

Transitioning To Non-Food Rewards

Using non-food rewards is the healthiest way to reward children and youth. Reducing and ultimately eliminating the use of food (also known as edible reinforcers) in special education and behavior plans takes planning and time.

Before you begin, make sure that everyone who supports the child is included in the plan. You may want to ask a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA), psychologist, or other professional to help with the process.

How to Transition to Non-Food Rewards

- Keep a record of how often a child is being rewarded with food and the behavior being targeted. This includes tracking food used in an Individual Education Program (IEP), a Behavior Plan, and even outside of a formal plan.
 - Let's Go!'s Food Reward Tracker is an example of a tool you can use.
- Ask educators to conduct up-to-date preference assessments to identify non-food rewards to replace the food rewards. Do not include any food in the assessments.
- Once new rewards have been identified, create or update the child's education and service plans with non-food rewards.
 - Describe the desired behaviors in observable and measurable terms.
 - Specify exactly what the child needs to do to receive the reward, such as correctly identifying an object in a picture or walking quietly in the hallway.
 - Include a reinforcement schedule that describes when and how often to use specific rewards.
 - Begin to replace food rewards with non-food rewards. Do this gradually for the most effective results.



A coordinated approach is key to all aspects of successful education and behavior management for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

TIP

Watching peers be rewarded with a high five or extra time to play outdoors can help a child prefer those types of rewards as well.