



Alternatives to Food Rewards

Lexington-Fayette County Health Department

Using food as a reward *or punishment* only brings about short-term behavior change, and it can have long-term consequences.

Facts

- 88% of KY schools use food as rewards for good behavior and academic performance.
- Pizza parties, candy, soft drinks and ice cream are the most common food rewards used in KY schools.

Disadvantages of Using Food as Rewards

Schools are institutions designed to model appropriate behaviors to children. Learning about nutrition will remain strictly theoretical if adults regularly model unhealthy behaviors.

- Foods commonly used as rewards can contribute to health problems in children such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and dental cavities. **These diseases are increasing rapidly among KY children.**
- Rewarding students with food can interfere with children learning to eat in response to hunger and fullness cues.
- Food preferences for both sweet and non-sweet foods increase significantly when

foods are presented as rewards (Birch and Fisher 1994). In other words, we may be teaching children to prefer unhealthy foods.

- It contributes to “disordered eating” in the future by teaching children that food is not only a reward, but a comfort.
- Using foods as a punishment (i.e. “You can’t have dessert unless you finish those vegetables”) does two things: it causes children to think vegetables are something you have to force down until you get the “good” stuff, and it teaches them to overeat. They may not have really been hungry enough for that dessert, but it was made to sound so good, they ate it anyway.

Food for Thought

“Rewards can be abused and overused. Too often students come to expect something in return for behavior or good grades when in reality they should do the behavior for its intrinsic value.”

~Middle School Teacher in Fayette County



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Kentucky Teachers' Suggestions for Alternatives to Food Rewards

Preschool

- Stickers
- Show and tell
- Sit by the teacher
- Play favorite game
- Teacher reads a special book to class

Elementary School Students

- Stickers
- Fun video
- Teach class
- Sit by friends
- Extra recess
- Show-and-tell
- School supplies
- Paperback book
- Play favorite game
- Eat lunch with teacher
- Make deliveries to office
- Trip to treasure box filled with non-food items
 - Pencils
 - Stickers
 - Spider rings
 - Paperback books
 - Coupons for extra credit or extra recess time
 - Plastic costume jewelry (metal jewelry may contain lead)
- Teacher reads special book to class
- Bank system (earn play money to be used for privileges)
- Teacher performs special skill (cartwheel, guitar playing, etc.)

Middle School Students

- Fun video
- Field trips
- Extra credit
- Assemblies
- Sit with friends
- Computer time
- Reduced homework
- Listen to music at desk
- Five minute chat break at end of class
- Eat lunch outside, or have class outside

High School Students

- Fun video
- Extra credit
- Reduced homework
- Coupons to video stores, music stores, movies (donated)
- A few minutes of “free choice” time at end of class period
- Drawings for donated prizes among students who meet certain grades standards



List Your Favorite Rewards Here