

Cooking with kids offers the opportunity to teach many things in addition to food and nutrition skills. Cooking is a wonderful way to teach culture (different people enjoy different foods); real life math (doubling or halving a recipe's ingredients); organization (getting everything ready); and following directions (reading a recipe). Here are five enjoyable ways to get kids involved with family meals:

Get kids involved in planning fun meals and snacks.

ALTHOUGH YOU MAY SEE COOKING AS A CHORE, kids see the kitchen as an exciting, even a magical, place. Everyone loves to be involved in choosing 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."



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 always washing hands before cooking, never touching a hot stove, and using knives properly.

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. Encourage children to choose a new item that appeals to them – like a fresh fruit or vegetable from the produce department (or a local farmer's market).



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.

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.

