

Taking Away Recess as Punishment – Find A Better Way

By Sharon Lutz

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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 you are experiencing. The school was taking recess away from my son. He was on an IEP for several years while in grade school for learning disabilities. He was also ADHD.

My son became overly excited in school. He got in trouble for “bad behavior” and could not settle down after recess. The school gave him meds every 4 hours. He took his second dose right after lunch and before recess. His morning meds were wearing off and his second dose had not kicked in yet. This was the time of day he would be most likely to get into trouble.

The school responded with in-lunch suspensions. No recess.

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

When in-lunch suspensions started, we had several meetings with the IEP Team to discuss the type of punishment he was receiving. We also discussed his ADHD.

I brought in copies of documentation from professionals to hand out to the Team. I read from professional books that documented *how 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 to come up with an alternative punishment other than taking away recess. I suggested staying after school to clean erasers, desks, or some other type of punishment. The school did not like any of those ideas. But the Team did come up with a plan that worked.

We determined that my son’s worst time was trying to settle down after recess. The Team came up with this strategy.

- After recess, my son would have job every day.
- He would take a document in an envelope the teacher gave him to the office.

Some days there would be a paper enclosed from the teacher to the office. Some days, the envelope would be empty but my son did not know this.

Instead he looked forward to doing his job. It made him feel important. It gave him enough time to settle down and be ready to get back to work when he returned to the classroom.

Once my son started *his job*, he never got in trouble or got punished for recess.

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

Update: Policy Statement (12/31/12): The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that 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.

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

[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.

[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. She is a member of the Learning Disability Association.

Sharon is happy to share her information with parents so that others can benefit from her experiences in advocating for her children.

She started a parent advocate group that was successful in sharing ideas and strategies as well and providing information to parents and the community.

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