



Boeing Center for Children's Wellness

Healthy Reward Alternatives for Behavior Management

Using food as a reward for positive reinforcement can lead to learned unhealthy behaviors because students are more likely to associate food with being good or feeling happy. When positive reinforcement is used effectively, it encourages and incentivizes students to display desired healthy behaviors. Below is a list of non-food rewards for behavior management that promote healthy behaviors.

No-Cost Incentives and Rewards

- Take a walk around the school with the teacher or principal
- "Free Time" pass— allows students to go to the library, read a book, play a game, or color
- "Get Out of an Assignment Free" or "Free Homework" pass
- "Special" assistant allows a student to help the teacher or principal for an allotted amount of time, such as one class period
- Create an "Honor" or "Classroom Hero" board to hang photos of students who reach their goals
- High-fives, fist-bumps, and verbal praise
- Allow students to listen to music while working at the desk
- Positive note or call home to the parent or caregiver
- Choose your seat— allow students to pick where they sit for the day
- Extra recess time
- Allow students to decorate a ceiling tile
- "First in Line" coupon— allow students to jump to the front of the lunch line
- Brain break choice— allow students to pick what the class does for a brain break

Low-Cost Incentives and Rewards

- Water bottles
- School-branded apparel
- Bubbles
- Trip to the classroom prize box filled with pens, pencils, coloring books, stickers, and other school supplies
- Sidewalk chalk
- Jump rope, frisbee, sports balls, or other physical activity equipment
- Free admission to school activities such as sporting events, field trips, school dances, carnival, etc.
- Gift certificate to the school store for non-food items

Whole-Class Rewards for Reaching Class Goals

- Extra recess time or play a game as a class
- Have a picnic lunch outside

- Take a class walk
- Class dance party
- Crazy sock party
- Duct tape the principal or teacher to the wall
- Healthy cooking activity
- Painting party or other art activities
- Movie party
- Special class visitor— work with the principal or community partner to arrange
- Field trip
- Hat day

Healthy Consequence Alternatives for Behavior Management

Regular physical activity for children and adolescents helps improve student learning, social-emotional skills, and attention, and shapes lifelong healthy habits. Physical activity is often taken away and used as a form of punishment for students who are acting out or not following directions. Many times, these are the students who need physical activity the most. Below is a list of alternative ideas to withholding or requiring physical activity as punishment.

Alternative Consequences

- Clean up the mess the student made or remedy the situation for which they are being punished (natural consequence)
- Write an essay on what the student did wrong and how to behave better next time
- Write an apology letter to the person who has been wronged. Use it as an opportunity to discuss the importance of seeking and giving forgiveness
- Do community service
- Have the student write a letter to their parents or guardians explaining why the behavior was inappropriate or disruptive, and state what they will try to do to change their behavior
- Have the student work with the teacher to develop a plan for behavior change tied to incremental privileges
- Create a behavior chart with the student that identifies a target behavior and agreed-upon reinforcements or rewards to address chronic behavior issues
- Assign a reflection task for homework
- Assign a job that incorporates moving— i.e., stacking chairs, sweeping, cleaning tables, delivering items around school, wiping down playground or PE equipment, picking up litter, etc.
- Take away screen time—computer, iPad, or gaming system— instead of recess time
- Have the student work with the teacher on an art project while they discuss what the student did wrong and how to behave better next time

Additional Ideas and Resources:

[PBIS Rewards](#)

[How to Reward and Motivate Kids without Using Food](#)

[Whole-class Rewards that Aren't Food](#)

[Action For Healthy Kids Healthy Rewards](#)

[Action for Healthy Kids: Alternatives to Withholding PA](#)

[Peaceful Playgrounds](#)

For more ideas and resources, please visit our website:

[Boeing Center Resources](#)

Please contact your school's Wellness Leader or boeingcenter@musc.edu with any questions.

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