



Cooking with Kids: Make Your Kitchen a Place for Fun, Learning & Family Bonding



The kitchen is a great place for children to brush up on their math skills, practice safety, learn about meal planning and nutrition, and discover the importance of following directions. Best of all, cooking is fun and it's something that the whole family can do together.

Introducing children to the joy of cooking takes time and a little patience. Begin when they are young, involve them whenever they express interest and, in time, you may have your own resident chef.

First, you'll need to adapt your kitchen to a child cook. A kitchen that is child-friendly is likely to be a place where people of all ages feel comfortable.

- **Provide a sturdy stool** that will allow your child to reach the countertops, tabletops and stove (with your constant supervision).
- **Keep several small cutting boards on hand** so that several children can chop at the same time.
- **Make sure that your knives are sharp.** More serious accidents happen with dull knives than with sharp ones.
- **Encourage your cooks to taste, smell and touch the food** as it's being prepared.

Meal Planning

- **Let your kids plan and prepare a meal.** This is a great time to talk about the food groups and what makes a balanced diet. Plus, if children are involved in the preparation, they might also be more likely to eat the food on their plate.
- **Ask your children to help make a list of what ingredients will be needed,** where to shop and when.
- **Review recipes together** and decide which ones seem the best.
- **Kids love to clip coupons** (and it's a great way to encourage their reading and math skills). Hand out round-edged scissors and let them find bargains on items that you use.

Grocery Shopping

- **Give your child a calculator to tally up the bill as you shop,** or have older children add the numbers in their head. Ask them to estimate what the total will be.
- **Send older children to retrieve items from your list.** Put one child in charge of checking off the list as you shop.

- **Inject a little adventure into the trip and purchase something from the produce department that you've never tried.** Find out what country it comes from and how it is prepared there.
- **Review the receipt with your child.** What was the most expensive item you bought? Why was it so much?
Let your kids help you sort and put away the groceries.

Now We're Cooking!

- **Give young children very simple cooking tasks that you are sure they can handle and let them do it all by themselves.** Tearing lettuce for a salad, shaking dressing and kneading dough are all small jobs that will spell success for even the youngest chef.
- **Gradually introduce more complicated skills.** For example, grating cheese, peeling vegetables and slicing fruit.
- **Teach your child the right way to handle a knife, the proper way to peel and other basics.**
- **Ask your child to read the recipe out loud as each step is completed.**
- **Give your child a diagram of a properly set table and ask him to follow it.**
- **Encourage creativity for a centerpiece design and napkin folding.**
- **Always include cleanup as part of the cooking process.**
- **Provide a child-sized apron for your junior chef.**