WHY PROHIBIT THE USE OF FOOD AS A REWARD?

NOTE ON FOOD REWARDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:

Rewards are common for all children, but can be a particularly big part of the lives of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Special educators often rely on food as a quick, effective way to reinforce desirable behavior. For this reason, prohibiting the use of food as a reward may have additional challenges.

Rewarding kids with food, even healthy foods, encourages kids to eat outside of meal and snack times, when they may not be hungry, and can lead to poor eating habits.¹,²

Using food, such as candy, cookies, doughnuts, sugary drinks, and pizza, as a reward for good behavior and academic performance is a common practice with kids and puts them at risk for excess weight gain and obesity.³,⁴

Encouraging kids to eat healthy foods, but at the same time rewarding good behavior with unhealthy foods, sends a mixed message and confuses kids.¹

Foods that are used as rewards are typically high in sugar, fat, and salt with little nutritional value, and can play a role in establishing kids' preferences for unhealthy foods.¹,²

¹ Puhl RM, Schwartz MB. If you are good you can have a cookie: How memories of childhood food rules link to adult eating behaviors. Eating Behaviors. 2003; Vol. 4 (Issue3):283-293.