

# Articles

[My Food Experiences]

## 7 Ways to Ensure your Kids Grow Up Knowing How to Cook



My oldest son, who is now out on his own, could regularly be found cooking quadruple batches of crepes from scratch when he was a teenager. It took us a while to find the perfect crepe recipe, and when we did, I had him write it down inside the back cover of one of my cookbooks. I made sure to have him add the date next to the recipe because I knew it would be a very special memory one day.

As a single mom, cooking meals hasn't always been my greatest forte, believe it or not. I love cooking a great deal, but after a full day of making food for other people at my commercial kitchen, I often had a difficult time finding the energy to cook a nice meal for my kids. I always felt bad about this until, one day, a friend told me he thought it was one of

the greatest gifts I had given my kids because they regularly had the opportunity to put their cooking skills to work.

People often ask me how I taught them to cook in the first place, and below, I've come up with seven ways to ensure your kids know how to cook when they grow up.

### **1) Let them look through your cookbooks and pick the menu with you.**

I found that when I allowed my children to look through cookbooks with tantalizing photos of delicious dishes, they got excited and wanted to try to make the things they saw. As kids get older, they can read through recipes and even be taught to look in the indexes for dishes that contain their favorite foods. This gives them a sense of ownership about whatever it is they're cooking, along with the whole process leading up to it.

### **2) Let them shop with you.**

Once you've decided what to cook, take them with you to the store, allow them to help you find the ingredients you need and even go so far as to allow them to pick out a couple basic items to supplement the meal with. A cut up pineapple they arrange on a plate, or some carrots they peel and put into a bowl, are great ways to give kids some

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more ownership of the meal. The point is to let your child decide what the sides are going to be.

Also allow your child to put the groceries on the store counter, pay the cashier, put the groceries in the car and unload them when you get home. It's important for children to learn the whole process.

A better option still is to shop at the farmer's market so your child can get to know the farmers that are growing food in your area.

### 3) Allow your kids to make a mess!

This is a difficult one for a lot of moms because it's hard for us to sit and watch messes bloom before our eyes without stepping in. But it's really important. It's how kids learn.

My three year old got the eggs out of the fridge yesterday and cracked seven of them into a bowl (and all around the bowl). I thought for a second about how I should react and I decided to tell her I was so proud of her for cracking eggs all by herself. We decided she should give them to the dog (they had lots of shells in them) and she was so happy that she had "made" some food for Murphy the Dog. I could have gotten upset at her, but I decided to be proud instead. I also took the opportunity to teach her about why we need to save the eggs for people meals and not feed them all to the animals, and believe it or not, she actually listened.

I have had a few friends tell me they were never allowed in the kitchen because their mamas "kept a tight ship" and wanted to keep their space neat and tidy. Subsequently, their children never learned how to cook or even what processes went into cooking. It's important to let go of the fear of "the mess" and to embrace the time you share with your children in the kitchen as you teach them the very valuable life skill of cooking.

And remember, just because they make a mess doesn't mean that they can't help clean it up! That's all part of learning to cook, too!

### 4) Let them make mistakes.

A few nights ago, my son and I were making a pasta dish together. I sat at the table chopping vegetables while he got the water boiling for the pasta and started the pan for sauteing the veggies. He grabbed a bottle that he thought was olive oil, and, after pouring a fair amount in, realized it was balsamic vinegar instead. He said, "Oh no! This is balsamic vinegar!" I told him it would be just fine and that it would probably taste good. He went ahead and added some olive oil, put the shallots and garlic in and when the whole dish was finished, we had on our plates some of the best pasta I had ever tasted. I praised him for working through the mistake and for making it taste so good. I know he

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was proud of himself, too, as evidenced by the giant plate he served up for himself!

### 5) Watch cooking shows together.

This may sound like a silly way to teach a child to cook, but let's face it, most kids LOVE watching YouTube and netflix and TV in general. Some of my fondest memories are of watching Cupcake Wars with my daughter who is the baker in our family, and Chopped with my son who, at one time, wanted to be a chef. I find that my children are inspired by the creations they see others make and it gets them cooking their own dishes.

I had one mom write me, too, that she and her daughter love watching my cooking shows, particularly when my baby is my guest, as it's a special time for them to bond.

### 6) Make it into a game.

Sometimes we get creative at my house and have one person pick out ingredients for that night's dinner-maker, (and it's not always ingredients you would expect!). We sometimes time ourselves to see if we can make things in a designated amount of time. It's also fun to make a mono-colored meal. Can you make a meal that is all red? All green? Try taking turns smelling foods with your eyes closed and make guesses as to what they are. Kids love

games and it's a really good way to get them excited about food and cooking.

### 7) Find someone to serve the final dish to.

I don't know about you, but my three-year old loves to show me the pictures she has drawn, or the rocks she has discovered. We all love to be acknowledged for our accomplishments and children are no different. If you can find someone to serve their creations to that wasn't part of the process, it allows them to present it as an accomplishment, something to be proud of. I can't think of many things that will keep them wanting to cook more than making others happy and proud.

author: *melissa chappell*

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