that meets your school's needs.

- **Have the Student Champions come up with a way to engage and recruit P.A.L.S. Leaders.**
- **Consider inviting all grade 4 to 7 students to an upbeat informative assembly**
- **Have the P.A.L.S. Student Champions meet with each class**
- **Prepare a one page information sheet outlining how the P.A.L.S. program will run in your school and schedule time to answer questions**

Program information:

Key information to be shared when recruiting leaders:

(Note: These are just suggestions. Feel free to incorporate your own ideas!)

- **Pump up the volume! Be enthusiastic about P.A.L.S.**
 - Begin by asking them whether they like to play games on the playground
 - Share some of the games (skipping, ball, and tag). You may wish to demonstrate a few.
 - Talk about their role in teaching younger children how to play
- **Review the objectives of the program**
 - Highlight P.A.L.S. as a leadership opportunity and a chance to make a difference in their school by decreasing bullying behaviour and increasing physical activity
 - Ask Student Champions to highlight additional reasons why students would want to get involved
- **Review program commitment**
 - When the program will run (i.e. noon hour recess or nutrition breaks)
 - Determine the number of days per week leaders will be scheduled
 - Commitment to keep up with school and homework
 - Emphasize how children look up to leaders and the importance of role modeling positive behaviour every day
 - Provide an overview of the training
- **Application and selection process**
 - Communicate the number of leaders that will be chosen
 - Distribute copies of the application and parent permission forms
 - Communicate the due date for the P.A.L.S. application and parent permission form
 - Share when and how leaders will know if they have been selected

Selecting P.A.L.S. Leaders

- **Recommended grade for P.A.L.S. leaders is 4 – 7**
 - Recruit 20-40 P.A.L.S. leaders. Take into consideration how many days per week P.A.L.S. leaders will be on the playground and the ratio of leaders to participating students.
 - Plan for 10-15 P.A.L.S. leaders to be on the schoolyard at each recess. The number of P.A.L.S. leaders is dependent upon the population of your school.
- **Choose a mix of students:**
 - Assertive
 - Sociable, enthusiastic
 - Bullying behaviours in the past
 - Target of bullying or marginalized
- **Select students who have the ability/willingness to role model positive behaviours**
- **Select students with a willingness to learn problem solving skills**
- **Build on any existing leadership programs offered in the school**



Leader Training for P.A.L.S. Leaders

All training sessions are held at your school and are led by the Staff and Student Champions. Your PHN is available to train, support and assist the Champions in the development of these trainings. Your PHN will be connecting with the Champions to setup time to begin this planning.

*Prior to your first planning meeting with you PHN, please have the Staff and Student Champions review the P.A.L.S. Champion Handbook and Leader Handbook.

Initial training day (approx. three hours):

Leader handbook review - in the library or a room with tables

- Welcome and ice breaker activity
- Qualities of a leader and leadership styles
- Communication skills
- Conflict resolution skills, role play and discussion
- Bullying

Subsequent training day (approx. three hours):

Games - gym or outside

It is the school's responsibility to provide the equipment. P.A.L.S. leaders will learn the games

Scheduling Leaders

Some P.A.L.S. Champions have found scheduling leaders the most challenging part of the program. Every school operates differently and will have to create a schedule to meet their needs. Here are a few points to consider when developing the schedule. Don't be afraid to experiment or ask your school PHN for suggestions that have worked in other schools.

- **Determine the two days per week the P.A.L.S. program will be offered**
 - Remember to set aside one day for meetings and introducing new games
- **Decide if the program will run at recess and lunch or just at lunch or during a fitness and nutrition break**
- **Ask leaders to submit their choice of days and the names of one or two individuals they would like to work with**
 - A choice of days allows the leaders to participate in other lunch time activities
 - Leaders will enjoy the program more if they are working with a friend
 - Tell leaders you will try to meet as many requests as possible, however it will be impossible to meet all requests
- **Create teams based on the number of days the leaders are assigned each week**
 - Assign a few older students to each team
 - Assign a mix of males and females
 - Assign a colour or name to each team (e.g. Blue team for Monday, Green team for Wednesday, Red team as the backup team)
- **Consider switching days for the teams each month so each Red team has an opportunity to be P.A.L.S. leaders for a day per week**
 - Before making schedule changes take into consideration the timing of other clubs or teams the leader may have committed to on their non- scheduled days

