

Alternatives to Using Food as Reward

One in three children is overweight; one in seven is obese. The rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the last twenty years. An overweight four-year-old is 20% more likely to become an obese adult; an overweight teen, eighty percent.

While there are many reasons for this obesity “epidemic,” one that providers can control is using food to reward, comfort or punish the children in their care. The following statements are common examples of these negative methods:

- *“If you pick up the toys, I will give you each a cookie.”* (reward)
- *“I know you got hurt when you fell down, here is a piece of candy.”* (comfort)
- *“Eat all of your peas or we will not go to the playground.”* (punishment)

Non-Food Alternatives

Avoid these kinds of statements and instead consider non-food alternatives as rewards. Some rewards that work well with young children individually or as a group:

- Sit by friends
- Teach the class
- Have extra art time
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Have an extra recess
- Play a favorite game or puzzle
- Walk with a favorite provider during a transition
- Eat lunch outdoors/ have a picnic
- Eat lunch with a teacher or the director
- Be a helper in another class
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Provider can perform special skills (i.e. sing)
- Field trips
- Provider can read a book of that child’s choosing

Normal Consequences

Even more effective than rewards is the delivering of consequences when a child behaves in a way other than the expectation that had been clearly explained prior. Look for opportunities to provide “normal consequences” whenever possible.

“Normal consequences” usually refers to temporary limitations a provider sets that connect with the problem behavior that just occurred. Examples include:

- *“You threw that block so you may no longer play in the Block area today.”*
- *“You two were fighting over that toy so neither of you may play with it today.”*
- *“All of the caps were left off of the markers in our Art Area this morning so they have all dried out. We will not have markers to use for a while.”*

Feel free to post or distribute this resource, adapted from the online provider training lesson: “Making Meal Times a Pleasant Experience”

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