

Alternative Options to Withholding Recess and Physical Activity

In a national survey of principals, more than three-quarters state that students in their schools are punished by withholding recess, but evidence shows that this is the wrong tactic. Taking physical activity away from children decreases their attention spans and ability to focus in the classroom and increases behavior problems and trips to the principal's office. Furthermore, with today's childhood obesity epidemic, it is more important than ever for children to be physically active throughout the school day.

According to the CDC, children need 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Recess can help students reach that important health goal.

- Over 80% of principals report that recess has a positive impact on academic achievement
- Two-thirds of principals report that students listen better and are more focused in class after recess
- 96% of principals believe recess has a positive impact on social development and 97% believe it has a positive impact on well-being

Recess can help to:

- Improve attention and reduce fidgeting later in the school day
- Provide a mental and physical break from the academic challenges of the school day
- Allow students to be active and release energy
- Create an opportunity for students to be social and use their imagination

Alternative Discipline Options

Below are some alternative disciplinary options to taking away recess. Disciplinary actions should be appropriate and match the level of misbehavior. They should be age appropriate and punishment should increase in severity over time with repeat offenses.

- Child gets a strike for each time he/she misbehaves. Have a different consequence for each strike (i.e., strike 1: warning, strike 2: parent receives a call from the teacher, strike 3: child is sent to the principal's office)
- Student must clean up the mess he/she made (pick up toys in the classroom, put away books in the library, or pick up trash outside while others play during recess)
- Student must write a letter of apology explaining what he/she did wrong
- Student must write an essay on what he/she did wrong and how to behave better next time (good for reflection and self-evaluation)
- Student is given extra homework
- Have the student and teacher call home together to report misbehavior to family
- Send a note about misbehavior home, have it signed by parent and return it the next school day (try to involve parents with improving student's behavior)
- Have the student do community service
- Stay late after school/afterschool detention
- Have the student miss a class trip or school event if he/she cannot behave properly

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Other Tips to Manage Classroom Behavior

- Include students in establishing expectations and outcomes early in the year and review those expectations and outcomes frequently
- Be consistent with enforcing behavioral expectations within the learning environment
- Reward compliance with rules
- Offer positive feedback and “catch” students doing things right
- Wait for students to be attentive before providing directions

Reinforce Positive Behavior

- Social rewards (such as positive attention, praise, a pat on the shoulder, or thanks) are often more highly valued by children than a toy or food and affirm a child’s self-worth
- Recognize the student with a ribbon, certificate, announcement on the school-wide morning announcements or school website, a photo on a recognition board, a note to the student, or a note home to parents
- Reward the student with special privileges (going first, choosing a class activity, helping the teacher, extra recess, eating lunch with teacher) or with stickers, stamps, small toys, trinkets, and school supplies
- Provide a sticker to students for good behavior. The student with the most stickers after a certain amount of time gets a prize (i.e. extra recess time, small toy, special classroom privileges, a homework pass)
- Students receive tickets for good behavior. The teacher puts all tickets in a basket and pulls out a ticket at the end of each week, as in a lottery. The student whose ticket is pulled receives a small prize
- Reward the entire class by placing a marble in a jar when the class behaves well. Once the marbles reach a certain point in the jar, the class gets a reward (e.g., extra recess, a movie, free time, no homework over the weekend)

Source: The Center for Science in the Public Interest