Scheduling Leaders

- **A well-designed play space can help reduce conflict**
 - Designate areas of the playground for each station
 - When developing the schedule split the team for the day into stations (e.g. Blue team: three leaders for ball games, three leaders for tag, two for skipping, two for jumpsies and two for tarmac games)
 - Assess the level of game popularity and make adjustments to the number assigned to each station
- **To improve communication with leaders, assign a Staff or Student Champion to each team**
 - This will decrease the number of leaders each Staff or Student Champion is responsible for making the P.A.L.S. program more manageable
 - P.A.L.S. leaders will know who to inform if they are away or have a concern they wish to discuss
- **Back-up leaders**
 - The back-up team would be asked to fill in if a leader is away sick or on a school trip
 - Back up may also be used to replace a leader who has a short term commitment such as extra practice for a play or playoffs for a team
 - P.A.L.S. leaders are responsible for notifying the Staff or Student Champion if they are away or unable to fulfill their duty
- **Decide if the P.A.L.S. leaders will be involved if there is indoor recess**
 - Assign each P.A.L.S. leader a class for indoor recess
 - The P.A.L.S. leader would be expected to provide indoor recess activities to their assigned class

Launching the program in your school

Each school may choose to launch the program in a different way. You could consider having the Student Champions come up with some ways to launch the program to get them involved. Here are a few ideas:

Introduce the program and P.A.L.S. leaders at an assembly

- Use questions to increase the students' interest in having fun on the playground. e.g. How many of you are sometimes bored at recess? How many of you would like to learn new fun games and activities?
- Tell the students about the program
- Introduce the P.A.L.S. leaders and have them wear the P.A.L.S. pinnies
- Have the leaders demonstrate a few of the games they will be playing
- *The Student Champions could also run the assembly!

P.A. announcements

- Remind the students often about P.A.L.S., especially when it is first initiated
- Inform students about the types of games they will be playing and where they can find them on the playground
- Remind students everyone is welcome to play the games
- Share the motto: **"There is always room for one more"**
- Announce the P.A.L.S. leaders on duty each day

Arrange a play day to orient students to the various games.

- Set up different stations in the school yard or the gym (e.g. skipping, ball games, marbles, elastics, tag, etc.)
- Schedule classes for a designated period of time
- Have the classes rotate through the stations to learn games from each category
- Have the P.A.L.S. leaders work in pairs

Introduce games during gym or one class at a time during recess.

- Teach the games during gym class using stations as outlined above
- If you decide to train during recess, arrange a training schedule for classes. Select a few P.A.L.S. leaders to train the scheduled class while other leaders play games with classes already trained.



P.A. Announcements

I'm lovin' P.A.L.S.

(To the tune of the "I'm lovin' it" - McDonald's jingle)

Submitted by Silverthorn Elementary School

Da da da da da, I'm lovin' P.A.L.S.

P.A.L.S. is here! And "I'm lovin' it". Today at (time), you'll get a change to find out all about it! P.A.L.S. student leaders will be on the playground in their bright red pinnies to play great new games and have lots of fun.

So remember,

Da da da da da, I'm lovin' P.A.L.S.

P.A.L.S. cheer

Submitted by St. Gregory's

Gimme a P!

Gimme an A! Gimme an L!

Gimme an S!

What have you got? P.A.L.S.!

What's that again? P.A.L.S.!

The P.A.L.S. leaders will be out on the playground today at (time) so look for their bright red pinnies. Join them to play some cool games!

P.A.L.S. Chant

We're P.A.L.S. leaders and we're here to say,
we offer fun and games most every day.
When we're out you'll always know,
by our bright red pinnies that almost glow!
Out on the playground, we're meeting new friends.
The fun never stops and the games never end.
So come out and meet us, we're always around.
We'll be out at recess, all over the playground.

P.A. Announcements (continued)

P.A.L.S. two way conversation

Hey (name)!

What is it (name)?

Have you heard of this great new thing at our school? It's called P.A.L.S.

P.A.L.S.? What's that?

