

## It's Time to Celebrate: Food-Free Celebrations

Celebrations are exciting times for young children. Not only are they pleasurable opportunities to visit with friends and family, but celebration foods are delightful and tasty to young children. A typical celebration menu consists of cakes, cookies, sugary drinks, and other high-fat, high-sugar items. However, with proper planning and commitment to the event, food-free celebrations can be just as fun and exciting for young children as traditional celebrations.



Food-free celebrations' primary focuses are activities designed to get children moving, playing games, and having fun. In addition, food-free celebrations eliminate the potential risk of an allergic reaction to food and prevent any other food related challenges preventing children from participating fully.

When scheduling the initial food-free celebrations, send a letter home to parents highlighting the new alternative to celebrating events and holidays. Talk to the children about the alternative celebrations and include them in the early planning stages. Encourage parents to participate by bringing items children can play with and use while in child care. Appropriate items may include pencils, markers, play dough, and books. Let's look at some tips, strategies, and activities for creating food-free celebrations.

### Basic Food-Free Celebrations

#### *Host an Art Birthday Party*

Celebrate birthdays using art in a variety of ways. Art stations either on the playground or in classrooms create opportunities for children to visit stations of their choice and create different art forms. Choose art supplies that are developmentally appropriate for children participating. Some stations may include painting, creating playdough, coloring, gluing, cutting, tying, and stringing. Streamers may be used as decorations, but remember to avoid balloons as they can be a choking hazard for young children.

### Activities to Try

- Sing the Birthday Song.
- Make play dough with water, flour, salt, and oil.
- Create a Birthday Bag. Ask parents to bring bags of trinkets instead of sugary, fatty foods. The trinket bags could include books, pencils, birthday hats, stickers, and other easily used items.



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### *Host a Winter Music Fest*

A Winter Music Festival can double as a talent show. Invite parents and family members to the festival. Each class or individuals can perform a song, dance, or skit. Make this event joyful by decorating festively, building real or artificial snowmen, hanging lights, and adding other winter items.

### Activities to Try

- Create a snow station with white confetti in a plastic container, inflatable pool, or in an open space.
- Host a canned food drive. Ask children to bring one canned item to donate to a local shelter.
- Play the game, Polar Bear Says (parallel to Simon Says).
- Design an arts and crafts table for children to create winter art. Donate the crafts to individuals living at a local long-term care facility.



### *Host a Harvest Party*

During the fall months, schedule a Harvest Party. Create stations for face painting, mask making, and other creative games for children. Then have a parade to show all the work the children created.

### Activities to Try

- Paint pumpkins on each child's face.
- Play musical chairs with fall themed music.
- Ask a local farmer to give horse drawn hayrides.
- Create masks, hats, and bracelets in fall colors for children to wear throughout the event.
- Incorporate physical activities, including sack races and simple obstacle courses with hay and large pumpkins.

### *Host a Valentine's Day Dance*

Host a family themed Valentine's Day Dance, inviting parents and siblings to the event. Select a theme for the dance, based on a song, color, or activity. Schedule time for the children to create Valentine's Day cards, flowers, and other festive items for the dance. Decorate the building with festive lights, paper cutouts, children's art, and other theme related decorations. Create a picture booth for families to take pictures throughout the dance.

### Activities to Try

- Design a table for children to create bouquets of real flowers.
- Ask children to bring a small item they love for show and tell.
- Create a stamp art table with Valentine's Day themed stamps.



### **Food-Free Celebration Resources**

- Healthy Alternatives for school celebrations, rewards, fundraisers, and snacks  
[http://www.kchealthykids.org/Resource\\_/ResourceArticle/29/File/HealthyAlternativesforSchoolSnacksandRewards.pdf](http://www.kchealthykids.org/Resource_/ResourceArticle/29/File/HealthyAlternativesforSchoolSnacksandRewards.pdf)
- Massachusetts Public Health Association: Food-Free Celebration Ideas  
<http://foodservice.fwcs.k12.in.us/wellness/foodfreeideas.pdf>

### **Sources**

KChealthykids. (2008). Healthy alternatives for school celebrations, rewards, fundraisers, and snacks. Retrieved from [http://www.kchealthykids.org/Resource\\_/ResourceArticle/29/File/HealthyAlternativesforSchoolSnacksandRewards.pdf](http://www.kchealthykids.org/Resource_/ResourceArticle/29/File/HealthyAlternativesforSchoolSnacksandRewards.pdf)

# Nutrition Highlights

## **National Association for the Education of Young Children**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) will host their Annual Conference and Expo on November 7-10, 2012, at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, GA. The conference's theme is "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the 21st Century". For more information, about registration, housing, and keynote speakers, follow the link: <http://www.naeyc.org/conference/>

## **NFSMI Trainings**

NFSMI has free child care training available. NFSMI will send a trainer to your location to train on a variety of topics. For more information regarding our free trainings, follow the link: <http://www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDefault.aspx?q=cEIEPTU3>

NFSMI has a variety of online child care courses available. All online courses are free of charge and can be accessed at any time. Check out our online courses by following the link: <http://www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDefault.aspx?q=cEIEPTIzNg==>

## **National Message**

USDA 2010 Dietary Guidelines Communications Message Calendar, the theme for September –December is *Foods to Increase*. During this time, the selected key message is "Make at least half your grains whole grains". Remember the theme and selected message when planning activities. To obtain more information, follow the link at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/MyPlate/CommunicationsMessageCalendar.pdf>



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