



Smart Rewards for Successful Kids

Using candy and soft drinks as rewards can create problems.

Children are offered food and beverages as rewards for good behavior or performance in many settings. Often these items (such as candy and soft drinks) are cheap and easy, but have little or no nutrition value. They also tend to only affect short-term behavior change. There are many disadvantages to using foods and beverages as rewards:

- They teach kids to eat or drink to feel better, even when they are not hungry.
- They send the message that all achievements should be celebrated by eating or drinking.
- They add unnecessary calories, sugar, and fat, which can lead to poor nutrition and unhealthy weights.
- They undermine the smart nutrition habits being taught at home and at school.
- They may create an unhealthy relationship with food that lasts a lifetime.

Smart rewards support kids' health, behavior, and academics.

When children and teens are well-nourished and physically active, they have fewer school absences, fewer behavior problems, and more ability to focus on classroom tasks. Healthy children also tend to score higher on standardized tests and have higher grade point averages. Families, schools, and communities must provide young people with the opportunities to develop the habits that will make them fit, healthy, and ready to succeed.

Smart rewards at home and school are an important part of the equation. If foods or beverages are used as incentives, choose nutrient-rich options, such as fruit kebobs, veggie boats, yogurt parfaits, string cheese, or low-fat flavored milk. Fortunately, there are also many effective ways to reward students **WITHOUT** using food and beverage treats. Check out these real-life examples from outstanding educators and happy families.

Choosing smart rewards at HOME

All children want quality time with parents, grandparents, and other caregivers. Doing things together is a wonderful way to reward children for good behaviors and to decrease negative, attention seeking behaviors. Here are some effective, positive rewards for kids.

- ★ **Take a walk or play an outside game with a parent or caregiver.**
- ★ **Read a book or play a board game of the child's choice together.**
- ★ **Listen to some favorite music (and dance) together.**
- ★ **Work together on a craft or other project of the child's choice.**
- ★ **Make a special trip to a park, museum, or other favorite destination.**
- ★ **Create a treasure box with a variety of small rewards, such as stickers, special pencils, craft items, sidewalk chalk, fun erasers, plastic jewelry, plastic bugs/animals, and small toys from which a child can choose.**

Choosing smart rewards at SCHOOL

Teachers, families, and involved community members can work together at school. They can enhance children's physical and mental health by consistently offering smart rewards, plentiful opportunities for physical activity, and quality time with positive role models. Depending on the age of children, these alternatives to food/beverage rewards are very effective with individuals, groups of students, classes, and entire schools.

- ★ Read a book.
- ★ Teach a lesson.
- ★ Read outdoors.
- ★ Sit with friends.
- ★ Enjoy extra recess.
- ★ Have extra art time.
- ★ Enjoy class outdoors.
- ★ Play a computer game.
- ★ Read to a younger class.
- ★ Sing a silly song together.
- ★ Get a 'no-homework' pass.
- ★ Make deliveries to the office.
- ★ Listen to music while working.
- ★ Play a favorite game or puzzle.
- ★ Earn play money for privileges.
- ★ Eat lunch as an outdoor picnic.
- ★ Walk with a teacher or principal.
- ★ Be a helper in another classroom.
- ★ Eat lunch with a teacher or principal.
- ★ Dance to favorite music in the classroom.
- ★ Get 'free choice' time at the end of the day.
- ★ Become student of the day, month, or week.
- ★ Be first in line when the class leaves the room.
- ★ Read school announcements over the intercom.
- ★ Have a teacher read a special book to the class.
- ★ Plant and maintain a flower or vegetable garden.
- ★ Listen with a headset to music or books on tape.
- ★ Win a free pass to a movie, sporting event, or play.
- ★ Watch a teacher or principal do something silly in public (such as being dunked in water or wearing a special hat).
- ★ Pick something from a treasure box filled with small items (such as stickers, pencils, erasers, bookmarks, small toys, or coupons from local businesses).