Well, today at (time) the P.A.L.S. leaders will be out on the playground in bright red pinnies to teach us lots of cool new games.

Really? That sounds great!

Yeah, and they'll be out on the playground (specify when) to show us even more games. They play tag and ball games and jump rope and more.

Wow! Well now that I know what it is, I'll be there for sure! I hope everyone comes out for this! It sounds amazing!

P.A.L.S. poem

You know their name and you know their colour!

They're fantastic and fun, like no other!

The P.A.L.S. help make our recess swing!

Come on out, and don't miss a thing!

P.A.L.S. are here and they love to play!

They make the most of every day!

They play great games and have tons of fun!

And they love to play with everyone!

Come on over and join the games!

Meet new people and learn new names!

P.A.L.S. can't wait to run and play!

So come and see them, don't delay!

That's right everyone, the P.A.L.S. leaders will be out today on the playground from (time) to (time) doing their P.A.L.S. thing. Look for the bright red pinnies and come on over to have some major fun!

P.A.L.S. have returned

Guess what everybody? The P.A.L.S. leaders are back! They will be out on the playground for another fun filled session of ball games, tag, skipping and jumpsies (or specify day's activity). They'll be out today from (time) to (time) teaching excellent new games. Just look for the bright red P.A.L.S. pinnies and come out and join the fun.



Playground Equipment List

When organizing the playground equipment consider using a mesh bag or small tote. Ensure whatever you choose is light weight and easy to carry. Organize the equipment according to how you designed your playground. For example, if you have a skipping station, place all the skipping ropes in one bag with the game cards. Repeat the same process for ball, jumpsie ropes and tag games.

- **Skipping ropes**

- Seven foot rope for solitary skipping (five)
- Fourteen foot or longer (five)
- Rubber skipping ropes are best

- **Balls**

- Tennis balls (12)
- Rubber utility balls (four to six)
- Red/white/blue bouncy balls (10 - 12) - White whiffle balls or baseball training balls (five)

- **Jumpsies/Yogi Ropes (eight) (can be made from sewing elastic)**

- **Pool noodles (two)**

- **Package of small coloured kitchen sponges (one) (Dollar store)**

- **Nine inch orange pylons (30) (Dollar store)**

- **Soccer cones (four to five)**

- **Hula hoops - medium size (four to five)**

- **Plastic bracelets (30 - 40) (Dollar Store)**

- **Bean bags (10 - 15)**

- **Pantyhose (three pairs, cut off legs for wall ball games)**

- **Nylon mesh bag for balls (one)**

- **Rubbermaid or facsimile container to hold equipment (one)**

Optional:

- **Hackey sacks (10)**

- **Rubber chicken**

- **Smooth stones for hopscotch (one bag from Dollar store)**

Approximate cost of the equipment is \$150 - \$200.

If you are unable to find equipment at local stores, consider purchasing equipment through equipment supply catalogues (e.g. Wintergreen. Spectrum).

Leader Visibility – Pinnies

It is important to ensure leader visibility on the playground. Niagara Region Public Health has adopted a one size fits all pinnie for this purpose. Schools interested in using the pinnies for their P.A.L.S. program will receive 12 pinnies, one time only. Niagara Region Public Health will not be responsible for replacing lost pinnies.

Pinnies will be made available to schools that have:

- Completed the P.A.L.S. training

Pinnies are red with white printing.

“There is always room for one more.” is printed on the back of the pinnie.

Incentives, Recognition and Celebrations

“Recognition is a valuable motivator, since positive reinforcement enhances self-acceptance, personal growth and a sense of belonging.”

When participants and leaders are recognized they show greater commitment to the program and you are likely to see increased participation. You could consider having the Student Champions come up with some ideas for recognition or ask their peers what ways they would like to be acknowledged.

Here are some of our ideas:

P.A.L.S. Leader Recognition

Playground Leader of the Week

- Certificates
- Announcements (assemblies or P.A.)
- Classroom and/or bulletin board postings
- Consider creating a visual that can be added to each week. For example, a P.A.L.S. garden filled with flowers or trees with each petal or leaf having the name of a P.A.L.S. leader of the week.

