

Now is the time to get creative': 5 ways to teach kids through cooking

Gaby Dalkin, the chef behind popular blog what's Gaby Cooking, offers simple ways to turn the kitchen into a classroom for kids.

While the kids are home from school, why not make the kitchen a productive learning environment?

For many parents, this period of quarantine and self-isolation feels overwhelming and with so much uncertainty, figuring out what to do at home is on the minds of many. Gaby Dalkin, the chef and recipe developer behind popular blog Whats Gaby Cooking, has some ideas for turning your kitchen into a classroom.

"I'm all about getting kids involved in the kitchen," Dalkin told TODAY Food. "Anything that makes your life as the cook easier and keeps them engaged is fair game!"

Be creative

Dalkin, who will release her third cookbook, "Eat What You Want: 125 Recipes for Real Life," this spring, encourages parents to let kids explore their way through the kitchen to learn about different flavors.

"I think getting kids involved in breakfast is the best way to start the day off on the right foot," Dalkin said.

Her favorite smoothie recipe calls for blueberries and bananas, but she encourages families to make adjustments whenever they need to.

"Maybe you don't have blueberries on hand — use another fruit," Dalkin suggested. "Use half a banana, or use different kinds of milk. Let kids get in there and mix and match flavors to give them different colors."

Assign useful tasks

"It doesn't have to be complicated. Kids can learn in the simplest ways! Get them involved in being strategic about loading the dishwasher or measuring out ingredients," Dalkin told TODAY. "I'd go so far as to give them all the Tupperware and make sure there are lids for each vessel! Might as well clean out the kitchen while we are at it!"

She added that preparing vegetables for meals is an essential and kid-friendly part of the cooking process — from peeling to chopping: "Teaching them how to prep vegetables is great intel."

Practice fine motor skills

Younger children in the kitchen can practice fine motor skills through simple tasks with a bit of supervision, and Dalkin suggests hands-on learning from prep to execution. Some experts have even said toddlers can use sharp knives with proper guidance.

"This is a great time to get kids involved with their hands," she explained. "Depending on their age, you could do anything from spreading jelly or jam on toast, practicing their cutting with a knife and fork, using a pair of scissors to snip fresh herbs, using a rolling pin to roll out cookie dough, kneading bread dough or folding napkins," Dalkin said.

Solve mental math problems

Mental math is a skill that can be tough for kids and adults alike. Dalkin suggests using time in the kitchen to practice doing calculations without a pen and paper.

"Use mental math to figure out ratios for rice and grains," she suggested.

Learn the basics

Sorting and patterning skills are often learned sequentially: Children start comparing items, followed by matching them and finally, creating groups.

"If you've got little ones at home who are learning colors and shapes, give them fun tasks like separating a bag of M&M's into different colors," Dalkin told TODAY. Other ideas include "sorting different kinds of pasta, organizing the spice cabinet from smallest to biggest or sorting the junk drawer that has all the measuring cups in it."

Still trying to figure out what to cook or where to start? Dalkin has a suggestion for that, too.

"I'm looking at this like an episode of 'Chopped.' See what's in your pantry, use the least amount of ingredients as possible while still making something delicious, but also being mindful that you might need to make these ingredients last for a while," she said. "Depending on which recipe you're following, if it's something savory, feel free to make swaps. Don't have marinara sauce, but have an Alfredo? Go for it! Now is the time to get creative."

<https://www.today.com/food/how-teach-kids-important-skills-through-cooking-t177543>