

# Kids in the Kitchen: A Child Development Tool

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Kitchens are the hub of the home and a wonderful place to create warm memories with your family. During the planning, cooking, eating and cleaning up of the kitchen include children in the process. Research shows that kitchens are a great place for a child to do exploring, cooking, chores and learn interpersonal skills through talking, an ideal environment for sensory development. Children between the ages of two and seven are active, curious, experimental, creative, imaginative, and talkative. Bring them to the kitchen!

## Exploring

Exploring the environment is a natural activity in childhood, and the environment of the kitchen offers many interesting things for a child to explore like manipulating water, cooking ingredients, or equipment like a candy thermometer. If the child understands the rules you have set for your kitchen like cleaning up after themselves, then the kitchen becomes a haven for exploration.

### Exploring Activities

*Water Exploration:* Blowing bubbles, Sponges in Water, Using a funnel, Pouring measures, Immersing bottles in water, A Thermometer in water, Floating and sinking, Dissolving substances, Food Dye - creating colors.

*Container/ equipment Exploration:* Glass sounds, matching jars and lids, measuring cups/spoons, filling containers -1/4, 1/2, 2/3 full, categorize kitchen objects or sort by size, color, texture.

### Food Exploration:

The child will find it interesting to examine the make-up of fruits, eggs, nuts, and vegetables. You may wish to take time to point out such things as the yolk, white, and membrane of the egg and their roles in the reproduction of a new chicken. You may wish to point out the parts of plants using vegetables. Discuss, for example, roots which they eat such as carrots or turnips. As a whole, help to make the child more aware of the properties of the foods with which he comes in contact.

### Food is a Science: Observing Food Changes

Give the child opportunities to observe food changes and, thereby, become aware of the fact that heat and chemical substances can produce changes in foods. The following are examples of activities that will allow a child to observe food changes.

- Make butter from cream. Then allow the child to handle butter and see what happens when it is left in a warm place or put in the refrigerator. Discuss the reason for the changes in the food with the child.
- Examine fruits, vegetables or grains with magnifying glass. Collect the seeds and let the child label them by drawing pictures, allow time for the seeds to dry, plant the seeds, and see what happens.
- Use pineapple/orange juice to keep bananas or apples from browning. Talk about the reasons for this.
- Baking powder and Yeast. Have the child note the difference between a mixture with baking powder added and a similar mixture without baking powder. Bake biscuits in which the baking powder has been left in and out. Similarly, have the child note changes in food caused by yeast. An oven with a glass window allows the child to watch from time to time while the oven is in use to note the changes in food produced by heat.
- Scramble eggs and teach a child that heat makes an egg coagulate.
- Sprout grains.
- Popcorn. Explore what makes the kernel of popcorn pop. Let them help you in making popcorn.
- Water changes when froze to ice and to steam when heated.
- Make homemade applesauce or peanut butter (use a food processor).
- Make lemonade from lemons.

## **Cooking**

Many foods can be prepared in whole or in part by young children. Feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction come to children when they eat or when others eat something that the children themselves have participated in preparing. Moreover, handling and manipulating foods, dealing with measures and completing projects are activities that give children rich experiences to aid in growth and development.

When you (power of an example) or your child enters the kitchen here are some **cooking secrets** to make into habits.

1. Read the recipe, then check to make sure you have all the ingredients. Get out all the ingredients and kitchen tools you will be using.
2. Wash our hands. If you have long hair tie your hair back.
3. Put on an apron.
4. Fill the sink with warm soapy water. Clean as you go.
5. Start cooking. Put away each ingredient after you use it.
6. Make sure the kitchen area is clean when you are finished.

### Additional Guidelines

- Match recipes with the child's abilities.
- Involve them in the total experience. This includes shopping and storing food properly.
- Use kid size utensils and children's cookbooks to start with.
- Always supervise the child when learning to use knives, stoves, and kitchen equipment.
- Remember to cook foods that meet the nutritional needs of your child.
- Teach them to use leftovers, and ways to prevent food waste and spoilage.
- Teach Food Safety guidelines.
- Teach them to use what they have - how to make a meal out of nothing. (Like white sauce.)
- Name foods. Children love to eat trees (broccoli) or ants on a log (celery with peanut butter and raisins as the ants. There are many more fun names for foods that delight a child.

### Basic Cooking Activities for Young Cooks

- **Shelling:** Removing shells for peanuts, peas from pods or eggs.
- **Mixing:** Children love to stir and mix; add the ingredients and put the batter in a pan.
- **Peeling:** A child can easily peel some foods without a tool like bananas, oranges, cooked potatoes, or a split onion.
- **Cutting:** With a dull knife a child can cut bananas, bread, lunch meats or dough. Teach the child how to hold the knife properly.
- **Measuring:** Teach the child about liquid and dry measurements. For liquid measures you can put a rubber band around the measuring cup at the desired amount for the recipe. Measuring can be a challenge for a child.
- **Non-food items:** Silly putty, finger paints, salt clay, etc.
- **Greasing pans, kneading dough and creating bread art.** Bread machines are also fun for children.

