
A Letter to Families About Cooking

Dear Families,

Cooking is an important part of my program, just as it is in your home. When they cook, children have opportunities to learn about nutrition, to be creative, and to prepare their own healthy meals and snacks. Children learn a lot of academic skills, too. When children follow picture recipe cards, they begin to develop early reading skills. Measuring ingredients are math lessons. Whipping egg whites into meringue and melting cheese under a broiler are lessons in science.

Cooking experiences are very meaningful to children. In their dramatic play, children often pretend to be grown-ups, shopping for groceries, preparing food, and serving meals in homes and restaurants. They also read and sing about food. By actually cooking, children share an experience that is also important to adults. Do you have some favorite family recipes that you would like to share with us? We'd love it, too, if you could visit and cook with us once in a while.

When children cook, we talk a lot about what they are doing and why. I ask them to become scientists, to observe, for example, what happens as we combine ingredients and change their temperatures. We make predictions and experiment to find out how much we should fill a muffin tin so that the batter doesn't overflow.

Here are some suggestions for cooking with your child at home:

Think about ways to involve your child in the cooking that you do ordinarily. It may take extra time and be messier than if you cooked alone, but there are many rewards. Your child will be learning literacy, math, and science skills just by helping you. In addition, cooking sets the stage for lifelong healthy eating habits. When children have a hand in preparing their meals, they are more interested in what they eat and are more willing to try new foods.

Start by giving your child simple tasks like stirring batter, squeezing lemons, adding spices, and shaping meatballs or dough. Discuss what you are doing together while cooking. Ask questions such as these:

- What happened to the dry ingredients when we added the milk?
- How did you get the lumps out of the batter?
- Why do you suppose the recipe says to fill the batter only halfway up the pans?
- What was your favorite part of making muffins?

The beauty of cooking with your child is that your child is learning skills and having fun at the same time as you are attending to a household chore. What could be better than that?

Sincerely,

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