



# Action for Healthy Kids<sup>®</sup> Virginia

## Healthy Rewards for Kids

### Why Healthy Rewards in the Home and Classroom?

Kids are offered foods as reward for “good behavior” in many settings. Often these foods have little or no nutrition value but are easy, cheap — such as candy and chocolate bars — and bring about only short-term behavior change.

There are many disadvantages to using unhealthy food as rewards:

- It teaches kids to eat as a reward, even when they are not hungry .
- It sends the message that achievements should be marked by eating.
- It may add unnecessary calories, sugar, and fat to the child’s diet, which can cause weight gain or an unhealthy weight.
- It can undermine healthy nutrition practices being taught at home or at school.
- It can establish poor dietary habits that may last a lifetime.

### Children learn and behave better when they eat well and are active!

Children respond to healthy rewards with improved behavior and stronger achievement in school. Kids naturally enjoy eating healthy and being physically active. It is important for families, schools and communities to provide kids ample opportunities to develop lifelong habits for better health. If you choose to reward children with foods, consider healthy options like an apple, banana, carrot sticks, string cheese, or even low-fat chocolate milk.

#### Choosing Healthy Rewards at Home

- Take a walk with a parent or caregiver
- Read a favorite book together or play a board game of your child’s choice
- Take a special trip to a museum or park
- Listen to music of your child’s choice (and dance!)
- Work together on a project of your child’s choosing
- Play an outdoor game together (a water balloon or snowball fight, hide and seek, tag)
- Create a treasure box for small items such as stickers, special pencils, small toys, craft kits, sidewalk chalk, fun erasers, plastic jewelry, plastic bugs/animals from which your child can choose.

**Children appreciate and are rewarded by quality time with parents and caregivers. Seeking attention is a common reason for misbehavior. Create a sticker chart to allow your child to earn these healthy rewards.**

## Local School Wellness Policies: A Move in the Right Direction

In many school divisions in Virginia, Local School Wellness Policies encourage teachers to manage classrooms with healthy rewards (such as those listed here) and to find alternatives to denying recess as a consequence. These relationship- and activity-based rewards help to break the cycle of overweight and obesity by teaching children that unhealthy foods do not have to be a reward for academic success and good behavior.

### Choosing Healthy Rewards at School

- Walk with the teacher at lunch
- Read outside with a buddy
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Have a special item on desk
- Listen to a CD at lunch
- Be able to use the teacher's desk
- Free homework night
- Have lunch with the teacher or principal
- Bring a pet to school
- Choose a story for snack
- Have extra recess
- Read to a younger class
- Choose from a classroom treasure chest for items such as pencils, stickers, small toys and other items

**Some teachers will use a voucher system to allow students to earn "play money" or tokens to purchase rewards.**

Together, teachers, parents and community members have an incredible opportunity to work together to improve the physical and emotional health of children by consistently offering healthy rewards, plentiful opportunities for physical activity, and quality time together.

