

TRANSITIONING TO NON-FOOD REWARDS

for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



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The transition away from using food rewards to reinforce behaviors may seem daunting, but there are steps you can take to ease the process. Follow these steps to make non-food rewards part of a coordinated approach to education and behavior management for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

1. Use the Food Rewards Tracker to gather information about how often a child is rewarded with food.
2. Complete preference assessments to identify new reinforcers to replace the food rewards currently used.
3. Create or update the child's Behavior Intervention Plan to include non-food rewards and exclude any food rewards. Be sure to:
 - 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.
4. Begin the transition by slowly reducing the use of food as a reward. Use food less and less frequently, and begin to replace food rewards with non-food rewards. Do this very gradually for the most effective results.
5. Complete the transition and avoid the use of food to reinforce desirable behaviors.

Reducing the use of food rewards can be a difficult process. Consult a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst, psychologist, or other professional with experience developing Behavior Intervention Plans to assist with the process.

Tips for Using Non-Food Rewards:

- Limit a child's access to the selected rewards to increase their desirability.
- For children who may not be as motivated by social attention, it is still important to pair tangible items with praise. By association, social attention may become more reinforcing over time.
- Rotate and vary rewards over time to maintain a child's interest, and to reflect the child's changing preferences.