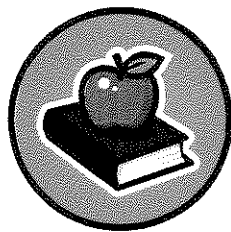


Constructive Classroom Rewards

Promoting Good Habits While Protecting Children's Health



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

Schools should not only teach children how to make healthy choices and to eat to fulfill nutritional needs, but also should provide an environment that fosters healthy eating. Providing food based on performance or behavior connects food to mood. This practice can encourage children to eat treats even when they are not hungry and can instill lifetime habits of rewarding or comforting themselves with food behaviors associated with unhealthy eating or obesity. Awarding children food during class also reinforces eating outside of meal or snack times.

Since few studies have been conducted on the effect of using food rewards on children's long-term eating habits the best policy is not to use food to reward children for good behavior or academic performance. At minimum, children should not be rewarded using foods of poor nutritional quality. (Note: classroom parties are covered by this policy.)

The value of rewarding children with non-food rewards

As teachers know, classroom rewards can be an effective way to encourage positive behavior. Children, like everyone, alter their actions based on short-term anticipated consequences. When trying to foster a new behavior, it is important to reward a child consistently each time he or she does the desired behavior. Once the behavior has become an established habit, rewards can be given every now and then to encourage the child to maintain the preferred behavior.

The ultimate goal of rewarding children is to help them internalize positive behaviors so that 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.

Developed in conjunction with Boerne ISD Wellness Committee February 2007 and some examples adapted from "Alternatives to using Food as a Reward," Michigan Team Nutrition (a partnership between the Michigan Department of Education and Michigan State University Extension), 2004.
Accessed at <<http://www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/foodrewards.pdf>>. on November 8, 2004.

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. Consequently, Boerne ISD does not endorse consistently withholding recess as an academic consequence or form of behavior modification. Likewise, routinely removing a student from his/her physical education class due to an academic or discipline concern is not permitted. Another counter-productive punishment is forcing children to do physical activity, such as running laps or pushups, as a classroom consequence. Penalizing children with physical activity might lead them to avoid activities that are important for maintaining wellness and a healthy body weight. In addition, food should not be withheld as a means of punishing children. The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits withholding meals as punishment for any child enrolled in a school participating in the school meal program.¹

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). *Prohibition against Denying Meals and Milk to Children as a Disciplinary Action*. Alexandria, VA: USDA, 1988

What Schools Can Do

Examples of beneficial and inexpensive rewards for children

Recognition

- A note from the teacher to the student commending his or her achievement
- A phone call, email, or letter sent home to parents or guardians commending a child's accomplishment
- A photo recognition board in a prominent location in the school
- Recognizing a child's achievement on the school-wide morning announcements and/or the school's website
- Trophy, plaque, ribbon, or certificate in recognition of achievement or a sticker with an affirming message (e.g., "Great job")

Individual Privileges

- Allowing a child to choose an extra recess activity for the class on his/her birthday
- Choosing a class activity
- Designing a class bulletin board
- Eating lunch with a teacher or principal
- Going first
- Going to the library to select a book to read
- Having an extra few minutes of recess with a friend
- Helping in another classroom
- Helping the teacher
- Listening with a headset to a book on tape or CD
- Making deliveries to the office
- "No homework" pass
- Playing an educational computer or other game
- Sitting by friends or in a special seat next to or at the teacher's desk
- Taking a walk with the principal or teacher
- Taking care of the class animal for a day
- Teaching the class
- Writing or drawing on the blackboard/whiteboard
- Working at the school store

Class Privileges

- A book read aloud to the class by the teacher
- Eating lunch outdoors
- Extra recess
- "Free choice" time at the end of the day
- Holding class outdoors
- Listening to music while working
- Playing a game or doing a puzzle together
- Reading outdoors

Treasure Box Ideas

- A plant, or seeds and pot for growing a plant
- Bookmarks
- Books
- Boxes of crayons
- Bracelets, rings, necklaces
- Chalk
- Chalk (i.g., sidewalk chalk)
- Coloring books
- Cups
- Erasers
- Finger puppets
- Frisbees
- Gift certificate to school store
- Hair accessories (barrettes, elastics, or ribbons)
- Head and wrist sweat bands
- Highlighters
- Jacks
- Jump rope
- Key chains
- Magnets
- Magnifying glasses
- Marbles
- Notepads/notebooks
- Pencils
- Pencil sharpeners, grips, or boxes
- Pens
- Plastic or rubber figurines
- Plastic scissors
- Plastic sliding puzzles or other puzzle games
- Playing cards
- Rulers
- Shoe laces
- Slinkies
- Spinning tops

- Stamps
- Stencils
- Stickers
- Stretchy animals
- Stuffed animals
- Sunglasses
- T-shirt
- Water bottles
- Yo-yos



A token or point system, whereby children earn points that accumulate toward a bigger prize.

Children can be given fake money, tokens, stars, or a chart can be used to keep track of the points they have earned. Points can be exchanged for privileges or prizes when enough are accumulated.

A point system also may be used for an entire class to earn a reward. Whenever individual children have done well, points can be added to the entire class's "account." When the class has earned a target number of points, then they receive a group reward.

Possible prizes include those listed above and:

- Board Game
- Book
- Gift certificate to a bookstore or sporting goods store
- Magazine subscription
- Movie pass or rental gift certificate
- Puzzle
- Sports equipment, such as tennis racket, baseball glove, soccer ball, or basketball
- Step counter (pedometer)
- Stuffed animal
- Ticket to sporting event