



Extension

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Cooking with Young Children

Cooking is a fun activity for young children and it helps them develop school readiness skills. Following recipes teaches counting, measuring, sequencing, and sorting. Working with food also teaches shapes and colors. Preparing food develops fine motor skills such as chopping, stirring, pouring, and cutting. Cooking provides opportunities to use the five senses, to learn about the food groups, how food grows, and to observe how food changes while cooking. Cookbooks and recipes teach print awareness and cooking terms build vocabulary. Cooking can provide opportunities to experience other cultures. Food preparation can be used to introduce food safety, healthy ingredients, and healthy cooking methods. Cooking together emphasizes the importance of being responsible, working together, sharing, and completing tasks.

Young children can assist with a variety of different tasks in the kitchen. Two year olds can help with tasks such as scrubbing fruits and vegetables, carrying unbreakable items to the table, dipping foods, washing and tearing lettuce and salad greens, and breaking bread into pieces. Three year olds are able to handle slightly more complex tasks including: pouring liquids into batter, mixing batter or other dry and wet ingredients together, shaking liquids in a closed container, spreading butter or other soft spreads, kneading dough, and serving foods. Four and five year olds are able to handle more complex tasks such as juicing fruits, cutting soft foods with a plastic knife, peeling some fruits and vegetables, measuring dry ingredients, cracking eggs, beating eggs with an egg beater, and setting the table.

There are a variety of ways to make cooking with young children a positive learning experience. Begin with you and your child washing your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds. To ensure your child's safety make sure you provide constant supervision. Have your child use a stool or chair, if necessary, so he or she is at the right level to help. If possible, use cooking supplies that will not break and use plastic or butter knives for cutting. Read the recipe with your child. Explain that you will be following the steps in the recipe to prepare the food. Provide simple directions one at a time and be patient with your child's cooking efforts. Expect that there will be spills and messes. Encourage your child to try age-appropriate cooking steps without your help. When you're finished cooking include your child in the clean-up process.

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