



In the Kitchen, the More the Merrier!

Whoever coined the phrase, "too many cooks in the kitchen," wasn't considering how rewarding it can be to cook with your kids. Use this guide to help you determine which activities are best suited for your child:

TODDLERS (ages 3-4)

- Let them choose between two or three possible recipes, ingredients or snacks that interest them.
- Hand them ingredients to play with and explore. Discuss color, shape, texture and even taste.
- Practice counting by reciting numbers out loud as you measure out ingredients.
- Let them stir ingredients together in a mixing bowl (you may need to help them at first).
- Let them decorate a few cookies or cupcakes after baking -- it's okay if they make a mess!
- Have them sort clean silverware into the correct drawer, use a dust pan to clean up crumbs on the floor, and wipe up spills on the table or floor with a paper towel.

LITTLE TYKES (ages 5-6)

- Let them pick a recipe each week or each month that they want to eat and help make!
- Have them read the recipe out loud so they can practice reading.
- Give them simple responsibilities like washing fruits and vegetables or fetching ingredients from the pantry.
- Teach "advanced" stirring techniques, such as beating eggs or folding berries into batter.
- Let them use tools like cookie cutters and butter knives to cut soft foods like strawberries.
- Have them fill the dishwasher with dirty, non-breakable dishes and soap, clean up the floor with a "big kid" broom or Swiffer, and spray non-toxic cleaners on counters.

SCHOOL-AGE (7-10)

- Let them measure and pour ingredients.
- Teach them about knife safety and more advanced kitchen tools. You can start with less dangerous ones such as vegetable peelers, and when your child is ready, introduce them to the techniques involved in actually cutting food (dicing, julienning, mincing, etc.).
- Practice math skills by converting quantities of ingredients.
- Have them load the dishwasher, put away dirty dishes, and wash other dishes by hand.

ANY AGE

- Be very clear about kitchen safety and set rules right from the start.
- Involve kids when you have the time and patience to properly explain and demonstrate tasks, and to keep an eye on them. Avoid high-stress situations when you're pressed for time.
- Encourage independence. Give kids their own apron, or even a special spoon for stirring. Help them create their own recipe binder or box from magazine clippings or websites online. Work with them on writing a special shopping list for the items you need at the store to complete the recipe.

Most importantly, keep cooking and cleanup enjoyable, and let your kids know when they've done a good job. By getting them involved, you can help them develop important life skills and good eating habits, build self-confidence and independence, and even strengthen family relationships.