

10 ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING RECESS AWAY

Sometimes it's disheartening to see how infrequently kids are able to get up and move during the school day when our training and experience tells us that movement and sensory exploration are the very foundation of healthy development and learning.

Movement breaks, active learning games, and fidget toys are great, but there is simply no substitution for good old-fashioned play in an open space when it comes to promoting developmental skills for kids. This is where recess comes in!

But, because recess is the most beloved and cherished part of most kids' school days, we often hear of it being taken away as a punishment for negative behaviors in the classroom. We would like to support teachers and administrators in thinking outside the box about behavior policies that result in the elimination of recess for kids.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says it best in its Policy Statement entitled, The Crucial Role of Recess in School: "On the basis of an abundance of scientific studies, withholding recess for punitive or academic reasons would seem to be counterproductive to the intended outcomes and may have unintended consequences in relation to a child's acquisition of important life skills."

The bottom line? Kids need movement and sensory input to learn, attend, and regulate their behavior and they get these movement and sensory opportunities at recess.

It has been hypothesized that some problem behaviors are directly related to a lack of participation in the very activities kids participate in during recess and other outdoor free play. "Repeat offenders" – kids who frequently demonstrate disruptive, fidgety, inappropriate, or inattentive behaviors in the classroom (and frequently end up standing to the side during recess as punishment) are likely the ones who need recess the most.

So, we have a choice to make. Do we continue to take away recess as a punishment, or do we come up with other options to give kids more not less of what they need to regulate their bodies and behavior at school?

1

Earning a recess reward! Instead of taking something away, what about having students work toward earning a special outdoor recess game, toy, or even extra recess for completing work or staying on track with behavior?

Cleaning up 10 pieces of litter or wiping down slides on the playground before being allowed to play.

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Designate a recess “break space”. Draw a large rectangle on the ground with sidewalk chalk. Inside the rectangle, draw lines/paths/shapes. Instead of standing/sitting, kids can walk/run on the paths or jump/hop from shape to shape.

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Raking leaves or pulling weeds in the school garden.

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4

Complete 10 designated motor or sensory activities to complete before joining friends on the playground.

9

Walking laps around the track or playground with the teacher.

5

Losing screen time instead of recess time.

Losing a specific (favorite) piece of playground equipment or a specific playground activity (e.g. no football today, no jungle gym today).

8

7

Have the student come up with 2 movement activities and have him lead the class (obstacle course, jumping jacks, etc).

Participate in a job that incorporates movement (e.g. stacking chairs, helping in the library or cafeteria, delivering items around the school, sweeping floor, wiping tables, washing a window) before going out to play.

6