

Bring out the splat mat—cook with your kids.



When my kids were younger, I realized one way to avoid the pre-dinner time meltdowns was to enlist their help in cooking. In addition, baking muffins or cookies with kids is a great rainy day activity with a built-in reward at the end. Much has been written about the nutritional and psychological merits of a shared family meal. Instead, this post is about sharing the mealtime prep. For those of you who do not love to cook yourselves, here are reasons to find your inner cook and encourage your child's development at the same time:

1-Toddlers LOVE pouring, mixing, and measuring, and when you teach toddlers these skills, you are strengthening their fine motor skills. Why else are toy kitchens and Play-doh so popular? Nothing beats "playing" with REAL ingredients in a REAL kitchen.

2-Teach young kids to count measurements, let older kids do the measuring themselves.

3-Kids who are learning to read now see WHY they need this skill- as you follow a recipe kids see how to read with a purpose. You can let your budding reader read the directions to you.

4- Time spent with a parent in the kitchen fosters more shared attention which can build self-esteem.

5-You will build good memories for your child.

6-For the picky eaters: kids are more likely to taste what they cook themselves.

7-Kids love water play, so even the clean-up is fun.

8- Kids as young as 7 or 8 can learn to cut with a knife. Teach them this life skill while cooking instead of when they are hungry and trying to eat dinner-it causes less frustration.

9-Kids take pride in what they help create. They can also take pride in completing a project. Pride in accomplishments develops self-esteem.

10- Cooking with you teaches your child how to help others as well as how to receive help graciously.

Finally, cooking is one of those life skills needed for when kids grow up and live on their own. Just as you teach them to use the potty, brush their own teeth, dress themselves and tie their own shoes, you should teach them how to cook.

Are you parents who don't cook? Call Grandma or Grandpa for some tutoring, or take a cooking class with your child!

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