



A Letter to Families about Cooking

Dear Families,

Cooking is an important part of our program. When children cook, they have opportunities to learn about nutrition, to be creative, and to prepare their own healthy snacks. Cooking teaches a lot of academic skills, too. When children learn to follow picture recipe cards, they develop skills for reading and writing. Measuring ingredients give them a lesson in math. Whipping egg whites and melting cheese are lessons in science.

When children cook, we talk a lot about what they are doing and why. They are scientists, observing what happens to flour when they add water to it and predicting how high we should fill a muffin tin so the batter doesn't overflow.



When we prepare the special foods of each family, your child learns to appreciate the cultures of everyone in our class. Perhaps you have some favorite family recipes that you would like to share with us. Please give them to us at any time; we will love it if you come to Ladybug and introduce the class to your child's favorite foods.

Cooking is a very special part of our program. It is one of the few activities children get to do that is also done by adults. In their dramatic play, children pretend to be grown-ups who make and serve meals. They also read books and sing songs about food, but while cooking, children actually behave as grown-ups.

What You Can Do at Home

Cooking is already a part of your home life, and involving your child does not have to be difficult. Including your child may take extra time, and there may be more of a mess than when you cook alone, but there are many rewards. Your child will be learning literacy, math, and science skills by helping you. In addition, cooking sets the start for lifelong healthy eating habits. When children help prepare their meals, they tend to eat better.

Start your child on simple tasks like stirring batter, squeezing lemons, adding spices, or shaping meatballs. Discuss what you are doing together while cooking. Ask questions like these:



“What happened to the butter when we heated it?”

“How should we get the flour into this cup?”

“Did we get all the juice out of that lemon? Let's push down on the lemon together and see what happens.”

The beauty of cooking with children is that they learn skills and have fun at the same time that you are attending to a household task. What could be better than that?

What Children Learn When Cooking

The kitchen is a laboratory for teaching academic content. When children are engaged in preparing food, all of the content areas can be explored (literacy, math, science, technology, social studies, and the arts.) Here are some examples of how you can make this connection among content, teaching, and learning.

Literacy

Go over recipe cards with your child to expand their vocabulary and language. As children learn how to knead bread, grind peanuts, and flip pancakes, they learn new words as well as skills.

Expand your child's knowledge of print and letters and words by developing and using recipe charts, recipe cards, and picture cookbooks. Point to the words as you read the chart from left to right and top to bottom. Draw your child's attention to the words on food containers. Offer children alphabet cookie cutters or show them how to form dough in the shape of letters.

Mathematics

Involve your child in solving problems about number concepts by posing challenges. For example, ask them how to divide a bowl of dip they made so that everyone in the family could have some. Let your child practice with one-to-one correspondence by having them set the table.

Help your child gain knowledge of geometry and spatial sense by giving them shape cutters for making sandwiches and letting them select the best place to position an oven rack for baking.

Develop patterning skills by showing them how to create a layered salad or lasagna.

Provide your child with a recipe that gives them experiences with measurement. Have them investigate how many teaspoons are in a tablespoon and how many cups are in a quart.

Encourage children to use data collection, organization, and representation skills in the kitchen by recording how many items were used and what replacements need to be bought at the store.



Science

Ask your child questions that will encourage them to conduct physical science investigations. For example, have them test an egg's freshness by seeing whether it sinks or floats in a glass of water. (Spoiled eggs will float to the top.) Encourage them to use their senses to observe what gelatin looks like as it sets, how dough feels when flour is added, or what lemonade tastes like without sweetener. Help your child to understand why food changes state: why ice cream freezes, chocolate melts, or pudding thickens.

Have your child plant radishes, peas, and cucumber seeds that can be grown for cooking activities. That is life science in action. You can suspend sweet potatoes or avocado seeds in jars of water until they produce roots and branches. Make every cooking activity a lesson in nutrition and good eating habits. Set out carrots, celery, and sprouts for your child to prepare and eat for a snack. Encourage your family to prepare recipes with fruits instead of sweets.

Social Studies



Share old family recipes with your child. Supplement these family treasures with recipes that you have collected. Talk about food-related customs and regional differences.

A way to have your child learn about people and their environment is by have your child help with the recycling at home. Have them collect different food containers: steel cans, glass jars, cardboard milk cartons and plastic jugs. As your child helps you clean up behind meal times have them separate out their paper, metal, glass, plastic, and food trash.

The Arts

Promote drama by pantomiming the movements of various cooking activities such as moving legs like an eggbeater, moving suddenly like a popping kernel of corn, or dropping and rising like a piece of bread in a toaster.

Technology

To make your child aware of technology, talk with them about appliances they use in the kitchen.

Challenge your child to explore gadgets and other tools. Pose questions such as, "How would you open cans without a can opener? Or "How are an egg beater, a wire whisk, and an electric hand mixer alike and different?"

How Cooking Experiences Promote Development and Learning

Social-emotional

Children find pride in their ability to produce a snack that they and others can enjoy. They develop independence from adults as they follow a recipe on their own or work cooperatively with peers on a common task.

Physical

Chopping celery, squeezing a lemon, and spreading apple butter are actions that strengthen children's small-muscle control and eye-hand coordination. In fact, children cannot cook without working on their physical development.

Language and Literacy

Cooking has its own terminology. Food names and basic cooking-related words like ingredients, recipe, gadget, grate, knead, simmer, grease, and dice may be additions to children's vocabularies. Moreover, as children match pictures to the written words in recipes, they learn to read and follow recipes on their own.

Cognitive

Cooking activities inspire children's curiosity and thinking. They learn measurement concepts as they measure ingredients and fill a gallon pitcher with four quarts of water. They develop problem-solving skills through experimentation and observe cause and effect when they watch bread dough rise after yeast is added to it. Cooking is also an outlet for creativity. Pretzel dough can be made just as effectively into letters, numbers, or snakes, as well as its characteristic looped shape.



Tips to Working with your Toddlers in the Kitchen

Having a young one in the house can make cooking the simplest of meals a real challenge. Here are some ideas to make this time a little easier.

If you are cooking, have your little one cook also. Add a play kitchen to your kitchen space for your little one to cook while you are cooking. Add raisins, Goldfish crackers or Cheerios in your child's kitchen for them to cook with. Two kitchens that work well are the:

Sizzlin' Shapes Kitchen from Step 2 (\$34.99)
from Little Tikes \$109.99



Cook 'n Grow Kitchen



Another trick is adding a small picnic table to your kitchen area where your toddler can help with the dinner prep. This gives them a table that they can get up and down from on their own, safely. With a small plastic bowl of water or a wet wash cloth they can wash fruits and vegetables, and if they eat the potato or green bean while they wash it, it will not harm them! Another thing they can do at their table is practice spooning Cheerios from one plastic bowl to another.



Easy Store Jr. Play Table from Little Tykes \$34.99

Now enjoy cooking!!!