Cooking with children with additional needs

Cooking together can be a fun way of learning, developing relationships, trying something new and building confidence. Cooking teaches your child about nutrition, food safety, literacy, maths, and can improve fine-motor skills and social skills.

**Getting started:**

1. Plan a time for the cooking activity when you have plenty of time and few distractions.
2. Discuss what you are going to cook. Perhaps it will be a favourite dish or something simple, plan for early success.
3. Make a trip to the shops together to look for the ingredients you will need.
4. Consider the kitchen environment and how it could challenge or frustrate your child, for example do you need a step to make a comfortable working height. If noise is an issue do you need silicone utensils?
5. Consider and discuss how to stay safe: From handwashing and apron wearing, to food storage and handling, to safely carrying and using the kitchen equipment.
6. Children thrive in a relaxed and fun environment to tackle learning, as they don’t realise they are learning.
7. Observe what your child finds difficult so you can then tailor what you’re cooking and how you’re cooking with them in mind.
8. Use visual explanations, for example, pictures of ingredients and steps within the recipe can be helpful for visual aids.

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During cooking:

1. Think about and practice the skills required for the activity, for example how to peel vegetables and how to use a knife safely.
2. Get out all of the utensils you need. Weigh out and prepare all the ingredients before you actually start cooking.
3. Allow the children to do as much as they can independently, it is much more fun. But encourage them to seek help if they need it.
4. Encourage lots of talking: What do you feel, see, smell, taste, hear as you complete each task?
5. Take plenty of time to complete each step including the clearing up, and remember to take breaks when your child needs to
6. Sit down together to enjoy what you have cooked.
7. Start small – gradually involve your child in the food prep and cooking process, this way it feels more natural to them
8. When you do start cooking, start with very simple dishes that include minimal ingredients, cooking times, and steps.

After cooking:

1. Allow time and space for your child to reflect on how they felt, what they liked, disliked, what they want to change.
2. Discuss what went well, what didn’t go so well and try to work out how you could improve the recipe next time.

Always trust your own instincts, you know your child best

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