Benefits of Cooking with Kids

Inviting your children into the kitchen to help you cook can be a great way to create quality time together. Use this time to help your children learn and refine some basic skills (e.g., fine motor, eye-hand, balance, time on task).

When children cook, all their basic school skills (reading, math, science, history) are enhanced. Language development increases as children name the ingredients they are using. Reading recipes and labels improves reading skills. Measuring out the ingredients increases math skills. Cooking also introduces children to scientific concepts, such as the temperature of boiling water, making bread by using yeast, and extracting juice from fruits. Pouring and using knives for chopping and dicing helps increase fine motor skills. Besides life skills, cooking together creates family bonding and quality time for learning, sharing, and supporting one another (Walton 2018).

Cooking Together

First, establish a workstation. Remember to start small and consider your children's ages and abilities when deciding on food preparation. Give yourself plenty of time to prepare and multitask. Keep cleaning equipment close by.

Create the menu together. Encourage children to help by giving them simple tasks. This teaches them teamwork and other essential life skills. Praise them. Providing for a family is such an instinct that kids feel an immediate sense of pride and self-worth when they contribute.

Quick and Easy Meal Ideas

- French Bread Pizza
- Mini Lasagna Cups
- Baked Spaghetti Squash
- Baked Parmesan Zucchini Fries
- Salad in a Jar
- Fruit Salad
- Fruity Nut Butter Pitas
- Rise and Shine Parfait
- Pumpkin Pie Smoothies

Visit https://prowellness.childrens.pennstatehealth.org/family/nutrition RECIPES/ for these recipes and more.

Dinnertime Conversation

- Let all family members talk. Be an active listener and make sure your children learn to listen as well.
- Encourage your children to participate. Do not
underestimate your children's ability to hold a conversation.

- Discuss the children's day. Show interest in your children's daily life.
- Discuss current events. Bring up news appropriate to the ages of your children.
- Ask questions that encourage conversation and keep the dialogue positive. Start your conversations with how, what if, why, and other types of open-ended questions. Avoid making meals a time for lectures or disciplining.
- You may also want to try using mealtine conversation starter cards. It's a fun way to talk over dinner. (Ehlinger 2013)

### Conversation Starters

1. If you could make up a brand-new school subject, what would it be?
2. Can you remember a time when you laughed so hard you snorted?
3. Make up a new holiday.
4. What is your favorite letter of the alphabet? Why?
5. If someone gave you $50, what would you do with it?
6. Would you rather eat your least favorite vegetable or have extra homework?
7. When you are sad, how do you make yourself feel better?
8. What is your favorite day of the week?
9. What is the best way to eat a sandwich cookie?
10. Would you rather take a picture or be in the picture? (Ehlinger 2013)

### References


### Penn State Extension Relatives as Parents Program

Many organizations and groups have emerged to support grandparents-raising-grandchildren families and help them navigate the unique set of emotional, legal, and daily living challenges they face. This program aims to expand supportive services available for Pennsylvania relative caregivers and the children they are raising, particularly in helping them find needed information and resources, locate and enroll in support groups that serve kinship care families, and engage in family-based recreational and relationship-enhancing activities. Learn more at [https://aese.psu.edu/outreach/intergenerational/program-areas/kinship/relatives-as-parents-program-rapp](https://aese.psu.edu/outreach/intergenerational/program-areas/kinship/relatives-as-parents-program-rapp).