

DECEMBER TRICK THE TREATS

Objectives: Use behavioral economics strategies to promote target foods and de-emphasize competitive foods. Encourage school-based stakeholders to celebrate achievements and holidays without incorporating desserts and other less-healthy treats.

Participants decorate and arrange lunchroom spaces to promote healthy foods over unhealthy seasonal treats. Participants are invited to act as ambassadors to other school groups, sharing ways to celebrate holidays and achievements without using foods (especially unhealthy foods). During the Booster Shot lesson, participants reflect upon which incentives best motivate them to go the extra mile.



LESSON 5: Trick the Treats

MATERIALS

- Trainer's Script
- Decorating supplies (prepared signs, floor decals, opaque cooler covers or paper, colorful markers, laminator)
- Menu board (create using poster-sized construction paper, art supplies, laminator, and dry-erase markers)
- Seasonal decorations, if desired
- Fasteners (tape, paper clips and string if hanging signs from the ceiling)
- Index cards featuring chosen intervention strategies
- FLYER: *Healthy Celebrations* (page 98)

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Choose intervention strategies from the bulleted lists on the following pages. Write each selected strategy on an index card. Secure the cards with a clip or rubber band.

Create any new signage needed, such as:

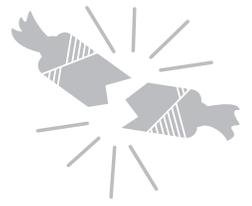
- Attractive, colorful reusable menu board
 - › Decorate poster-sized construction paper or a white board with photos, icons, or stickers featuring healthy foods, school spirit images, or seasonal themes; write "Today's Specials" in colorful, clear large letters; laminate
 - › Create a similar "Tomorrow's Specials" menu board to whet students' appetite for the next day's offerings; laminate
 - › Update daily with dry-erase markers
- "Don't Forget Your Fruit!" signs for the frozen treats cooler
- Posters featuring seasonal characters who are:
 - › Eating healthy snacks
 - › Reminding students to eat their lunch first, save treats for later

SAY:

This year, we have used Smarter Lunchrooms principles to promote healthy choices in the lunchroom.

This month, the lunchroom faces a challenge from seasonal treats and other competitive foods. Is it some combination of the cold weather, bulky clothing, a festive spirit, ever-present candy dishes, and

LESSON 5: Trick the Treats continued



lots of “treat yourself!” messages that influence people to eat more candy, sugared beverages, desserts, and other treats this time of year? Scientists are still studying this question. Regardless of the exact cause, the effect is clear: people, students included, tend to indulge more in sweets and other less-healthy foods during the colder months.

This affects our lunchroom in many ways. When kids eat lots of sugary treats as part of classroom parties, food rewards, and candy sales, it affects their appetite and behavior, which in turn affects the lunchroom. Teachers report stories of students eating excess sweets and subsequently being hyperactive, unfocused, and jumpy; later (when they “sugar crash”), they appear tired and disengaged from learning. Worse, because they temporarily fill up on treats, they do not feel hungry for more nutritious foods at mealtimes, so they may skip meals. As a result, their bodies lack the nutrition needed to succeed at daily tasks.

Have you seen any examples of the “holiday sugar rush” in this lunchroom?

➔ **DO:**

- Allow participants to offer examples. (1 minute)

💬 **SAY:**

This year, we will use behavioral economics to reduce these seasonal disruptions as we Trick the Treats. We will promote target items this month, (healthier-choice a la carte items) and make less-healthy choices just a bit less visible or convenient, nudging students to make healthier choices without removing any options.

Previous workshops used many of these strategies to promote fruits and vegetables, so healthier snacks are the focus this month. However, use these strategies on other target foods when possible.

To promote target items (low-sugar, low-fat, and/or low-sodium a la carte options, as well as fruits and vegetables), give them the edge:

- * Place them in the center, front, eye-level area of all coolers and displays
- * Post eye-catching signs or food labels near the items
- * Make sure they can be easily seen and reached by all students (especially K–5 students, who may have trouble reaching high foods)
- * Place them in multiple locations along the service line
- * Stock serving lines, coolers, and shelves 50% or more with target items
- * Turn the snack window/line into the healthy-convenience line, featuring healthier snacks, handheld fruits, white milk, and bagged reimbursable meals; post an attractive, colorful menu board prominently nearby
- * Advertise target items by listing them first on menus and announcements



LESSON 5: Trick the Treats continued

Conversely, use the inverse strategy to downplay less healthy choices without removing them:

- * Place less healthy a la carte items in the back of coolers and displays
- * Move these items behind the counter, so students must ask a server to get them; if that is not possible, put them on the furthest rung or shelf
- * Remove signage promoting these items

We will now use some of these strategies in the lunchroom. Let's decorate and Trick the Treats!

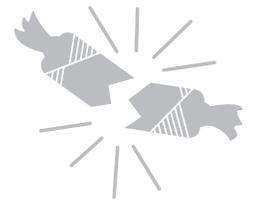
➔ **DO:**

- Ask participants to form groups of 2–3. Invite groups to choose different areas of the lunchroom to embellish: one team may take the waiting area, another the dining area, etc. Distribute the strategy cards. Give groups the promotional materials, seasonal decorations, and fasteners needed to complete their tasks. (If decorations are area-specific, make sure to send them to the correct zone.)
- Direct groups to their chosen areas. Teams should complete tasks in this order:
 1. Remove signs promoting less-healthy (non-target) items. Remove out-of-date or unattractive decorations.
 2. Rearrange the space to promote the target items. This may mean moving displays or moving/restocking foods within the displays.
 3. Hang promotional items and seasonal decorations.
 4. Complete menus. Write in bold, clear, easily read letters with colored markers/chalk/etc. Update daily.
 5. Post index cards regarding new food placements near those stations, to remind staff members to maintain the changes.
- Circulate to assist with the decorating and interactions. Encourage pairs to work together and have fun! Make sure the new promotional items are clearly visible to students. Praise their efforts.

