

## IDEAS FOR GUIDING GRANDCHILDREN THROUGH THE COOKING PROCESS :

### ➔ CREATE GROUND RULES AROUND SAFETY



Children need supervision. Start by checking with parents about safety concerns and boundaries in the kitchen. ... Next, teach or review basic food safety rules throughout the cooking process.

Grandparents are an important role model for showing and explaining food safety practices like correct hand washing techniques and checking the temperature of food with a food thermometer. Encourage tasting while cooking, but have rules about no double dipping. Have everyone pull back long hair and wash their hands. Be sure to clean all work surface areas and work with children to clean up along the way.

### ➔ SET THEM UP FOR SUCCESS



Children of all ages can help with food preparation, table set up, and clean up. With very young children, the experience is all about senses and teaching safe kitchen practices. Over time, children

will gain skills and independence. [The next page] shows a general idea of age appropriate skills. ... A 6 year old can try everything listed on that level and above. Selecting tasks that match a child's skill level can build confidence and limit frustration. It is important to remember each child develops at their own pace.

### ➔ ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION



Focus on listening instead of talking. Describe what you are doing. Talk about where the food or recipe came from. Ask children questions and help them problem solve. Teach them about

safety in the kitchen. Share observations throughout each food preparation step. Telling stories can create and build strong bonds.

### ➔ WORK THROUGH THE MESS



It is important to remember, children need help learning new skills. One can expect some messy moments during the learning process. Doing things together over and over will supply the practice and

guidance needed to master a skill. As cooking skills improve, there should be less mess. Learning how to clean up messes is also an important life skill for children to learn....

### ➔ MAKE IT A HABIT!



 Cooperative Extension Service

# INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN TO BECOME GRAND COOKS

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## Introduction

.....Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. Cooking helps children develop fine and gross motor skills. It inspires creativity and problem solving. Cooking can also help children practice following directions and gain independence. Language and literacy can develop through talking and reading about what they are cooking. Cooking increases children's confidence and can increase their willingness to try and ultimately eat more fruits and vegetables. Learning cooking skills at an early age has lasting impact on attitudes about cooking, skills, diet quality, and health in adulthood.

## Children need more time in the kitchen.

...Even though cooking at home is on the rise, children are not usually helping. Mothers report extra stress when children are in the kitchen because they feel a lack of control and that children are a distraction. They also report safety concerns and not wanting to clean up messes. ...With fewer occasions to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations.

## Grandparents can teach cooking skills.

...Grandparents do not need to be expert chefs. They just need to share time, patience and experience with children.

# INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN TO BECOME GRAND COOKS



## UNDER 2 YEARS

Very young children are not quite ready to help in the kitchen. They can play nearby with pots, pans, or storage containers as well as toy foods or kitchen sets. Talk about what is going on in the kitchen.



## 2-3 YEARS

**Cooking skills:** Wash fruits and vegetables, knead and mix with hands, tear or break foods into pieces, use a rolling pin, use a cookie cutter, roll mixtures into a ball, squeeze lemons and limes

**Kitchen skills:** Put things in the trash



## 3-5 YEARS

**Cooking skills:** Add ingredients to a bowl, stir and mix, mash foods, cut, chop, or slice with plastic, kid safe knives, spread butter with a butter knife, scrape batter down a bowl, brush oils on food with a pastry brush, cut green onions and herbs with blunt kitchen scissors, peel fruits and vegetables with peeler, deseed fruits and vegetables with a spoon

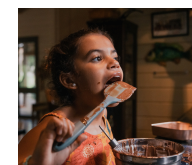
**Kitchen skills:** Put things away, fill drink cups, help set table, move dirty dishes to the sink, wipe tables and countertops, explore the garden



## 6-7 YEARS

**Cooking skills:** Measure ingredients (with help), crack eggs in a bowl, shuck corn, snap green beans, grease pans, peel fruit with fingers, skewer foods, bread, flour, and dip foods, sprinkle ingredients, juice lemon, lime, or orange using a juicer

**Kitchen skills:** Make guided menu choices, gather ingredients, load dishwasher, wash dishes, help dig, plant, and harvest the garden, help find items while grocery shopping



## 8-9 YEARS

**Cooking skills:** Weigh and measure ingredients, beat eggs, open cans with can opener, use food thermometer to check temperature of food, use an oven or microwave, pound foods with a kitchen mallet, pour from a container, drain canned foods, shake liquids in a closed container, use a hand mixer

**Kitchen skills:** Set the table, store and refrigerate leftovers, help plan gardens



## 10 YEARS OR OLDER

**Cooking skills:** Follow a recipe, cut, slice, and chop with kitchen knives, simmer ingredients on stovetop, boil pasta, bake foods in oven

**Kitchen skills:** Become the expert of a family recipe so that it passes down generations. Once children show they can follow kitchen safety rules, they can begin doing things on their own.

