



Continuing Education and Local Support for Schools (CELSS) Resource Manual

Classroom Reward Options

Adapted from CSPI at www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/constructive_rewards.pdf and "Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward" Michigan Team Nutrition at www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/foodrewards.pdf.

Constructive Classroom Rewards

Promoting Good Habits & Protecting Children's Health

Rewarding children in the classroom need not involve pizza parties, candy, and other foods that can undermine children's diets and health and reinforce unhealthy eating habits. A wide variety of alternative rewards can be used to provide positive reinforcement for behavior.

"It's just a little treat": the harm in using food to reward children

Schools should not only teach children how to make healthy choices and to eat to fulfill nutritional needs, but should provide an environment that fosters healthy eating. Providing food based on performance connects FOOD to MOOD. This can encourage students to eat treats even when they are not hungry and can instill habits of rewarding or comforting themselves with food behaviors associated with unhealthy eating or obesity.

The value of rewarding with non-food rewards

Children alter their actions based on short-term anticipated consequences. When trying to foster a new behavior, it's important to reward a child consistently each time he or she does the desired behavior. The ultimate goal of rewarding students is to help them internalize positive behaviors so they will not need a reward. Eventually, self-motivation will be sufficient to induce them to perform the desired behavior, and outside reinforcement will no longer be necessary.

Physical activity and food should not be linked to punishment

Punishing children by taking away recess or physical education classes reduces their already-scarce opportunities for physical activity. Another counter-productive punishment is forcing children to do physical activity such as laps or pushups. Children often learn to dislike things that are used as punishments. Thus, penalizing children with

physical activity might lead them to avoid activities that are important for maintaining wellness and a healthy body weight. Food should not be withheld as a means of punishing children.

Examples of beneficial rewards:

Social rewards

- Involve attention, praise, thanks
- Often more highly valued by students than a toy or food
- Pats on the shoulder, verbal praise, nods, smiles affirm worth

Recognition

- Trophy, plaque, ribbon, certificate in recognition of achievement or sticker with affirming message
- Recognizing achievement on the school-wide morning announcements
- Photo recognition board in a prominent location in school
- Phone call, email, letter sent home to parents or guardians
- Note from teacher

Privileges

- Going first
- Choosing a class activity
- Helping the teacher
- Having an extra few minutes of recess with a friend
- Sitting by friends
- “No homework” pass
- Teaching the class
- Playing an educational computer or other game
- Reading to a younger class
- Making deliveries to the office
- Reading the school-wide morning announcements
- Helping in another classroom
- Eating lunch with a teacher or principal
- Listening with a headset to a book on tape or CD
- Going to library to select a book to read
- Working at the school store
- Taking a walk with the principal or teacher
- Designing a class or hall bulletin board
- Writing or drawing on the blackboard/whiteboard
- Taking care of the class animal for a day

Rewards for a class

- Extra recess
- Eating lunch outdoors
- Going to the lunchroom first
- Reading outdoors
- Holding class outdoors
- Extra art, music, PE or reading time
- Listening to music while working
- Dancing to music
- Playing a game or doing a puzzle together
- “Free choice” time at the end of the day
- Song, dance, or performance by teacher or students
- Book read aloud to the class by the teacher
- Field trip

School Supplies

- Pencils
- Pens
- Erasers
- Notebooks
- Boxes of crayons
- Stencils
- Stamps
- Plastic scissors
- Bookmarks
- Highlighters
- Chalk
- Markers
- Coloring books
- Rulers
- Glitter
- Pencil sharpeners, grip, boxes
- Gift certificate to school store

Toys/trinkets

- Stickers
- Yo-yos
- Rubber balls
- Finger puppets
- Stuffed animals
- Plastic or rubber figurines
- Toy cars, trucks, helicopters, airplanes
- Plastic sliding puzzles
- Slinky
- Gliders
- Magnifying glasses
- Spinning tops
- Marbles
- Jacks
- Playing cards
- Stretchy animals
- Silly putty
- Bubble fluid with wand
- Balloons
- Capsules that become sponges/figures when placed in water
- Inflatable toys
- Small dolls or action figures

Sports equipment and athletic gear

- Paddleballs
- Frisbees
- Water bottles
- NERF balls
- Hula hoop
- Head and wrist sweat bands
- Jump rope

Fashion wear

- Temporary tattoos
- Hair accessories
- Bracelets, rings, necklaces
- Sunglasses
- Eyeglasses with nose disguise
- Hat or cap
- T-shirt
- Sneaker bumper stickers
- Shoelaces

Miscellaneous

- Key chains
- Flashlights
- Cups
- Magnets
- Crazy straws
- Backscratchers
- Plat, seeds, and pot for growing a plant
- Books

Token/point system

- Bookstore or sporting goods gift certificate
- Movie pass
- Rental gift certificate
- Sporting event
- Puzzle
- Book
- Stuffed animal
- Magazine subscription
- Board game
- Step counter (pedometer)
- Sports equipment
- Tennis racket
- Baseball glove
- Soccer ball
- Basketball