

Non-Food Rewards

Why does it matter?

Using food to reward success (such as a pizza party provided for an accomplishment) or reinforce good behavior (such as a piece of candy, or even a piece of fruit) is often a regular practice in schools or out-of-school time settings. Providing food based on performance or behavior not only encourages children to eat outside of meal and snack times, but also to eat when they are not hungry. Additionally, this practice has the potential to create a lifelong habit of rewarding or comforting themselves with food. It can undermine healthy eating messages and reinforce unhealthy eating habits. Food, even healthy foods, should never be used as a reward or reinforcement for students.

What can you do?

- Write a policy statement or add appropriate language to the district or school wellness policy that prohibits the use of food as a reward or reinforcement.
- Survey staff to determine non-food rewards already being used to reward students. Share results and success with the other members of the school community.
- Work with the school wellness council and administrators to write a policy statement and determine alternative practices for reward and reinforcement. Send a letter to staff that explains the school's new policy and include examples of alternative practices.
- Promote the new "reward and reinforcement program" via the school's website, in newsletters and on bulletin boards.
- Share success stories at staff meetings.

Give me some examples!

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pencils ▪ Stickers ▪ Erasers ▪ Drawings or raffles for a prize ▪ Tokens/points toward a prize ▪ Special physical activity breaks ▪ Choice of special activity ▪ Students have the opportunity to lead an activity ▪ Extra free time ▪ Special book selected by student ▪ A feat by a teacher or principal ▪ Special dress day (like PJs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Special visitor ▪ Choice of music for study time ▪ Certificates or ribbons ▪ Post recognition signs (i.e. student of the month) around the school ▪ Special section in the announcements ▪ Call or letter to a parent ▪ Photo board ▪ Going first for something ▪ "No Homework" pass ▪ Designing a prominent bulletin board ▪ Special event (i.e. dance or kite-flying party) ▪ Extra recess or P.E. time |
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For more information, contact Stephanie Joyce, MS, RD/LD, SNS, National Nutrition Advisor at the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, at stephanie.joyce@healthiergeneration.org.