### Foods Children Can Prepare

There are endless possibilities for having a child experiment with the preparation of foods. Some foods that are simple for a child are drinks, breads, cakes, sandwiches, dips, salads, cold treats like Popsicles, and eggs. Excellent recipes for children can be found on the Internet and in a variety of children cookbooks on the market.

### Twelve Things Children Learn from Cooking

Science Concepts, Health Issues, Math Concepts, Sequencing, Reading, Language Development, Cooperation, Food Tasting, Learning to Cook, Creativity, Large and Small Motor Skills.

## Chores

Chores in the kitchen give the child opportunities for learning to be responsible, orderly and able to complete tasks. Children need to develop discipline and good work habits to lead happy productive lives.

<b>Kitchen Chores</b>			
<u>3 Years</u>	<u>5 Years</u>	<u>6 Years</u>	<u>8-12 Years</u>
Clear Tables Help with dishes Hold a dustpan Empty small garbage Wipe dinner mats Stir Jell-O, etc	Set Table Take out garbage Butter cooking pans Any mixing Wash dishes Clean tables and chairs Fold napkins	Simple recipes Teach to use the stove Clean out a refrigerator Clean front of appliances Clean the kitchen Simple shopping tasks Put away groceries Food safety practices	Clean/Keep kitchen Cupboards tidy Cook family meals - parts and then the whole meal Menu Planning Making the shopping list Food shopping Food storage Food safety practices Table settings

Children older than twelve should be helping with every kind of food preparation; some can be left completely alone to accomplish meals. Remember to tell them how much fun it is to have them working with you, it's not mom's work, it is everyone's work.

Not forcing the young child into kitchen responsibilities would be best and not to give too many responsibilities. Activities such as those listed above can be taken on gradually. To the extent possible, maintain the kitchen as a pleasant environment for the young child. Coercion in chores or in any other kitchen activity can cause rebellion and disinterest by the very young.

On the other hand, a child may sometimes be interested in doing a task which you may not think he or she is quite ready for. In this case, if it is something which does not involve a hazard, you may try letting the child proceed to do it his or her own way. For example, the child may be very anxious to try mopping the kitchen floor. At an appropriate time, you may let him have a mop which they have dampened and proceed to "mop." This action may provide a big boost for a little child's ego.

## Talking and Storytelling

Talking and storytelling is a natural in the kitchen. The talking, listening and telling of stories lay a foundation for the skills and learning a child finds in school. It helps a child and parent better understand and appreciate one another.

### Talking

The young child develops skill in speaking and in conversing by having many opportunities to talk. For a parent and child, there is always something to talk about. As for the kitchen, a parent can always discuss what is taking place in the kitchen. While cooking, for example, a mother might say "I am making a vegetable soup. First, I will put in the carrots. Next, I will add a couple of these potatoes, ..." Such communication will benefit the child not only by exposing her to new learning, but to let the child know that she is important enough to be informed of what is taking place.

By conversing regularly with an adult, the child has opportunities to develop listening skills, comprehension skills, and vocabulary. Moreover, talking allows the child to develop greater confidence in his or her ability to relate to others. Also, they foster the child's emotional growth as he or she shares thoughts and ideas with others.

Questioning can be helpful in parent-child communication. Through questions, a parent can give the child opportunities to recall, compare, predict, and make judgments. When the situation is appropriate, questions can also allow the child to express his or her feelings and emotions. It is equally important for the parent to listen to the child and to respond to the child's ideas and questions. Open, honest, two-way parent-child communication is essential to the emotional and intellectual development of the young child.

### Storytelling

Story telling is an art which adults have used throughout the ages to entertain and enlighten children. The young child is rich in imaginative and creative spirit and succumbs easily to the well chosen and well told tales. Storytelling gives the child an enjoyable experience, but its pleasure is found in the storyteller and in the child.

A child benefits in special ways from listening to a story. He or she can identify with characters. A child can also enjoy the sounds of oral language, the informal atmosphere, and the warm intimate feelings of sharing something pleasurable with a special person. They expose him or her to model language patterns and new words.

Vocabulary is strengthened by hearing words introduced and repeated in the context of a story. The listening and attention which storytelling demands are also worth noting. To grasp ideas, the child must be attentive and must concentrate on the ideas transmitted by the teller.

Those who care for young children should have a small repertoire of children's stories committed to memory so that when the mood arises, engaging in story telling will be easy. Old favorites such as the following are always popular with the very young:

The Gingerbread Boy  
The Three Little Pigs  
Henny Penny  
The Little Red Hen  
Goldilocks and the Three Bears  
Johnny-Cake

Many good children's books about food and nutrition are available for storytelling. Public librarians can offer helpful suggestions to parents. Beyond drawing on children's literature, parents or the child can create stories. Fun stories and songs about foods are a delight to the child while working in the kitchen. Parents can also tell stories about their personal experiences, especially about their childhood. Such childhood stories delight children and sometimes ask to hear them again and again. When our hands are busy in the kitchen, and we are talking with each other our hearts become one.

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