

Cooking to Promote Development and Learning – Policy and Procedures

Cooking activities can support many areas of children’s learning and development, including language, literacy, numeracy, interpersonal and fine motor skills. They also offer educators great opportunities to talk with children about nutrition and healthy eating.

Cooking experiences can stimulate children’s senses and enhance their learning about a wide variety of concepts such as colors, shapes and numbers. Cooking allows children to experiment, solve problems and be creative in a relaxed environment where the focus is enjoyment. It can also build confidence and help children to learn to take responsibility. Social skills such as taking turns, communicating and cooperating can be developed when working in a small group to prepare food.

Cooking and eating food is an everyday pleasure but also an important and significant part of special occasions, celebrations and cultural and religious events. By involving children in cooking experiences that represent the backgrounds of families at the center and in the community, they can develop a deeper sense of the important role food plays in our society.

Importantly, children’s cooking experiences offer prime opportunities for them to develop an understanding and appreciation of healthy food and good food choices.

Social-Emotional Development

Hands-on cooking activities help children develop pride and confidence in their skills and abilities. The act of following a recipe can encourage self-direction and independence, while also teaching children to follow directions and use thinking skills to problem solve.

Physical Development

Chopping, squeezing, spreading and mixing are all cooking skills that help develop a child’s small muscle control and hand-eye coordination. It’s impossible to separate hands-on cooking activities from physical development for young children

Cognitive Development

Cooking inspires children’s curiosity, thinking and problem solving, offering new opportunities to make predictions and observations. Additionally, cooking offers authentic opportunities for children to understand and apply their knowledge of measuring, one-to-one correspondence, numbers, and counting. As they follow a recipe, children organize ingredients, follow a sequence, and carry out multiple directions.

Language Development

With its own vocabulary, cooking is a great opportunity for language development. Take advantage of opportunities for children to match pictures to words and articulate questions inspired by their new experiences.

Creative Development

By allowing children to experiment with various ingredients, children can be creative and learn which ingredients make enjoyable flavors, smells, textures, and what foods are visually appealing.

The Educator's Role

- Engaging children in conversation
- Verbalizing and describing what the children are doing
- Discussing where food comes from
- Making observations
- Asking questions for children to analyze and solve
- Modelling positive attitudes and behaviors

Selecting Recipes for Young Children

- Are the hands-on skills age/developmentally appropriate?
- Do you have access to appliances that are required?
- Do you have adequate supervision?
- Does the recipe connect with children's interests or classroom projects?
- Does the recipe promote health food choices?
- Is the recipe culturally relevant?
- Is the recipe affordable for all families, and does it use familiar ingredients they have at home?

Connections to Content Areas

Mathematics

- number concepts
- one-to-one correspondence
- simple addition
- patterning (layered salads, kabobs)
- measurement
- data collection, organization, and representation (voting on who wants a particular recipe or ingredient)
- simple fractions (half, whole, quarter)

Science

- life science (growing vegetables in containers)
- making predictions and observations

Social Studies

- share family recipes
- discover important roles of farmers in our communities

Literacy

- vocabulary and language development
- children's literature
- recipe cards

Arts

- drawing/painting fresh seasonal products
- pictorial recipes
- edible art

Enjoying the whole process

To enhance enjoyment of the whole process of cooking, encourage children to participate in planning menus, setting tables, growing ingredients, serving meals, tidying up and eating meals together.

Safety and Hygiene

Good hygiene when growing, preparing and cooking food with children reduces the risk of cross contamination and infection and helps them to develop good long term hygiene habits. A few simple hygiene rules should be reinforced every time educators cook with children. These include thorough handwashing and drying before and after handling food, maintaining clean utensils and food preparation areas, having safe and hygienic food storage and refrigeration, and following correct food waste composting and removal procedures.

Safe cooking and kitchen procedures should also be followed to ensure children are protected from risk and harm at all times. Do not use sharp knives with young children – butter knives are a safer alternative. Take extra care with graters and mortar and pestles, and always remind children to keep their fingers clear using developmentally appropriate explanations. Always use extreme care and close supervision when using ovens, stoves and hot pans with children.

Furthermore, make sure that children's allergies are taken into account when cooking, as some children can be highly allergic to contact with and consumption of particular foods such as eggs, nuts and dairy products.

Procedures

- Always review Safety and hygiene rules listed above, reminding children the importance of having clean and dry hands
- Prepare a simple recipe chart with illustrations of each step and review the whole recipe with children before starting
- Gather all the necessary ingredients and utensils
- Set out utensils and ensure children do not have access to sharp knives
- Fill a basin half full with warm soapy water so that items can be cleaned as they are used
- Weigh and measure the ingredients with the children first
- Keep the sink clear to wash fruit and vegetables before cooking or eating
- Follow the recipe chart step-by-step
- Involve everyone in cleaning up – demonstrate how to wash and dry knives carefully and explain why they should never be left at the bottom of the sink or basin, children should not have access to the sharp knives
- Before eating, take a few moments to admire the food you have prepared by looking, smelling and describing the outcome and the experience.