

5 Easy Ways to Make Cooking Cool for Kids

Cooking with kids helps teach many things in addition to food and nutrition skills. Cooking can help teach culture (different people enjoy a variety of foods); real life math (fractions for doubling or halving ingredients); organization (getting things ready); and following directions (reading a recipe). For more information about easy family meals, visit www.school-wellness.org/indeEnrichingFamilyMealtimesDownloads.aspx.

1. Get kids involved in planning meals and snacks.

Although you may see cooking as a chore, kids see the kitchen as an exciting and even a magical place. Everyone loves to be involved in choosing their favorite dishes for meals and foods for snacks. For small children, eating becomes something much more special when *“I got to pick it out”* – and even better when *“I made it myself.”*

2. Get kids involved in shopping for new foods.

Food shopping with children works best when they are well rested and not hungry. Use your trip through the aisles to talk about possible meals and different ways to prepare various foods. Allow children to choose a new item that appeals to them – like a fresh fruit or vegetable from the produce department, a local farmer’s market, or your garden.

3. Get kids involved in kitchen safety.

All children need adult supervision in the kitchen. Give frequent reminders about what is OK to touch and which items could be dangerous. Talk about which kitchen tasks are for grown-ups and which are for kids. Establish kitchen rules, like never touching a hot stove, being careful with knives, washing hands often, and keeping all surfaces clean too.

4. Get kids involved in preparing tasty recipes.

Children are able to manage different kitchen tasks at different ages. A preschooler can stir ingredients that have been pre-measured; an elementary age child can read the recipe and do the measuring and mixing themselves; tweens can learn to cut, chop, and dice safely; and teens may be able to try challenging techniques from a TV cooking show.

5. Get kids involved in setting an appealing table.

Children are justifiably proud when they make even simple dishes, like a fruit salad or a sandwich, themselves. You can reinforce their success (and desire to try cooking again) by making the table setting special as well. Put their creation on a ‘fancy’ plate, light a small candle, use colored napkins, or put some flowers in a vase.