

# Teaching Kids to Cook

Have children do age appropriate activities:

## Ages 2-5:

-Stir dry ingredients that you've measured into a bowl. At first tell them to mix really well. By the end of this age span, explain how leaving lumps of baking powder or baking soda unmixed can make bitter bites in the cookies.



-Measure dry ingredients into a bowl. For flour or powdered sugar, fill the measuring cup or spoon with the ingredient, drag the straight edge of a metal spatula or back of a knife over the cup or spoon to level off the ingredient. For brown sugar, pack measuring cup until it is full and level it off-you know you have done it correctly when you empty it out and it holds its shape. For solid fats like shortening, butter and margarine, measure into a measuring cup and level it off. Use a rubber spatula to remove it from the cup. If you are using butter or margarine, you can look at the wrapper for measurement.

-Measure liquid ingredients into a bowl. Fill the liquid measuring cup with liquid close to the measurement you need, place the liquid measuring cup on a level surface, bend down and look at the measurements written on the side of the measuring cup. Pour or add liquid into the measuring cup until you have the amount you need.

-Grease a cookie sheet or muffin tin. You can have them spread the shortening/butter with their bare hands or use a paper towel for a less mess.

-Stand at the kitchen sink to scrub potatoes. They can also poke potatoes with a fork to prep for baking.

-Slice mushrooms or garden-fresh green beans with a butter knife. Early on you will watch carefully to make sure they're ready for this task, but you can't inflict a lot of damage with a butter knife. Later on you can explain how slicing the veggies into uniform sizes helps them cook evenly.

-Peel carrots with a kid-friendly peeler. Most 4 year olds are very able once you've taught them. Early on, your child will need close supervision with you guiding their hands and showing them how to stroke away from themselves. Once they're good at carrots you can move them on to potatoes.

-Crack an egg. Have your child crack each egg into a small bowl and then use a spoon to pick out any shells that accidentally make it into the bowl. Then dump it into your bowl and return their little bowl to them to crack another.

-Wash pots and pans. Little children love to stand on a stool and splash in a pot or a big bowl with a wash cloth and a scrub brush. By the time they are 5 they will be able to actually wash it and wipe up the puddle on the floor!

-Wipe counters. Give them a wash cloth and let them wipe. It won't be perfect but will be better than what it was. Teach them how to clean up after you cook.

-Washing their hands. Teach kids good sanitary practices. Washing hands before and during cooking.

-Get cooking equipment. Have your child put on a little apron and scoot a stool or chair up to the counter so they are able to see and help.

-Taste ingredients. Let them know what flavor everything has. They will learn that not all ingredients that goes into the bowl or pot tastes nice by itself or in large doses.

-Shape dough. If you are making something that involves dough, give a bit to your child to shape and cook for themselves.

## Ages 6-12:

-Boil water. They can make boiled eggs or boil noodles.

-Get hot things out of the oven. Make sure it is something they can carry-not too heavy and that they use oven mitts or hot pads.

-Make pancakes. Pancakes recipes tend to be forgiving. Too much flour? add a bit of water. They won't hold together? add another egg.

Pancakes can be ugly! When they are learning to flip there is no guarantee things will go smoothly, but they need lots of chances to mess it up so they can learn. Pancakes involve just enough danger. Kids are around a hot griddle but it isn't flinging grease everywhere. Pancakes are cooked in the morning so you have more patients!

-Grilled cheese sandwich. Younger children can make them in a toaster oven and then move to the stove top.

-Kitchen safety tips. Continue stressing the importance of washing their hands. Make sure they are washing hands after they handle raw meat, eggs or poultry. Never use the same knife, plate or utensil on raw food and cooked food and use one cutting board for meat and another for vegetables. Use a clean spoon or fork each time you taste a dish and never stick your fingers in food you'll be serving to others. Turn all pot and pan handles toward the back of the stove to prevent them from being knocked over or a child's head hitting them. Wear an apron, roll up sleeves and tie hair back. Keep a hot pad handy, a handle that feels lukewarm to you may be too hot for a youngster. If anybody gets burned, run it under cold water immediately.

-Kitchen appliances and utensils. Teach children to use can openers, blender and mixers. They can also start using a paring knife or a knife sharper than a butter knife to cut other vegetables.

-Follow a recipe. Once children are able to read, teach them how to follow a recipe then give them more freedom. Instead of helping with a recipe, they are able to follow one on their own.



A recipe explains exactly what you must do to make the food. There are five parts to a recipe:

1. Ingredient list. This list tells the amounts and ingredients you will need. Before you can make a recipe, you'll need to compare the ingredient list to the foods you have on hand. If you don't have an ingredient you will need to add it to a shopping list to purchase at a store. The ingredient list can also save you time. Before making a recipe, use it to get out all the needed ingredients. If you arrange them in the order they are needed, you'll be able to make the recipe without stopping to search for ingredients.

2. Cooking equipment needed. Most recipes may not specifically state what equipment you will need. For example, a recipe may tell you to boil noodles, but not state that you will need a pot or a pan. It's a good idea to get out all cooking equipment you'll need before you'll begin. (i.e. measuring cups and spoons, cutting board, etc.)

3. Cooking time and temperature. Some recipes give you the exact temperature and time. For instance, bake cookies for 375 degrees for 12 minutes. It's important if you're using the oven that the oven is pre-heated before you begin so when you're finished mixing ingredients, the oven is ready to bake.

4. Steps to follow. The steps describe what you must do to prepare the recipe. The steps are listed in the order they should be completed.

5. Yield. The yield is the number of portions the recipe will make. This is important because it will tell you how many people you can serve. This way you can increase or decrease the recipe depending on what you need.

-Cooking terms. Teach children out of a simple cook book proper terms, tools and culinary skills so that they will be able to successfully make any basic recipe.

## Ages 13 and older:

-Prepare a meal. If you have cooked with your kids long enough, this could come sooner. By this age they should be able to get a full meal on the table from planning and preparing to making sure that everything is hot when it's time to eat. They can even plan the menu with a budget that is given and shop for the food.



2-Don't force participation. Most kids get excited to help make cookies but realize a child's attention span during the process. A toddler may want to help but then may lose interest, then gain it again and that is normal and age appropriate. A good rule of thumb is that they can pay attention for a minute for years they are, i.e. a three year old's attention span would generally be about three minutes, a six year old's attention span would be six minutes, and so on. Not all children will like to cook as much as others but they will all learn how.

3-Have fun and relax! This can sometimes be easier said than done. Messes will happen and it will take longer so make sure you pick a time where you aren't in a rush, won't be judged by how the cookies turn out, and don't have company coming over for you to stress about how your kitchen looks. Remember, you're not only teaching a basic life skill but also math, science, reading, self esteem, how to follow directions, working together as a team, creativity and bonding. As your child gets older, let go and give them the freedom to give it a try and try not to look!