

PlayWELL: ALTERNATIVES TO WITHHOLDING RECESS AS PUNISHMENT

Recess should not be withheld as punishment

Recess is viewed as a necessary and foundational component for all children—students should not be denied recess because of behavior in class or so they can complete class work as punishment. Recess should be approached with the same importance as other learning opportunities. Alternatives for withholding recess as punishment include:

- Focus on positive rewards rather than punishment, such as offering extra recess for good behavior.
- Limit students' game or activity choices during recess.
- Prohibit certain activities or games that create issues (for a period of time or indefinitely).
- Teach all students specific strategies for self-calming and problem-solving.
- Create a “reflection zone,” either a visibly designated spot or path that kids can walk. In this zone, students consider the specific behavior they must change to stay in the game. Then to get back into recess, the student must tell the recess supervisor and demonstrate the appropriate behavior without removing them from recess.
- Partner students who are having trouble with a recess supervisor who is able to help them follow game rules and participate calmly.
- Assign responsibilities to students (equipment manager, student leader/referee, etc.). Pair students with a recess supervisor to oversee the responsibilities.
- Make a plan: If a student's behavior is consistently an issue, it's time to get to the bottom of it! First ask (both you and the student) if things are working as they are. When is the student acting out? What are you both trying to accomplish at the time? Do one or both of you need to make a change? Brainstorm things that could be done differently. Once everyone agrees on a plan, write it down.¹
- Check In, Check Out: When the recess bell rings for all students to go outside, the student “Checks-in.” The student waits until everyone has left the classroom and has a 1:1 conversation with the teacher. The teacher talks about the exhibited behavior that needs to be corrected and discusses the replacement behavior or strategy the student can use. This takes 30-60 seconds. Let the student know that the recess supervisor will be watching and supporting, as well as letting the student know that he/she will be coming in to report to the teacher on how they did outside. The student will “Check-Out” with the recess supervisor before going back inside.

BEST PRACTICE: ALTERNATIVE TO WITHHOLDING RECESS:

Three Strikes and You're In! promotes good behavior and incentivizes students to follow the rules of games played during recess. When a student demonstrates poor behavior or does not follow the rules of a recess game, certain games (usually choose those that are class favorites) are off limits for the student. The student must earn their way back into those games by being recognized for good behavior on three separate occasions (i.e., three strikes and they are in). Additionally, students can earn stars for good behavior, and “star students” are rewarded with extra recess or open gym after school.



1. <https://www.playworks.org/resource/six-alternatives-to-withholding-recess-as-punishment/>