💬 **SAY:**

Thank you for your enthusiasm and contributions today. We will also be sending teachers a list of suggestions for how to celebrate special occasions and reward students without incorporating food. This may include a short presentation at a teachers' staff meeting. You are invited to attend, in a speaking or supportive role, if you would like to come.

LESSON 5:
Trick the Treats
continued



FOLLOW-UP

Check back every few days (or assign a staff worker to do this and report to you) to ensure that the interventions are being consistently maintained—signage is hung and updated, new food placements and stocking protocols are enacted, etc.

Practice what you preach. Do not include unhealthy treats in rewards and holiday celebrations at work. Include healthy foods and non-food rewards.

Distribute the **Healthy Celebrations flyer** to school administration and staff explaining the benefits of celebrating without unhealthy treats. Make a brief presentation at the next school staff meeting or distribute the flyers through the front office (in person is better). Include willing lunchroom staff members. Help interested school staff members to incorporate the recommendations in their classrooms.

Update the seasonal decorations every 1–3 months, as appropriate.

Learn more about the
Healthy Food Choices
in Schools Community
of Practice on page 99.



BOOSTER SHOT 5: The Incentives Game

This game invites participants to reflect upon and share the incentives and rewards which inspire them to go to extra mile. Use these frank insights when celebrating successful lunchroom interventions, particularly during your end-of-year recognition event.

MATERIALS

- Trainer's Script
- *Incentives List* bundles (lists printed, cut into strips, and stored in envelopes or plastic sandwich baggies—one per participant) (page 100)
- Lined paper
- Pens/pencils
- Large paper, markers (optional)

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Prepare the incentives activity, one set per participant. Print the Incentives List 1-sided. Cut each list, one incentive per strip. Collect each set and store in an individual envelope or sandwich bag.

NOTE: Only include incentives you can feasibly arrange. Feel free to add more options of your own. Use colored or holiday-themed paper for extra pizzazz.

SAY:

Happy holidays!

Quick question: Who here has received a holiday gift that was utterly wrong for them—well-meant, but not what you liked at all? (Pause for a show of hands.) Who would like to share an example?

DO:

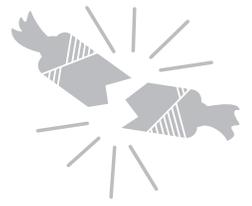
- Encourage participants to share. Keep the stories short and the mood lighthearted. (1 minute)

Instructor's note: Prepare 1–2 humorous, relatable examples to share in case participants do not offer examples, such as an ugly/itchy sweater, tickets to a show you hated, or greatly outdated electronics.

SAY:

Earlier this month, we discussed some negative consequences of snacking (particularly on sugary treats) in the classroom. This is true in other settings as well: using foods as **incentives** (to promote an action) or **rewards** (to celebrate an action) can lead to unhealthy habits and attitudes about food.

BOOSTER SHOT 5: The Incentives Game continued



So what do we use instead? Today, in this season of gift-giving, we will reflect upon what rewards really ring our bells and which fall flat. Let's play a game.

➔ DO:

- Distribute the prepared **Incentives activity**, lined paper, and pens/pencils.

💬 SAY:

This game asks you to reflect upon what motivates you.

Open your baggie/envelope and read through the incentives written on the strips. They range from material rewards to recognition to professional training opportunities. A reward which might really excite one person could be a strong *disincentive* to somebody else—different strokes for different folks! There are no right or wrong answers, only what works for you.

Choose the 3–4 rewards which appeal **most** to you. Place them in one pile.

Place the 3–4 choices which appeal to you **least** in another pile.

➔ DO:

- Pause while participants work. (2–3 minutes) Circulate to answer questions and provide support. Participants who finish early may compare answers.

💬 SAY:

Now, using the lined paper, briefly write **why** those choices were most and least appealing to you. A few words or a sentence will suffice. Be honest; there are no right or wrong answers and these will not be collected.

➔ DO:

- Pause to let participants work (1 minute). Circulate to provide support.

💬 SAY:

That's a lot of food for thought! Share your picks and reasons with a coworker.

➔ DO:

- Pause while participants work. (1–2 minutes) Circulate to provide support.

💬 SAY:

Now let's poll the whole group. Raise your hand if you had any of the same answers, for either positive or negative rewards. (Pause for a show of hands.)

Did anyone have a same choice as their partner, but on different lists—you liked something they hated, or vice versa? (Pause for a show of hands.)



BOOSTER SHOT 5: The Incentives Game continued

Which answers did you like or dislike most? Why do you think there are similarities or differences within this group?

➔ **DO:**

- Allow participants to volunteer answers, which will vary (2 minutes). Responses may include:
 - › Individuals have different personalities and preferences, so their likes and dislikes may vary widely.
 - › Some professions appeal to a certain personality type or skill set, so individuals' preferences among those groups may be similar.

🗨 **SAY:**

Lastly, let's choose the most popular incentives for this group. As a group, which rewards did you like most?

➔ **DO:**

Help the group reach consensus regarding the favorite 3–5 choices (1–2 minutes). Write these on large paper. Store these in a safe place.

FOLLOW-UP

Use these preferred incentives when planning staff holiday events, the year-end recognition and celebration party, and future Smarter Lunchrooms Makeovers.