

Healthy Rewards

Kids
Can Do
it!



Use Non-food Rewards

Kids are often offered food as a reward for “good behavior.” As teachers know, classroom rewards can be an effective way to encourage positive behavior. However, rewarding students in the classroom shouldn’t involve candy or other unhealthy foods. Instead, teachers should use non-food rewards to provide positive reinforcement for behavior and academic performance.

“It’s just a little treat”... the harm in using food to reward or discipline kids.

- Food should be used for nourishment rather than reward or punishment.
- Providing food as a reward for positive performance or behavior, as well as withholding food for negative performance or behavior connects food to mood and promotes behaviors associated with unhealthy eating and obesity.
- Most food rewards involve candy or other unhealthy foods that are typically high in sugar, fat, and calories.
- Kids learn preferences for food that are made available to them...thus offering food as a reward, whether sweet or non-sweet, significantly enhances the preference for that food.
- Using food as a reward:
 - Encourages kids to eat even when they are not hungry
 - Encourages over consumption of foods high in added sugar, fat, and calories
 - Encourages lifetime habits of rewarding or comforting with food
 - Undermines nutrition education taught in schools

Speaking From Experience!

Mac’s Hands

“I have a huge poster on my back wall that’s titled ‘Mac’s Hands.’ Every time a student does something extra special, noteworthy, or is just having an overall great day (scholastically or behaviorally) they get to draw their hand and print their name. It has turned into a big contest. Everyone wants the recognition of having their hand on the wall, so they try harder and produce better and behave more appropriately. **I also give high fives and show them dance moves as a reward.** My dance moves aren’t that good, but they love to see them.”

Jake McCollum, 9th grade teacher
Wellington Junior High School

Schools should help teach kids how to make healthy choices, to eat to fulfill nutritional needs, and provide an environment that fosters healthy eating.

All Star Board

“I have an ‘All Star’ board in my gym. Each week students can earn three stickers: one for wearing tennis shoes; one for turning in homework related to nutrition and health; and one for being caught being a good sport in class (high fiving someone, telling them they did a good job). At the end of each quarter, I take the top students with the most stickers and let them go to the ‘Good Sport’ Bag. I collect non-candy items at the dollar store and garage sales all year long. **Hacky sacks, rubber bracelet bands and superballs tend to be the most popular.** I award the ‘Good Sport’ award at lunch time and give them a certificate. Kids ask for homework now. The only punishment for not turning in ‘fun PE’ homework is not getting a sticker.”

Nancy West, PE teacher
Mountain Schools

Climbing to Higher Peaks

“Our school motto is ‘Climbing to Higher Peaks’. When my students as a class have worked their magnet up 100 steps on a Colorado Fourteener poster, **we celebrate with a lunchtime movie or a game outside.** If we have had a ‘brain strain’ afternoon, we all (me included) go outside for a sprint to the fence or a physical team-building initiative.”

Colleen Stanevich, 6th grade teacher
Kruse Elementary School

Healthy Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward

Token or Point System Rewards

Kids are rewarded with points that accumulate toward a bigger prize.

Teachers can use play money, tokens, stars, stickers, or a chart to track points students have earned. A point system also may be used for an entire class to earn a reward. When the target number of points are earned, a reward is provided.

- Extra recess
- Gift certificates for sporting good stores, bookstores, video or music stores, movie theaters
- Tickets to sporting events
- Sports equipment – tennis racket, baseball glove, soccer ball, basketball
- Drawing for donated prizes

Prize Box Rewards

Keep a prize box full of age-appropriate non-food rewards

School and Art Supplies:

- Pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, markers – add the school logo
- Notepads, notebooks, coloring books, art pads, books, magazines
- Stencils, stamps, glitter, stickers, glue, scissors
- Bookmarks, rulers, photo albums
- Gift certificates, coupons

Toys and Trinkets:

- Finger puppets, stuffed animals
- Toy cars, helicopters, airplanes
- Slinkies, marbles, jacks
- Bubbles, balloons, silly putty
- Crazy straws, magnets, picture frames
- Flashlight, key chain
- Plant or seeds and a pot with soil to grow plants

Wearable Rewards:

- Hair accessories
- Bracelets, rings, necklaces
- Sunglasses
- Hat, cap, T-shirt

Social Rewards

Reward with encouraging, motivating, character-building words!

“Social rewards,” which involve attention, praise, or thanks, are often more highly valued by kids than a toy or food. Simple gestures like a pat on the shoulder, verbal praise (including in front of others), nods, or smiles can mean a lot. These types of social rewards affirm a kid’s worth as a person and build self-esteem. Say “thanks for helping” or “your contributions were great!” Send notes to parents praising the student’s good behavior.

Physical Activity Rewards

Reward often with physical activity time! Promote physical activity as being fun!

- Give extra recess, PE, or physical activity game time
- Take a fun activity break – dance, move, play, sweat!
- Give coupons to skating rinks, bowling alleys, ice rinks or other active entertainment outlets
- Give physical activity equipment, games, and sports gear
 - Hacky sacks, yo-yo’s, frisbees, hula hoops, step counters
 - Balls of all kinds – super balls, sponge balls, rubber balls, inflatable beach balls, juggling balls
 - Jump ropes, hand weights, kites, Twister
 - Water bottles, running shoe laces, sweat bands, rubber wrist bands
 - Sidewalk chalk

Recognition and Privilege Rewards

Try unique non-food rewards that motivate and inspire!

- Special field trips
- Eat lunch or take a walk with a teacher or principal
- “No homework” pass or reduced homework
- Sit by friends
- Listen to music or an audio book while working
- Watch a fun video
- Eat lunch outdoors or in the classroom
- Read or hold class outdoors
- Go to the library to select a book to read
- Take care of the class animal for a day
- Read to a younger class
- Play games - Brainteasers, Trivial Pursuit
- Stickers, trophy, plaque, ribbon, or certificate in recognition of achievement
- Recognize student’s achievement on the school-wide morning announcements, website, or photo recognition board
- A phone call, email, letter, or postcard sent home to parents or guardians commending a student’s accomplishment
- A note from the teacher to the student commending his or her achievement

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