# Little Chefs, Big Benefits: Cooking with Young Children

Getting children into the kitchen is a great way to have fun and try new recipes. Cooking with children is also a chance to share traditions, learn about different cultures and spend time together.

### Contributing in the kitchen has many benefits for children's skill development:

- Encourages positive food attitudes
- Improves food choices
- ✓ Nurtures a sense of well-being
- Teaches food preparation skills
- Develops a lifelong enjoyment of cooking
- ✓ Introduces, and improves acceptance of, new foods

- ✓ Develops creativity
- Teaches problem-solving
- Improves literacy (vocabulary, basic reading)
- Reinforces math skills (measuring)
- Teaches science (solids, liquids, mixed foods)
- ✓ Improves self-reliance

**good** S C beginnings

"...no one is born a great cook, one learns by doing." – Julia Child, *My Life in France* 



There are lots of ways to make sure that young children are comfortable, safe and engaged in the kitchen – and to guarantee they have fun!

# Create an Inviting Cooking Space

### Create a positive learning environment

- Start with observation. Allow children to start off by keeping you company or just watching in the kitchen. Confidence takes time but they will dive in when they're ready.
- Keep it simple. Choose easy to make meals or snacks that children can actually help with. Remember that children are learning and recipes will take longer than usual. Be patient and offer encouragement.

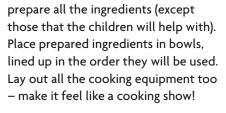
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Let the children decide whether to try the foods you prepare. Children may get more pleasure from cooking if they feel no pressure to try the foods they make.

 Use all five senses. Touch, taste, smell, hear and see all the wonders of ingredients coming together. It's a great way to build children's appreciation of food.

#### Make the kitchen welcoming

- Choose the time of day. Plan your food activities for times when the children are fresh and alert. They will have more difficulty paying attention if they are hungry, tired or restless.
- **Cook like a chef.** Use *mise en place* "to set in place." Before bringing your chefs into the kitchen, gather and



- Bring it down to their level. Set up the cooking space at the children's physical level, using a child-size table and chairs. Working at the right level makes it comfortable and easier for them to perform cooking tasks safely.
- Use kid-size tools. Short mixing spoons, small bowls and knives and kid-size oven mitts are more easily manageable for small hands.
- Use non-breakable cooking equipment. Plastic liquid measuring cups, stainless-steel bowls and metal bakeware are all kid-friendly.

## "Cooking is at once child's play and adult joy. And cooking done with care is an act of love."

– Craig Claiborne Restaurant critic, cookbook author • **Pre-assign tasks.** Let helpers know beforehand what they will be doing (and the utensils they'll use) to avoid tussles over tools and jobs. For example, Peter will whisk, Anton will stir and Fatima will pour. Next time we'll switch, and everyone takes turns.

### Build an appreciation for food and the world around us

- **Grow your own.** Grow vegetables or herbs in small containers that can be placed on a sunny windowsill. It's fun, educational and even tasty! Let the children take turns watering the plants.
- Avoid food waste. When possible, use all parts of the food. Leave the skins on cucumbers, apples and potatoes. This reduces food waste, and fruit and vegetable skin delivers important nutrients, including fibre.
- **Re-use food scraps.** Encourage children to collect trimmings while preparing food. Clean fruit rinds add to presentation and flavour. Vegetable scraps, such as celery and carrot tops, can be made into a soup broth.
- **Compost and recycle.** Provide the necessary bins to get the kids involved in composting food waste and recycling appropriate food packaging.



Get the kids involved in composting food waste.

