

Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward

Teachers, administration, parents, and the community often offer kids food as a reward for “good” behavior. Typically “food rewards” have little or no nutritional value, but are used because they are easy, inexpensive treats that are thought to bring about short-term behavior change. Teachers and staff are encouraged to reward students with non-food items.

Disadvantages of Using Food as a Reward

- It sends a mixed message that highlights the conflict between nutrition education taught in the classroom and the school environment.
- It encourages over-consumption of foods high in added sugar and fat that can lead to overweight.
- It may displace more nutritious foods offered in the school meal program.
- It teaches kids to eat to reward themselves with food, even when they are not hungry.

Zero-Cost Alternatives

Sit at the teacher’s desk
Sit by friends
Eat lunch with the teacher/principal
Make a delivery to the office
Be the classroom helper
“No homework” pass
Read outside
Extra recess time
Class walking break
Listen/dance to music
Watch a video
Free choice time
Game day
Listen to a book on tape
Extra computer time
Teacher performs special skill (i.e., sing, dance)
Teacher reads a special book to the class

Low-Cost Alternatives

Books
Enter drawing for donated prizes
Stickers
School supplies
Movie/video coupons
Trading cards
Stamps
Trip to the treasure box
Coloring books
Art supplies
Gift certificates to school store
Physical activity equipment

Other Resources

Constructive Classroom Rewards, Center for Science in the Public Interest,
www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/constructive_rewards.pdf

Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward, Michigan State University Extension,
www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/foodrewards.pdf

Prohibition Against Denying Meals and Milk to Children as a Disciplinary Action, US
Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service

*From the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA), Model Local
School Wellness Policies on Physical Activity and Nutrition, March 2005, page 22*