



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 park
- 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.

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