



Alternatives to  
Withholding  
Recess - Discipline



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## **Part I - Tips for Disciplining Students on the Playground.**

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Given the value of recess in a student's physical and social development, coupled with the need for periodic breaks from classroom instruction, using recess as a punishment is inappropriate.

Yet, in a national survey of principals, commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, more than 75% of principals state that their schools use recess as a discipline technique.<sup>1</sup>

A growing body of research supports the many benefits of physical activity and provides further support for the importance of physical activity in schools that is most often gained in either physical education or recess.<sup>2</sup> This report found, "Time spent in recess had a positive relationship or no relationship with, children's attention, concentration, and/or on-task classroom behavior. All eight studies found one or more positive

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<sup>1</sup> Playworks. [The State of Play: Gallup survey of principals on school recess, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2010.](#)

<sup>2</sup> CDC. [The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education and academic performance.](#)

associations between recess and indicators of cognitive skills, attitudes, and academic behavior, none of the studies found negative associations.”

Further, in 2009 the National Association of Sport and Physical Education put out a position statement on “Physical Activity Used as Punishment and/or Behavior Management”, was inappropriate.<sup>3</sup> The position statement was written to address the inappropriate use of or withdrawal from physical activity as a disciplinary consequence, both within and outside the school environment.

### **Alternative Discipline Options: Misbehavior on the playground**

#### **1. Restricting play area**

1. Most discipline issues on the playground can be solved by restricting the play area of the child having problems.
  - a. Step 1. Rather than asking a child who is having difficulties in 4 square to “sit out for the rest of the recess period”, instead ask the student to select another game saying, “since you are having trouble in 4 square please select another 4 square game that you can be successful at.”

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<sup>3</sup> NASPE. Physical Activity used as Punishment and/or Behavior Management. 2009 National Association for Sport and Physical Education, a division of AAHPERD, Reston, VA

- b. Step 2. If this difficulty continues, ask student to find another game area to play in and make the 4 square courts off limits for a specified length of time.
- c. Step 3. Continue to decrease the freedom to roam the playground by asking a student to play on the grass or the blacktop based on the area of difficulty. I've found that most playground problems can be solved by restricting the area of play space or restricting the playmates.

2. **Restricting Playtime with preferred playmates.** It might be appropriate to say:

- a. Step 1. "I see you are having difficulty with (child's name), so today pick another friend to play with at recess". This too solves a lot of problems that arise.
- b. Step 2. "If you show me that the two of you can play without any difficulty then you can play together again". Monitor the kids at play.
- c. Step 3. "Unfortunately, the two of you seem to have problems getting along outside. Pick different activities and you may not play together for the rest of the week".

- d. Step 4. Restrict play between the two students for an appropriate amount of time depending on the grade level.

### **3. Restricting Game Choices**

Most students have a preferred game or activity. Yet some students have difficulty playing successfully with their preferred choice of game. Sometimes it is caused by difficulty with a playmate but often it is an over zealousness for the game itself.

- a. Step 1. Ask the student to pick an alternative game court. This is often enough to solve the problem as a first step.
- b. Step 2. If difficulty continues for the same child, then asking the child to select a different game choice is appropriate and seems to solve most problems.
- c. Step 3 might be to say, "you've lost the privilege of playing 4 square for the rest of the week".
- d. Step 4. Or, you may say, "You've lost the opportunity to play 4 square for the rest of the month".

### **Additional Discipline Alternatives**

1. Student writes a letter of apology to the person who was wronged and discuss the importance of apologies.
2. Student writes a letter to parents/guardians explaining why their behavior is inappropriate and stating what they will do to improve.
3. Have student work with teacher to develop a behavior tied to incremental privileges.
4. Create a behavior chart with student that identifies a target behavior and agreed upon reinforcements and rewards for a chronic behavior issue.