Child Development / **Cognitive Development**

Cooking as a Learning Activity

Dear Debi,

I care for a 4 and 5-year-old. I always have them cook with me. Cooking makes them feel special. But how can I make cooking more of a learning experience?

– **Esmeralda**, North Hills, CA

Debi's Tips

- Cook with children regularly
- Use simple recipes
- Kids develop many early academic skills

Debi Gutierrez
Host

Expert Advice

Susan Singer
Los Angeles Unified
School District

Almost every aspect of learning can be incorporated in cooking activities from colors, textures, smelling, pre-science, developing vocabulary, visual awareness, and measurements. Children constantly learn literacy in cooking activities because they are picking up on new words for foods that they are being introduced to and are cooking with. They learn how to following directions and you can even teach geography by introducing foods from different areas or discussing where certain ingredients come from.

Child Care providers should be aware that the whole cooking activity can be used to teach kids. Preparing the ingredients, picking out what to make that can increase vocabulary. Measuring out ingredients can teach math skills and watching water heat up and boil can also be a lesson in pre-science. Child Care providers just need to be aware to talk to kids throughout the activity and ask open-ended questions and engage kids throughout the time they are doing the activity.

There are so much that kids are gaining. Besides introducing them to healthy eating habits and introducing good nutrition early on, they can start learning all sorts of things from academic skills to fine and gross motor skills by using plastic serrated knives to cut foods. They learn how to follow directions if you talk to them about a recipe and it's also great in incorporate things like pictographs or books into the cooking so that it takes the learning beyond the kitchen.

Cooking doesn't necessary have to involve using the oven or stove. Making open-faced

sandwiches, or sauces and salads are all great ways to incorporate learning and cooking. Making simple healthy snacks also can be a great way to cook with your kids. Cooking isn't about making something fancy, it can be just how you and the kids work together to make something that they will enjoy eating. And kids will enjoy eating these items more because they had a hand in preparing it.

Child Care provider Comments

Elizabeth
Child care provider for 4 years

Cooking teaches kids skills like patience and taking turns, in addition to the traditional lessons like math and science skills. Kids find cooking to be very rewarding because they get to see the fruits of their labor almost immediately. Besides that, I think cooking is a great way to have conversations about the ingredients, proper nutrition, and eating in moderation.

Sandy
Family child care provider for 5 years

Cooking is a great way to teach some important skills, like math and science. I think kids learn these concepts more easily through cooking because it's a hands-on experience. When we measure out three cups of water for a recipe, they can actually see what three cups of water is. I also think that cooking is a great bonding activity. When kids cook with a child care provider, parent or grandparent, they are sharing that time together and passing on a lot of knowledge. I also like to use cooking to teach safety. Kids learn not to touch hot pots and how to stay a safe distance from the oven.

Clarissa August
Family child care provider for 21 years

I cook with my grandkids everyday. It's a real sharing activity for my kids because we all cook together. They love being able to divide portions so there's enough for everyone. But besides learning how to make a meal, cooking is a great time for us to talk about almost anything. I feel like it's a time where my kids feel safe to ask me questions and they know that it's a time that we can freely discuss what they may be curious about.

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