# Tips for Cooking with Young Children

#### Prepare the cooking space

#### Be safe around appliances

- Set the ground rules. Explain the adults-only rule and give reminders often. Only adults can put things into or remove things from a hot oven or microwave, use electrical appliances and pour hot liquids. Some knives are for adults only.
- Keep appliances unplugged.
  When you're ready to use them, only adults can plug them in. Never leave appliances unattended when they are in use.
- Take your timer. Use a clip-on timer or portable oven timer, rather than the oven's own timer, and carry it with you. It is easy to forget that something is in the oven until it's too late.
- **Restrict the oven area**. Put masking tape on the floor to section off an area around the oven. Instruct children to stay behind the line whenever the oven door is open.
- Avoid burns. Create placards that say "HOT" in red paired with an image of a flame. Place near anything hot.
- Use wooden or silicone spoons to stir the contents of hot pots. An allmetal spoon can get too hot. Protect hands and arms with kid-size oven mitts (preferably silicone-coated).
- Mind the handles. Point pot handles toward the side or back of the stove to avoid accidentally brushing against them or having children grab them and spill the hot contents. Metal pot handles can be covered with silicone grips to prevent burns.



#### Be safe when cutting food

- Use cutting boards. Chop, slice and assemble recipes on a clean cutting board. To prevent the board from slipping, place a damp cloth underneath it.
- Use a crinkle cutter. A crinkle cutter is a great tool for cutting cheese, fruits and vegetables. Remember to treat it as a knife and remind children to use two hands when cutting, one on the food and one on the cutter.
- **Try scissors.** As an alternative to knives when children are first starting out in the kitchen, scissors can be used to cut fresh herbs or to chop peppers.

Use the right knives. Use knives with different coloured handles, or wrap coloured tape around the handles, so kids can identify which end to grab and which knives are for adults only. Start with a plastic knife or serrated dinner knife (with a round tip).
 Progress to a small paring knife (with supervision) – they are the perfect size for little hands.

#### Be food safe

- Be a safe cook. Follow the four important food safety steps to eliminate harmful bacteria and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.
  - ✓ Clean Wash hands and surfaces often
  - **Separate** Don't cross-contaminate
  - Cook To a safe internal temperature
  - ✓ Chill To 4°C (40°F) or lower

Get detailed food safety information, handouts and posters at <u>befoodsafe.ca</u>.

• Sanitize with a mild bleach solution. Remember to follow your facility or local health unit recommendations for bleach solutions. An example of a safe solution is 1 tsp (5 mL) of bleach to 4 cups (1 L) of water.





#### Prepare the little chefs

- **Choose the recipes.** Let the children help choose their favourite recipes. Creativity and fun follow when their interest is piqued.
- Get ready. Tie or pin back long hair, roll up sleeves and tuck in shirts. Wash your hands.
- **Put on your aprons.** Child-size aprons help to protect clothing and kids from splatters and spills.
- **Demonstrate cutting.** On a cutting board, firmly hold the food being cut with one hand, with fingers tucked in, like a claw. Hold the knife with the

#### Supervise and guide.

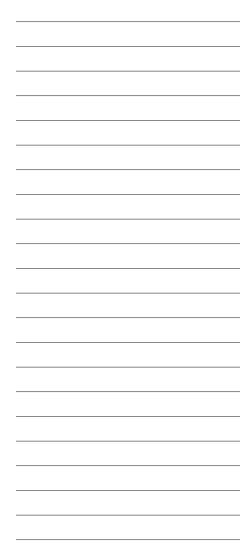
Never leave kids in the kitchen unattended – a ratio of one caregiver to three children is ideal. If you are caring for more children, you may be able to work in shifts. Offer gentle reminders and positive guidance along the way. other hand. Offer guidance and hold the child's knife hand and steady the food. Let children practise with Play-Doh and plastic knives to build confidence.

### "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

– Benjamin Franklin

- Make small quantities. To make it easier for little hands to hold and pour, divide larger amounts of liquids into two batches and offer guidance.
- **Choose your tasks.** Pick kitchen tasks for the children that match their ability. Consider asking them to wash fruit and vegetables, stir, whisk, pour, tear leaves, sprinkle toppings, brush baking dishes with butter, spread, knead and roll dough, mash, grate cheese or vegetables and chop soft foods.
- Clean as you go. Remind children to put dishes in the dishwasher, put ingredients away after use and wipe up spills as soon as they happen.

#### Notes:



#### References

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