

POSITION STATEMENT

Physical Activity

Physical Activity Should Not Be Used as Punishment and/or Behavior Management

Released: 2021

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Position

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators asserts the position that withholding physical activity (PA) and physical education (PE) as a form of punishment and/or behavior management is inappropriate. In addition, administering physical activity as punishment is inappropriate.

Definition of Terms

Physical Activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in expenditure of energy (Caspersen et al., 1985).

Physical Education is an academic subject characterized by a planned, sequential K–12 curriculum based on SHAPE America’s National Standards for K-12 Physical Education (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Institute of Medicine, 2013; SHAPE America, 2015). Physical education provides cognitive content and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge, and behaviors for physical activity and physical fitness and is the foundation of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; 2013; Institute of Medicine, 2013; SHAPE America, 2015; 2017).

Punishment is the infliction or imposition of a penalty as retribution for an offense (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (appropriate practice) is using methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

Purpose

This position statement addresses the inappropriate use or withholding of physical activity or physical education as a disciplinary consequence or behavior management strategy, throughout the comprehensive school day.

Educators who use **appropriate practices**:

1. Promote a physically active lifestyle;
2. Provide a safe and inclusive learning environment, allowing students to experience positive, challenging, and enjoyable physical activity while learning about the benefits and importance of physical activity;
3. Appreciate individual differences such as cultural identity, previous movement experiences, fitness and skill levels, and intellectual, physical, and social-emotional maturity; and
4. Advocate for a positive school culture toward physical activity and physical education.

Core Issue

Administering or withholding physical activity as punishment is inappropriate and constitutes an unsound education practice because it inhibits the development of a positive attitude toward PA.

Intended Audience

This position statement was prepared for all school administrators, educators and support staff, coaches, parents, and other professionals that work with children and young adults in PA school settings (e.g., youth sports and clubs and before/after school programs).

Key Messages (Institute of Medicine, 2013)

- Regular physical activity promotes growth and development and has multiple benefits for physical, mental, and psychosocial health that undoubtedly contribute to learning.
- Physical activity reduces the risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, obesity, and metabolic syndrome.
- Physical activity improves aerobic capacity, muscle and bone strength, flexibility, insulin sensitivity, and lipid profiles, and reduces stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Physical activity can improve mental health by decreasing and preventing conditions such as anxiety and depression, as well as improving mood and other aspects of well-being.
- Physical activity programming can improve psychosocial outcomes such as self-concept, social behaviors, goal orientation, and most notably self-efficacy. These attributes in turn are important determinants of current and future participation in physical activity.

When it comes to promoting healthy lifestyles, it is important to promote physical activity as a positive benefit, while avoiding using physical activity as a negative consequence. The following grid includes developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices.

The practices mentioned are not meant to be an exhaustive list. These are basic instructional practices. Many other practices that would be included in an excellent program are not enumerated here. But the list does include the practices observed recently in gymnasiums, pools and fields across the United States.

Use of Physical Activity/Exercise as Punishment

Inappropriate Use (Instead of this ...)	Best/Appropriate Practice (Try this ...)
Physical Education Teachers	
Assigning exercises to the “losing” team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Let the “winning” side pick an exercise as a reward and have all students do the exercise. ● Winning is its own reward! Encourage a simple high five or “Thanks for playing!” between all of the players after the game
Punishing negative classroom behaviors with exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work hard to connect with ALL students and create a community environment in your classroom ● Reward positive behaviors by allowing on-task students to select the next exercise/activity. Make sure all students over time have this opportunity ● Create and execute engaging lessons ● Include social and emotional learning into your curriculum, ensuring connections to the competency of self-management and exhibiting self-discipline. (ex. health. moves. minds.®) ● Bring positive attention to students who are demonstrating appropriate behaviors (e.g., “I like the way X has her hands on her knees and her eyes on me”)
Assigning exercises for breaking classroom rules (e.g., being late to class or chewing gum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remind students, one on one, about rules and expectations. Explain the impact on the entire class when rules aren’t followed ● Remind students to correct their behavior (e.g., spit their gum out in the wastebasket)
Assigning exercises to students who do not participate (e.g., running laps for standing on a sideline during a game)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure you are providing the “why” for your activities ● Talk to the student to learn why they are not participating ● Reach out to parents/guardians to discuss why a student may not be participating ● Allow for student choice in lesson planning (ex. “Tomorrow we are going to be doing ‘x’ activity. Given these options, how will you participate?”)

