

## Cooking with Kids: What are They Learning?

**Cooking** – something we need to do often to feed ourselves and our families! While we like to eat, sometimes the thought of cooking or preparing a meal can be stressful. Adding young children to cooking or baking can increase this stress! Your kitchen will be a mess after your children help you in the kitchen but the truth is that cooking with kids can really teach them a number of important and valuable skills.

### What skills are children learning through cooking with parents and caregivers?

#### 1. Early Literacy Skills

While children under 3 years of age are not typically able to actually “read” words yet, we can teach young children that the scribbles and letters that are on the food wrappers, jars and bottles we use during cooking and baking have meaning! This is one of the first steps in teaching young children that print and ultimately reading are important!



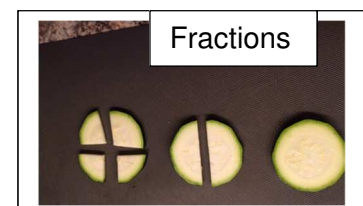
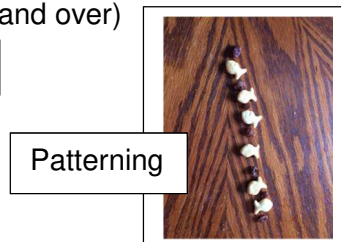
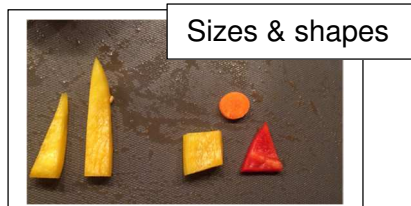
-Consider having your children help you gather all the ingredients before you start cooking or baking. This gives you the chance to point out the labels and names of everything.

-If you store ingredients in glass jars – consider labelling them with their names using labels or sticky notes so you draw your children’s attention to them and the “print”.

#### 2. Early Math Skills

Cooking with young children can be so rich in early math concepts and a great way to introduce things like;

- **Counting** (count the ingredients; count how long it takes to stir everything together)
- **Shapes** (cut fruits, vegetables and other foods into different shapes)
- **Sizes** (cut foods into different sizes so you can label and help children compare; ask “Which one is the biggest?”, “Which one is the smallest?”)
- **Fractions** (cut foods in half; show how 2 half cups of an ingredient is the same as 1 whole cup)
- **Adding and Subtracting** (1 banana plus another banana makes 2 bananas; we need 3 eggs for this recipe, after we put in 1 egg, how many are left to put in?)
- **Patterning** (take a couple of ingredients and show children how to create a sequence that repeats over and over)

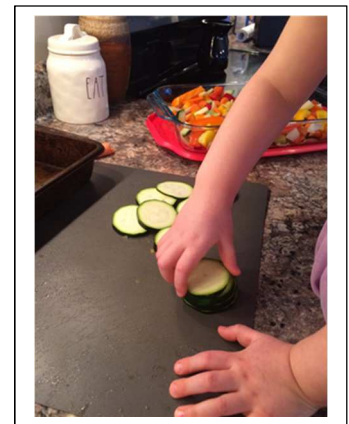
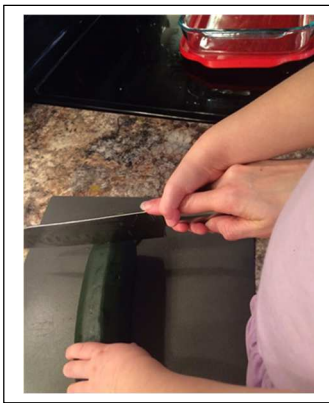




### 3. Other School Readiness Skills

Cooking and baking with young children can also include other concepts and skills that are important for children before they go to school including;

- **Colours** (“Let’s make a salad using peppers that are yellow, red and orange – which 1 is red?”)
- **Overall vocabulary** (While we cook and bake with children we can talk about different textures and use other descriptive words. “What foods feel smooth?”, “The banana feels squishy.”)
- **Fine-Motor skills** (Before children are printing their name – they are building and strengthening the small muscles in their hands and fingers by squishing and squeezing foods with their fingers, cutting foods (with adults supervision and help of course!), scooping and pouring foods into bowls, stirring things together in bowls, breaking apart eggs and placing small pieces of food on a plate or baking sheet)



### 4. Early Regulation and Social Skills

- When we cook and bake with small children – we have to wait for things to finish being prepared or cooked before we can eat them. **This learning to wait for something good or yummy is an important early regulation skill!** Sometimes we have to give children a taste of an appropriate ingredient while we are waiting for the end product or result!
- When we cook or bake with other children or siblings, children need to take turns stirring, cutting, pouring and so on. **This learning to take turns is also an important early social skill.** Sometimes we have to make sure that children get lots of turns when they are really young – we as adults can always finish the stirring later!





## 5. Greater Awareness of Their World

When you ask young children – “Where does your food come from?” – many of them will tell you, “The grocery store!” Children see the fruits and vegetables at the store but often don’t really know how they got there. You could increase this awareness by;

- Have a map - use stickers to show where the food comes from; write the item on the sticker. For younger children draw a photo of the item to support their learning styles. Before every meal or snack, take them over to the map and point out where the food comes from on the map. As you add more every day you will see where the majority of the food is coming from. Allow questions and conversations to grow- you never know, you may learn a thing or two as well!
- Ask young children, “Where does a banana come from- does it come from a garden, hang from a tree or vine?” Create a graph with three categories. Garden- Tree- Vine. Include other fruits and vegetables in this discussion to ensure you have items in all 3 categories.
- Depending on the season or time of year – consider planting seeds and/or seedlings of some hardier and easier to grow fruits, vegetables and herbs such as tomatoes or lettuce with your children. With your support, young children can help to take care of the seedlings. Then when the time is right – you can harvest them and use them directly in cooking and baking experiences. Children can start to understand and appreciate where their food comes from by growing it and using it in recipes!

