

## **Safety Tips for Cooking with Kids**

### **ELIMINATE INTERFERENCES**

Tie back long hair, pull up long sleeves, and secure other articles of clothing that could pose safety or hygiene risks.

### **HAND HYGEINE**

Wash hands with soap and warm water before touching any food or utensils. Gloves are not required if the food you are preparing will ultimately be cooked, but they are recommended if the food will be served raw. Encourage arm sneezing, and stress the importance of not touching your face, hair, etc. once hands are clean.

### **CLEAN COOKING AREA**

Start with a clean workspace. Clean all counter tops and surfaces before preparing food on them.

### **SET-UP**

Prepare work stations ahead of time with ingredients and proper tools.

### **WORK IN SMALL GROUPS**

Cooking with children is most successful when they can work in small groups of no more than 4-5, ideally with an adult per group. Younger children benefit from even smaller groups. Increase the adult-child ratio by involving parent volunteers in classroom cooking activities.

### **A JOB FOR EVERYONE**

Include every student in the cooking process by assigning everyone a job. This may mean giving each student a small task or even making up additional jobs. Tasks can include reading the recipe aloud, checking to be sure you have included all the ingredients, washing produce or dishes, drying dishes, measuring, stirring or helping another student. Every job is important and it is easy for children to get excited with the task at hand.

### **KNIFE SAFETY**

Be careful with knives and other sharp tools such as graters and peelers. Instill the importance and responsibility that comes with handling knives and kitchen equipment. Teach children the proper ways to hold, wash, carry, and store these tools. Most children take this responsibility very seriously.

### **USE THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB**

Kids can cut too, as long as you give them a safe and appropriate knife for the task. As an introduction to knife use you can use plastic disposable knives, plastic knives from a kids' set, or a butter or dinner knife with a less-than sharp serrated edge and a rounded point. Herbs, peeled fruit, and soft vegetables like zucchini, cucumbers, and tomatoes will yield to these kid-friendly knives. Sometimes a sharper or larger knife is a more appropriate tool for a cutting job and, with proper use, can be a safer option than trying

to cut something with an inadequate tool. Use your discretion in gauging the readiness of your students for using more professional cutting tools and always monitor use closely.

## **CUTTING TECHNIQUES**

- Place a wet paper towel under your cutting board to prevent it from slipping around on the table.
- Use a claw-like grip (with fingers curled slightly under) to hold the food steady on the cutting board - the knuckles act as a bumper and finger tips are kept away from the knife blade.
- Before cutting rounded objects, such as potatoes, carrots, or zucchini, give the food a flat edge so that it does not roll around on the cutting board. Do this by cutting a small slice from one side of the food so that it can lie flat on your work surface.
- Tools stay with the cutting board.

## **DEMONSTRATE**

Always demonstrate the correct cut, size, technique, etc. before handing the task over to the kids.

## **READING THE RECIPE**

Ask a child to read each instruction aloud as you prepare the food. Kids will get a sense of turn-taking and sequencing from following directions in order. This also helps to pace the process so that you can focus on one job at a time and avoid multiple distractions.

## **MAKE CLEAN-UP A PART OF THE ROUTINE**

Cleaning up is an important part of the cooking process and kids may love using a mop or dustpan as much as they love the food preparation. But save cleaning until the cake is in the oven!

## **TASTE!**

Have the students taste the food they are preparing. Encourage the practice of trying new things, but never force anyone to eat something against their will. Try offering the option of a "No, thank you" bite if someone is really hesitant to taste the food. Also keep cleanliness in mind when tasting the food – use clean tasting utensils to prevent contamination.

## **“Choosing The Right Knife”**

Students have different comfort and skill levels when it comes to using knives. Give kids the option of using a plastic or rounded-tipped butter knife for cutting softer foods. Attempting to cut harder vegetables or foods with a dull or inadequately sized knife can increase risk of injury, so select a tool that is appropriate for the job. For any knife use, always demonstrate proper cutting technique first.

## **Trying New Foods**

Encourage students to try new foods, but never force them to eat food they do not like. Model healthy choices by eating food with the students. Establish a routine with students for sitting down and eating food together as a group.

## **“Don’t Yuck My Yum” Rule**

Remind students that we do not say negative things about how something tastes because it might offend someone and discourage others from trying something new. If a student tries something that she or he does not like, request that they quietly spit it out in a napkin so other students have an opportunity to taste it and form their own opinions. Encourage students to use respectful language like “I don’t care for it.” Remind students that sometimes it takes trying new things 10 times before you begin to like them.

## **Serving Samples**

To reduce waste, consider purchasing reusable stainless souffle cups.

