



I. Why Cooking Is Important

Cooking is a daily happening in a family child care program. Children need lunch, snacks, and very often breakfast, too. This means that cooking is already part of your curriculum.

But cooking can be more than just a chore you have to do—it can also be a teaching activity. Through cooking experiences, children learn how food helps their bodies develop and how it keeps them healthy. Cooking can also provide children with a wealth of learning experiences, from the scientific to the creative.



Cooking is one of the best ways that providers have to make use of everyday routines to teach children. Moreover, by letting children participate in an activity they see you and their parents doing daily, you invite children into the world of grown-ups. This can be very exciting for children, and it provides built-in motivation for learning. Of course, cooking also involves activities and ways of learning that children love: pouring, dumping, mixing, stirring, scooping, smelling, testing, feeling, hearing, and tasting.



Here are some of the many types of learning experiences that can take place through cooking.

Children develop thinking skills by:

- Learning about nutrition (participating in preparing balanced meals and snacks).
- Solving problems (remembering to fill a muffin tin only halfway to keep batter from spilling over when cooked).
- Sorting and classifying (searching for bananas that are soft and darkened to use in making banana bread).
- Gaining a foundation in math (filling a quart pitcher with four cups of water to make lemonade).
- Understanding scientific principles (watching cream turn to butter).
- Expressing creativity (decorating muffins with cream cheese “faces” or folding napkins into shapes while setting the table).

Children develop socially by:

- Developing responsibility (helping in chores of daily life by preparing meals).
- Learning self-help skills (setting the table for lunch).
- Developing consideration for others (asking another child what she would like to drink during snack time).
- Working cooperatively (baking a cake together).

Children develop emotionally by:

- Showing pride (serving pudding they’ve made themselves to the younger children for a snack).
- Having fun (enjoying cooking and eating as a group).

Children develop physically by:

- Strengthening hand muscles (sifting flour).
- Coordinating eye and hand movements (pouring water through a funnel).
- Learning directionality (using a whisk to beat egg whites).

These are just a sampling of the many ways in which cooking can be used to support children’s growth and development. With just a little planning on your part, you’ll find that you can easily provide children with learning opportunities such as these. In the next section we’ll look at how you can set up the kitchen in your family child care home to support the development of children in various age groups.