



- Alternatives to Food as Reward Guide -

At school, home, and in the community, children are commonly offered food as a reward for good behavior and/or academic performance. To provide the best possible learning environment for students, schools must provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Students need to receive consistent, reliable health messages and opportunities to apply them. Finding alternatives to food rewards is an important part of providing a healthy school environment.

“Rewarding children with unhealthy foods in school undermines our efforts to teach them about good nutrition. It’s like teaching children a lesson on the importance of not smoking, and then handing out ashtrays and lighters to the kids who did the best job listening.” - Marlene Schwartz, PhD, Co-Director, Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders

ADVANTAGES of food rewards	DISADVANTAGES or CONSEQUENCES of food rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy - Inexpensive - Leads to short-term behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages eating when not hungry rather than learning to eat in response to hunger & satiety cues. - Connects food to mood. Can instill unhealthy habits of rewarding or comforting themselves with food. - Reinforces eating outside of meal or snack times (district regulation JLJ-R E2) - Sends mixed message. Classroom learning about nutrition will remain only theoretical if schools regularly model unhealthy behaviors. - Encourages over-consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods which can displace more nutritious foods. - May teach children to prefer unhealthy foods if they’re presented as rewards.

The Value of Rewards

Classroom rewards can be an effective way to encourage positive behavior. After rewarding students consistently for a certain behavior, the behavior will hopefully become a habit. Rewards can then be given less often to encourage the maintenance of the preferred behavior. Eventually, self-motivation will be enough to bring them to perform the desired behavior, and outside reinforcement will no longer be necessary.

So what are some ideas for effective non-food rewards?



Non-Food Reward Ideas

The following ideas, either free or low-cost, vary from recognition to prizes and are organized by age-level.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MIDDLE or HIGH SCHOOL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fun physical activity break with an “Active Party Kit” (contact SNAP-Ed Program Manager 527-6651) - Walk or dance break - Make deliveries to office - Sit by friends or at teacher’s desk - Eat lunch with teacher or principal - Read or have class outside - Listen to music while working or listen to audiotape - Be helper in classroom - Play favorite game or puzzle - Watch a fun video - Extra computer, art, or PE time - Show-and-tell time - Teacher reads special book to class - Bank or point system; earn play money/points for privileges - “Free choice” time at end of day - Recognition on morning announcements or with posted photo - Note given to parent/student commending accomplishment - Going first or getting to choose the class activity - Reading to a younger class - Writing/drawing on blackboard/whiteboard - Taking care of the class animal for a day <p>Prizes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>School supplies</u>: pencils, bookmarks, erasers, notepads, crayons, stencils, scissors, highlighters, chalk, markers, rulers, pencil grips - <u>Active play equipment</u>: hula hoop, jump rope, Frisbee, balls - <u>Treasure box prizes</u>: stickers, tattoos, coloring books, books, stamps, yo-yos, finger puppets, stuffed animals, small figurines, puzzles, Slinkies, marbles, playing cards, Silly putty, balloons, bubbles, key chains, flashlights, cups, magnets, crazy straws, hair accessories, sunglasses, hat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sit with friends - Listen to music while working at desk - 5-minute chat break or “free choice” period at end of class - Reduced homework - Extra credit - Fun video or brainteaser activities - Computer time - Assemblies - Field trips - Eat lunch or have class outside - Donated coupons to video or music stores, movies - Donated tickets to sporting events <hr/> <p>Game Day Idea: <i>Have students earn letters to spell “Game Day.” After the letters have been earned, do a special activity together.</i></p> <p>Friday Free Time: <i>Give students 30 minutes at the beginning of the week that they can either earn or lose depending on their behavior. Add time when their behavior is good or subtract time when too loud, not lining up, etc. You’ll save time in the long-run even with the set aside free time.</i></p>

On the opposite end of the spectrum, remember that food and physical activity should **not be linked to punishment** either. Taking away recess/PE class reduces their already scarce opportunities to be active. Another counter-productive punishment is forcing students to do physical activity (running laps, etc.) as they often learn to dislike things used as punishments. Food should not be withheld as a means of punishment either.