Other Teachers and Support Staff	
<p>Assigning exercises for students who do not participate or misbehave (e.g., 20 push-ups for using a word that is unacceptable per the rules of the class)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work hard to connect with ALL students and create a community environment in your classroom ● Reward positive behaviors by allowing some kind of choice of activity for the class (make sure all students over time have this opportunity) ● Create and execute engaging lessons ● Include social and emotional learning into your curriculum, ensuring connections to the competency of self-management and exhibiting self-discipline. (ex. health.moves.minds.®)
Administrators	
<p>Allowing teachers to use (and/or supporting teachers who use) physical activity as punishment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a school and district written policy that declares the use of physical activity as punishment as inappropriate ● Provide professional development opportunities related to positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), trauma-aware practices, and/or restorative practices

Withholding of Physical Activity/Exercise

Inappropriate Practice (Instead of this ...)	Best/Appropriate Practice (Try this ...)
Physical Education Teachers	
Sitting a student out for inappropriate behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a space for students to use for conflict resolution and to reset (e.g., Calm Corner, Peace Center, Conflict Resolution Center) ● Include social and emotional learning into your curriculum ensuring connections to the competency of self-management and exhibiting self-discipline. (ex. health. moves. minds.®)
Having a student sit out when they have on the inappropriate shoes for activity participation	Create a collection of extra shoes and clothes for students to borrow from (e.g., a “shoe library”)
Not allowing a student to participate if they do not change into PE clothes	Allow students to participate if their clothing/attire is safe. (Provide clothing or a “clothing closet” of clean, appealing, appropriate attire)
Other Teachers and Support Staff	
Bringing students to physical education class late/withholding physical education as a consequence for misbehavior	Follow school-level schedules to ensure students are receiving adequate academic time during physical education
Withholding brain energizers/brain boosters (also known as brain breaks) as a behavior management strategy	Keep to schedule and implement brain energizers/brain boosters (also known as brain breaks), and choose an appropriate consequence that matches the behavior

Administrators	
Teachers individually limiting the frequency and duration of recess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a written school and district policy that defines the frequency and duration of recess in the operational code of conduct ● Remind staff about written school or district policies that define the frequency and duration of recess ● Develop a school and district written policy that declares the withholding of physical activity opportunities across the school day as inappropriate ● Provide professional development opportunities related to positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), trauma-aware practices, and/or restorative practices
Using physical education classrooms for other content area classes and events	Dedicate alternative spaces for physical education classes during events
A culture within the school/district that does not support the whole child exists	Address and support issues with teachers and staff to promote a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) and/or Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child approach.

Conclusion

SHAPE America opposes *withholding* physical activity as a form of punishment and/or behavior management. SHAPE America opposes *administering* physical activity as a form of punishment and/or behavior management. Using physical activity as a punishment discourages students' engagement in an active lifestyle, which is counter-productive to the development of the whole child.

School administrators, physical education teachers, classroom teachers, coaches, parents, and others working with children and young adults play a critical role in providing meaningful physical activity experiences. Providing meaningful physical activity ensures that children and youth develop positive attitudes toward movement and active healthy lifestyles.

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Suggested Citation

Suggested citation: SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators. (2021). Physical activity should not be used as punishment and/or behavior management [Position statement]. Reston, VA: Author.

Acknowledgement

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