

Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward

At school, home, and throughout the community kids are offered food as a reward for "good" behavior. Often these foods have little or no nutritional value but are easy, inexpensive, and can bring about short-term behavior change.

There are many disadvantages to using food as a reward:

- It undermines nutrition education being taught in the school environment.
- It encourages over consumption of foods high in added sugar, salt, and fat.
- It teaches kids to eat when they're not hungry as a reward to themselves.

Kids learn preferences for foods made available to them, including those that are unhealthy. Poor food choices and inadequate physical activity contribute to overweight and obesity. Currently, obesity among kids is at epidemic levels and can often lead to serious health problems.

1. Birch LL. Development of Food Preferences. *Annu. Rev. Nutr.* 199, 19:41-62.

2. Ogden CL, Flegal KM, Carroll MD, and Johnson CL. Prevalence and Trends in Overweight Among US Children and Adolescents, 1999-2000. *JAMA*, October 9, 2002 Vol 288, No. 14.

Students Learn What They Live

Kids naturally enjoy eating healthy and being physically active. Schools and communities need to provide them with an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Below are some alternatives for students to enjoy instead of being offered food as a reward at school.

ZERO-COST ALTERNATIVE

- Sit by friends
- Watch a video
- Read outdoors
- Teach the class
- Have extra art time
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Have an extra recess
- Play a computer game
- Read to a younger class
- Get a no homework pass
- Make deliveries to the office
- Listen to music while working
- Listen with a headset to a book
- Play a favorite game or puzzle
- Earn play money for privileges
- Walk with a teacher during lunch
- Eat lunch outdoors with the class
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Eat lunch with a teacher or principal
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Get "free choice" time at the end of the day
- Have a teacher perform special skills (i.e. sing, dance, rap, or play instrument)
- Have a teacher read a special book to the class



LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES

- Select a paperback book
- Enter a drawing for donated prizes
- Take a trip to the treasure box (non-food items)
- Get stickers, pencils, and other school supplies
- Movie theatre, mini golf or Skating Rink coupon
- Get a set of flash cards printed for a computer
- Receive a "mystery pack" (gift card, notepad, folder, sports cards, etc.)

IDEAS

GAME DAY-This strategy is very much like the game of "HORSE" in basketball. Every time the class (or individual students in the class) does something positive, reward the whole class with a letter from the words, "GAME DAY." Place these letters/words somewhere in your room (i.e., on the board, on a poster, on the wall). Once the class has spelled the two words, the class has earned free time to play a game of their choice.

TOKEN/POINT SYSTEM-Each time a student/class is "caught" doing something positive, he/she or they receive a token or point. These tokens/points can then be accumulated into an "account," of which the teacher could keep track. Fake dollars/coupons/stickers can also be used, and then the student is responsible for keeping track of how many "tokens" they have collected. These "tokens" can be "cashed in" for special rewards, such as a free recess, free homework pass, or small school supply items.

For more information:

Contact the Division of Nutrition Services

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