

Healthy Classroom Rewards

Rewards are commonly used to recognize students for classroom success. However, rewarding children with food, healthy or unhealthy, can lead to problems with children's diets and health. You can help your students practice what they learn in the classroom about healthy eating and Canada's Food Guide by ensuring that classroom rewards are healthy.

'It's just a little treat': Using food as a reward...

- Confuses children by contradicting the classroom lessons about healthy eating and Canada's Food Guide
- Discourages positive attitudes towards food and lifelong healthy eating habits
- Harms children's dental health. Frequent sugary treats can lead to cavities
- Connects food to mood by teaching children to eat even when they are not hungry
- Reinforces eating outside of meal or snack times
- Promotes a preference for sweets, teaching children to prefer them over healthy foods that don't taste sweet (eg, vegetables, plain milk, unsweetened cereal)
- Puts children with food allergies at risk, or else excludes them

Applying the School Food and Beverage Policy PPM 150 to classroom rewards

The School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM 150) encourages schools to create a healthy eating environment that teaches and models healthy eating behaviours. The Ministry of Education states that schools can reinforce healthy eating messages taught in the curriculum by ensuring that food or beverages are not used as rewards or incentives.

Nutrition Tools for Schools®

www.nutritiontoolsforschools.ca



Nutrition Tools for Schools (NTS) is an online community and an interactive, web-based resource for Ontario Schools. Join us to get tips, tools and ideas to create a healthy nutrition environment in your school!

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Something to think about

Rewarding children with unhealthy food in school undermines our efforts to teach them about good nutrition. It's like teaching children a lesson in the importance of not smoking, and then handing out ashtrays and lighters to the kids who did the best job listening.

Marlene Schwartz, Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders. Alternatives to Food as a Reward. Connecticut State Department of Education, 2004.

Healthy choices for classroom rewards

Healthy classroom rewards are rewards that do not include food, but instead use non-food items (eg, stickers, pencils, note pads, bookmarks) and privileges (eg, dancing to music in the classroom for a fun break).

Ideas for non-food classroom rewards^{1, 2}

Depending on the age of the student, the type of rewards may differ. Inspire students by giving them a chance to:

- Sit by friends
- Read outdoors
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Have an extra recess
- Read to a younger class
- Be first in line for the day
- Make deliveries to the office
- Have extra art or computer time
- Walk with a teacher during lunch
- Be a helper in another classroom

Privileges:

- Use play money or tickets as rewards. Set amounts that students can save up and cash in for classroom privileges

Recognition:

- Recognize a student's achievement in the morning announcements
- Phone or send an email or letter to a parent or caregiver commending the child's work
- Present a certificate or 'Student of the Week' trophy



Physical activity and food should not be linked to punishment

Taking away recess or forcing students to do extra (eg, running laps) may cause children to dislike physical activity. Being active keeps children healthy and more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Also, food should not be withheld to punish children or as part of 'policing lunches'.



1. Constructive Classroom Rewards http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/constructive_classroom_rewards.pdf http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/policy_options.html#ImproveSchoolFoods
2. Alternatives to Food as Reward. Connecticut State Department of Education. 2004 http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/Food_As_Reward.pdf

Success to share

'I like to reward the class as a whole rather than individuals. I add tokens to a classroom jar every time a student is recognized. When the jar is full I reward the class with a special outing, event, or activity'.

Submitted by: Healthy Schools 2020 workshop participant,



A treasure box of rewards!

Fill a treasure box with items that promote learning or physical activity. Consider the following treasures!

- Stickers
- Erasers
- Bubbles
- Note pads
- Bouncy balls
- Fancy paperclips
- Playing cards
- Marbles
- Jacks
- Bookmarks
- Magnifying glass
- Slinkies
- Hacky sacks
- Skipping ropes
- Frisbees
- Paddleballs
- Hair accessories

Check out discount stores for other great ideas.

Together we can make the healthy choice the easy choice!

For more information about Nutrition Tools for Schools®, PPM 150, or healthy eating, please contact your [local public health unit](#).

For information on healthy schools go to the Ministry of Education Healthy Schools website
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/healthyschools.html>