

Taking Away Recess as Punishment – Find A Better Way

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My sixth grade son, 12, is diagnosed ADHD with anxiety. His current IEP does not include ADHD, only another disability. He has difficulty finishing his homework. The school takes away recess as punishment. This type of punishment never works for him, but it does cause undue stress and depression.

Is there anything we can do to stop this missed recess?

We had the same problem. My son has learning disabilities and ADHD. He had an IEP for several years while in grade school.

My son became overly excited in school. He could not settle down after recess and got in trouble for “bad behavior.” He took meds every four hours. He took the second dose right after lunch and before recess. He was most likely to get in trouble when his morning meds wore off and his second dose had not kicked in.

The school punished him with in-lunch suspensions and no recess.

Taking Away Recess – A Type of Torture for an ADHD Child

When the in-lunch suspensions started, we had several meetings with the IEP Team to discuss the type of punishment they were using. We also discussed his ADHD, his meds, and how these issues affected his behavior.

I made copies of articles and other documents by professionals and handed them out to the team. I read in professional books that *keeping an ADHD child in from recess or not allowing him to take gym class was a type of torture for the ADHD child.*

A Creative Solution

We wanted the school staff to come up with an alternative to taking away his recess. I suggested that he could stay after school to clean erasers, empty trash, or other work as “punishment.” The school staff did not like any of those ideas. Finally, the Team came up with a plan that worked.

As we discussed his problem, we realized that the worst time for trying to settle down came after recess (before the 2nd dose of medication kicked in). The Team came up with this strategy.

- Every day, after recess, my son would have job to do.
- The teacher would give him a document in an envelope and he would take the envelope to the main office.

Some days, the envelope would include a piece of paper from the teacher. Other days, the envelope may be empty but my son did not know this.

He looked forward to doing this job. The fact that he was entrusted with the job made him feel important. The job gave him enough time to settle down so he was ready to get back to work when he returned to the classroom. .

Once my son started *his job*, he never got in trouble and was never punished by taking away recess.

Sometimes, it takes a simple change like this to get a child back in line. This particular solution will not work for every child. But **a creative team can help the child have a positive experience instead of a negative one.**

Read the Research

Update: In 2013, The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a [Policy Statement on The Crucial Role of Recess in School](#) that says in part:

“Recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child’s development and, as such, it should not be withheld for punitive or academic reasons.”

This Policy Statement is also available [as an 8 page PDF](#). If your child’s school is withholding recess or PE, provide copies of the PDF to members of your child’s Team as a starting point for discussions to find creative and effective alternatives.

[*The Crucial Role of Recess in School*](#)

[The Education Commission of the United States \(2016\)](#). Find what states have passed legislation requiring recess or unspecified physical activity.

Read More

[Withdrawing Recess as Punishment – Does it Work?](#) This podcast answers the question “Is withholding recess harmful?” and discusses how recess activities can improve behavior for children with ADHD.

[Play Deprivation and Behavior Problems](#)

[Quiz: How Much Recess Does Your Child Get Each Day?](#)

Why Recess Matters, How to Defend It? This podcast includes a brief discussion of research about the importance of recess for an child with ADHD.

Sharon Lutz (Sharon L.) of Ohio is a parent of 3 sons with learning disabilities (ADHD and Dyslexia). Sharon is an advocate for her sons and has 25 years of experience working with school districts and the IEP process.

Sharon enjoys sharing information with other parents so they can benefit from her experiences and is the author of "If I Can Do It, Anyone Can: A Resource Book for Parents of Learning Disabled Children" and a member of the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

Sharon started a parent advocate group. Members shared ideas and strategies and provided information to parents and the community. For more information, please contact Sharon at helpgrouponline@twc.com.

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