Healthy Alternatives to Food Rewards

Food Rewards...

- **Undermine healthy eating habits**
  Foods used for rewards are often sweet treats or salty snacks with little nutritional value. They can lead to health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cavities.

- **Encourage eating when children aren’t hungry**
  It is important for children to learn to respond to feelings of hunger and fullness. Food rewards can affect this learning process and may lead to unhealthy habits.

- **Contribute to emotional eating**
  Food rewards can teach children to reward themselves with food which may lead to eating when they are bored, stressed, or sad.

Food rewards may be a short-term fix, but they promote unhealthy habits in the long-term.

USDA policy states that:
Reimbursable meals must contribute to the development and socialization of children by providing food that is **not used as a punishment or a reward**.
Child care providers can set a good example for the children in their care by finding healthy alternatives to food rewards. The ideas below are just the beginning. Get creative with ideas for non-food rewards. Give small toys or play games that promote physical activity. Don’t forget the power of praise as a reward for good behavior.

Excellent Examples of Non-food Rewards:
- Offer verbal praise
- Spend extra time outside
- Read a story
- Sing a fun song
- Dance to music
- Take a field trip
- Do a craft
- Do a coloring sheet
- Play a game
- Visit a game
- Do a puzzle
- Have a picnic
- Offer stickers
- Offer temporary tattoos

Use normal consequences as punishment:

When children misbehave, use “normal consequences” which refers to setting temporarily limits related to the problem behavior. For example, a normal consequence of children throwing blocks would be to not allow them to play in the block area for a set amount of time.