Material Awards - prize draws for leaders who have consistently fulfilled their obligations

- Prizes (Monthly or Weekly) – pencils, notebooks, erasers
- Coupons, ribbons, stickers
- Team Achievement Award

Year End Party

- Bowling
- Pita Party
- Picnic at the park

Celebrations - Celebrate successes at leader meetings to keep the group motivated:

- Share success stories, ideas, new games
- Picture wall/brag book

Participant Recognition - Recognize those who consistently participate in the program (play games, assist leaders with clean-up, etc.)

- P.A.L.S. tree in school (every consistent participant is a leaf of the tree)
- Sportsmanship/Spirit Awards
- Announcements at assemblies
- Participant stickers
- Each P.A.L.S. leader will receive an end of the year certificate

Safety on the Playground

Playground safety is a shared responsibility. Here are some tips to help you and your P.A.L.S. leaders to understand the role you play in keeping the playground a safe and fun place to be!

- Meet with students to discuss safety considerations that are specific to your school
- Discuss the importance of following general safety rules such as: respecting people's space on the playground, adjusting play according to the age of the players, waiting your turn and avoiding pushing or rough play
- Encourage the storing of equipment in its appropriate carrying case, so that it does not become a hazard
- Remind leaders that they need to be good role models for the younger children. Remember to be a good role model yourself.
- Keep tag and ball games in separate areas of the playground to prevent collisions
- Ensure there is adequate supervision on the playground and that playground staff are easily visible
- Intervene immediately if bullying behaviour takes place
- Emphasize the importance of promptly obtaining the assistance of a Staff Champion if an injury occurs or they have a safety concern
- In the case of a head injury, emphasize that when the brain is injured, it is very important to take good care to let it heal, as repeated injuries to the brain can cause serious damage over time. That is why it is important to report head injuries to a Staff Champion or teacher right away. Remove child from play and refer to your specific school's head injury/concussion protocol if a concussion is suspected.

Weather Considerations

Although each school board will have specific policies addressing extreme weather conditions, here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

- Remind parents and students of the importance of sunscreen, wide brimmed hats and sunglasses as protection from sun exposure
- Encourage students to pick less strenuous games and activities on hot days
- Encourage rest periods preferably in shaded areas on hot days
- Observe board policy on days of extreme weather conditions and consider the use of indoor games
- Remind parents and students to dress warmly during winter months, cover any exposed skin by wearing insulated boots, coats, mittens, hats and scarves
- Help students to assess icy conditions on the playground and avoid those areas
- Remind students to promptly change out of wet clothing
- Watch for signs of hypothermia, frostbite, sunstroke and heat exhaustion

P.A.L.S. Ice Breakers

Ice breakers are a fun way to start off a P.A.L.S. leaders meeting. Keep in mind what you would like the P.A.L.S. leaders to get out of the activity as you choose an ice breaker for the P.A.L.S. meetings. Below you will find a few examples of ice breakers that can be used. The internet also offers a variety of ice breakers.

What's in a Name?

- Have participants introduce themselves by picking a descriptive word that starts with the same letter as their first name
- Some examples may be Athletic Amanpreet or Creative Carol

This activity is a great ice breaker that provides opportunity for participants to use one word to share something about themselves with the group.

Add a Compliment

- Distribute the handout to participants and have them fill in their name
- Handouts are then passed around the group until all participants have had a chance to write a compliment on everyone else's sheet
- The compliment must not be about the person's physical appearance
- The handouts are then returned to their owners

This activity provides opportunity for participants to learn to compliment and receive compliments from others. It helps to build group unity as barriers come down when participants are challenged to focus on the positive attributes of others.

Create a Story

- One participant in the group begins a story. For example, "I was walking home last night and I stepped in a puddle."
- Other group members continue the story until everyone has had a chance to contribute

The activity provides a fun opportunity for participants to practice group skills such as listening, co-operation, communication and respect.

P.A.L.S. Commonalities

- Have the participants form small groups
- Each group brainstorms 10 things they have in common with each other
- Small groups then present back to the large group

This activity provides opportunity for participants to get to know each other and discover things they have in common.



Source: Region of Peel – Public Health (2007). Child to Child Facilitators' Workbook