

Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward

One in five children is overweight or obese by age 6. The rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the last 20 years. An overweight 4-year-old is 20 percent more likely to become an obese adult; an overweight teen, 80 percent.

While there are many reasons for this increased obesity rate, 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
- Eat lunch outdoors/ have a picnic
- Teach the class
- Eat lunch with a teacher or the director
- Have extra art time
- Be a helper in another class
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Have an extra recess
- Provider can perform special skills (i.e. sing)
- Play a favorite game or puzzle
- Field trips
- Walk with a favorite provider during a transition
- 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. 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."*