

Cooking with Kids

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By Matthew Card.

While we're lucky enough to have our children cooking at school, we—as parents—need to reinforce those lessons at home for the skills and experiences to really take root. However, I'll be the first to admit that there is nothing easy about cooking with kids. They can be messy, lack the focus that cooking demands, and slow—it takes time to cook with kids, something many of us lack in our busy lives.

What better moment to get cooking with your kids than the holidays? Everyone is off from work and school and (reasonably) relaxed, right? Sure, baking projects are great, but think of savory dishes too. Plan a meal with the kids and make it all together. **Here are a few tips** I find help make cooking with my kids successful and rewarding:

Choose Recipes Wisely: Skip dishes with hard-to-prepare ingredients, finicky timing, or flavors you know your kids don't like. You don't have to pander to finicky palates, but don't force them into anything that will build resentment from the start. Expanded palates need to be teased out (That being said, surprise them too—I've yet to meet a child who doesn't like anchovies).

Baked goods are always a safe bet and provide the opportunity for some basic chemistry lessons. I like making biscuits and pastry crust because it's fairly easy for kids to see the role of the butter and how its fat and moisture effect the dough.

Be Patient: You can't rush this: kids take time to get stuff done. Don't start a cooking project unless you truly have the time to get it done. The last thing you want to do is rush, express frustration (with the kids or yourself), or not finish the dish. Make sure you have a finished product that everyone gets to consume. The act of creation is largely what makes cooking so compelling—the turning of raw ingredients into something delicious and beautiful.

Sharp Knives: It may be counterintuitive to a protective parent, but a sharp knife is a safe knife. Let them use real knives and give them the guidance they need. Sure, they may nick themselves, but don't we all? Demonstrate how to cut safely (curling fingertips back on the holding hand and using the forward knuckle as a guide). And make sure the knife fits the child's hand well and is easily maneuvered. Asian-style knives, like those made by Global or Mac, tend to be smaller handled and light, making them well suited to children.

Stable Work Surfaces: Keep a damp paper towel under cutting boards to prevent them from sliding. Use a wood or plastic cutting board to prevent the knife blade from skittering on contact.

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