

Recess Doctor



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# Professional Articles

By Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.

Alternatives to  
Withholding  
Recess - Discipline

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## Alternative Solutions To Withholding Recess Discipline

Life is rarely an “all or nothing experience”. Yet schools often withhold recess as the be all and end all in disciplining elementary students. A better solution might be to consider intermediary steps to disciplining students in respect to playground difficulties.

As an elementary school principal, I found that playground supervisors chose severe consequences for students who had difficulties on the playground. Rather than taking recess away completely, we found that a better solution was to say, “I can see you are having trouble playing flag football today. In order for you to be successful, no football for the next week. On Monday, you can return to flag football at recess and we’ll see if you have a better week.” Or if a student gets into an argument each day at recess playing 4 square then limiting them to the field area for the day or week is a better solution all the way around because:

1. Kids need to move so that they can better focus when they return to class.
2. Kids need to be physically active. Research indicates that most kids don’t get enough daily exercise.
3. When students sit outside against a wall for example, frequently misbehavior ensues.
4. Kids who lose recess all together are frequent offenders. Most often, a student will have a daily problem with the same student. So a solution might be to say, “I can see that you and Sally are having difficulty playing together appropriately. I think you both need to select separate games. You may not play together during recess for the rest of the day, or week,” etc.

An alternative discipline plan with a suggested appropriate progression for getting in trouble on blacktop might be:

1. Confined to grass.
2. Confined to a specific game on the grass.

For students who continue to have difficulty in four square daily, an appropriate progression might be:

1. You can play any game but 4-square for the rest of the day.
2. You can play any game but 4-square for the rest of the week.
3. You are confined to the grass for the week because you are finding it difficult to be successful on the blacktop.
4. Students write and sign a note home to parent. These suggestions also focus on the child taking responsibility for his/her actions and on being successful in the future. Let's face it. All or nothing discipline often breeds repeat offenders.



# Thank You

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