

A healthy nutrition environment is created by serving nutritious foods during regular meals and snacks as well as at special occasions. Typical celebrations usually include calorie dense foods of limited nutritional value, such as cookies, cake and candy. On occasion, this may be acceptable, but it sends a message to children that eating such foods is the only way to celebrate.

recommendation

Celebrate holidays or special occasions with mostly healthy foods and non-food items.

why?

- Child care programs can be a role model for families. They can move families toward a healthier way of celebrating by reducing unhealthy foods and increasing fun activities
- Providing healthy celebrations supports the classroom lessons children are learning about health and gives children an opportunity to practice healthy behaviors

cultural competency tip:

Consider the variety of holidays and traditions your families celebrate. Find ways to observe or honor the differences and likenesses of the celebrations. Consider who might be left out if you emphasize a particular holiday and how you can celebrate in an inclusive manner.

"I tell [parents] to really think about celebrations — are we celebrating food or the time with family and friends — which is more important?"

— Dorothy Young, Young Child Development Center, Appleton

how?

- Ask staff and children to help develop a list of healthy foods and activities for celebrations
- Review celebration program policy with families
- Involve children in healthy snack preparation
- Serve nutritious foods in a special way such as heart-shaped sandwiches for Valentine's Day
- Use color to celebrate (e.g., red, white, and blue fruit and vegetables for Independence Day, or orange fruit and vegetable snacks for Halloween instead of candy)

sample policies

- Our program supports a healthy environment for children during celebrations by offering nutritious snacks and doing creative activities. It also honors children on their birthdays with special privileges instead of with food.
- Our program realizes it is important to families that their child be allowed to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays or holidays. Please refer to the family handout "Healthy Celebration Ideas" for examples of appropriate ways to celebrate. Check with your child's teacher before bringing anything.

See Healthy Celebration Ideas in Appendix H for a list of healthy food and non-food activity ideas and Appendix I for a sample letter to families describing your celebration policies.

Due to possible food allergies, consider that food brought from home be store bought only. Foods must have a label containing ingredients so any allergens can be identified.

Healthy celebration ideas

Unhealthy foods such as cake, cookies or candy do not have to be served to make an event a celebration. Below are ideas for activities to make a day special.

Celebration Activities

- For general celebrations, create a sign-up sheet that includes only approved and healthy foods. Families can sign up for specific items
- Ask families to purchase a book in the birthday child's name. It can be read to the children, or invite the families to read it on their child's birthday
- Create a special birthday package (e.g., the birthday child wears a sash, pin or crown, sits in a special chair and gets a special birthday surprise, such as a pencil, sticker or card)
- Let the birthday child be an assistant for the day to help with special tasks, e.g., leading the line, starting an activity or choosing a game or story
- Plan one party each month to celebrate all the birthdays in that month instead of hosting a separate celebration for each child
- Encourage families to visit the program to help celebrate their child's birthday

Non-Food Celebration Items

Stickers	Glow-in-the-dark items
Little toys	Slap bracelets
Stamps	Whistles
Army men	Party hats
Plastic rings	Silly bands
Decorative pencils	Fake tattoos
Erasers	Bubbles
Holiday theme items	Chalk
Crayons	

Healthy Foods for Celebrations

- Low-fat cheese cubes or hummus with whole grain crackers
- Parfait with low-fat yogurt, fruit and granola served in a waffle cone or decorated cup
- Trail mix (whole-grain, low-sugar cereals mixed with dried fruit, pretzels, etc.)
- Seasonal beverages (e.g., warm cider in fall or a fruit smoothie in summer)
- Bananas dipped in yogurt, rolled in crushed cereal and frozen
- 100% fruit juice freezer pops
- Fruit pizzas using whole grain tortillas topped with low-fat whipped topping and fruit
- Fruit salad or apples with caramel dip

Here is a sample *Birthday Request Form* for families who want to do something special for their child's birthday. Go to the following website for a downloadable copy: <https://dpi.wi.gov/community-nutrition/cacfp/wellness/active-early-healthy-bites>

Name of Program

Birthday Request

I would like to help celebrate my child's birthday. Activities will be planned with the teacher. I understand that I may do so in one of the following ways: (please check all that apply).

☐ Purchase a book for the program

☐ Come and participate in an activity or a meal

☐ Bring food(s) from program list

☐ Bring in non-food items for all children (see list)_____

Today's date:_____

Child's Name: _____

Child's Room:_____

Date of event:_____

Time of event:_____

Please submit at least 2 days in advance.

Thank you!