## **Conclusion**

Children need more time and guidance in the kitchen to reap the lifelong benefits of knowing how to cook. Grandparents are a valuable resource for teaching cooking skills. The special moments that occur when cooking together can supply benefits for both grandparents and grandchildren. Sharing stories about family recipes exercises memory, gives children a sense of connection, and passes family heritage from generation to generation. Most of all, giving children time, space, and support to gain confidence in the kitchen yields priceless experiences that will last a lifetime.



# INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN TO BECOME GRAND COOKS

*“Cooking with kids is not just about ingredients, recipes, and cooking. It’s about harnessing imagination, empowerment, and creativity.” - Guy Fieri*

**RATIONALE:** Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. However, changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home, and children are spending less time in the kitchen. Older adults are a valuable resource for time and cooking skills. Time spent cooking together can provide many special moments that benefit adults and children.

**PROGRAM GOAL:** To increase intergenerational cooking experiences

## **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:**

After this lesson, participants will be able to:

- List at least two benefits of older adults and children cooking together,
- Explain developmentally appropriate ways to involve children in the kitchen, and
- Create a plan for working in the kitchen with children.

## **PROGRAM MATERIALS**

- Facilitator’s Guide
  - Marketing language
  - Success story template
- Publication FN-CTL.001: Inspiring Grandchildren to be Grand Cooks
- PowerPoint presentation that includes notes
- Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids handout
- Matching Game worksheet and answer key
- Program evaluation tool
- Fillable marketing flyer

**ESTIMATED PROGRAM DELIVERY TIME:** 30 minutes. With optional activity, 60 minutes.

## PROGRAM PREPARATION

This lesson includes four activities focused on adults – two discussion-based activities, a matching game, and a planning exercise. If the group wants to add a hands-on experience, select one of these optional activities listed below. You can complete optional activities with or without children. Consider having members invite a special child to take part in the fun. Make sure to decide on whether or which special activities you will include ahead of time so that everyone can plan accordingly.

1. **Cooking Activity.** Prepare and enjoy one or more recipes of your choosing. This is a way for everyone to practice what you talk about. Some recipe ideas are included at the end of this guide. Your FCS agent is a great resource for tried-and-true recipes that are easy to make and delicious to enjoy with children of all ages. You can also check out the Plan Eat Move website (<https://www.planeatmove.com/recipes/>) and browse the “Kid Approved” or any other category.
  - a. Needed supplies: Ingredients, cooking utensils and other equipment as specified by the selected recipe as well as plates, serving utensils, eating utensils, and napkins.
  - b. If it feels like too much work to pick a recipe and prep all the ingredients, invite your FCS agent or SNAP-Ed assistant to help with the cooking activity.
2. **Potluck.** Have members prepare and bring a dish. The dish could be something people would like to make with a child, or they could have prepared it with the child they invite to the meeting. During the meal, everyone can swap recipes and stories about the experience of cooking together or how they would go about making the dish with children.
  - a. Needed supplies: Plates, serving utensils, eating utensils, napkins
  - b. Make sure to share instructions ahead of time about what you need to safely share food. For example, will there be space to keep foods cold or warm? Should foods be ready to eat?
3. **Recipe book.** Have people bring recipes to share. You can do some arts and crafts to create a memorable recipe book that includes space for notes and pictures about the experience of cooking together.
  - a. Needed supplies: Paper, markers, stickers, glue, tape, stapler, ring binders, and/or any other arts and crafts materials to personalize a recipe book
  - b. People can either hand copy or photocopy one another’s recipes. You can talk through how to involve children in the preparation process and/or share stories of previous attempts to include children in making the selected dish.

### In-person

- Market the program through various channels.
- Reserve a room and any equipment needed to deliver the program (e.g., projector, computer) as well as any additional activities (e.g., cooking supplies).
- Share instructions and reminders for any special activities planned for the lesson (e.g., potluck instructions, bringing a recipe).

- Make copies of FN-CTL.001: Inspiring Grandchildren to Become Grand Cooks, Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids handout, Matching Game handout, and program evaluation tool.
- Gather pens or pencils for completion of activities and program evaluation.

### **Virtual**

- Develop plans for online implementation (e.g., Zoom, Facebook Live, Google Classroom).
- Market the program through various channels and share login information with interested and registered individuals.
- Reserve a room and any equipment needed to deliver the program (e.g., projector, computer).
- Email or mail FN-CTL.001: Inspiring Grandchildren to Become Grand Cooks, Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids handout, Matching Game handout, and program evaluation tool. Provide instructions for any additional materials you want people to have on hand at home for additional activities (e.g., a recipe to share).
- Establish whether you need an online survey for the evaluation or if you will mail paper copies for participants to return.

## **FACILITY AND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS**

### **In-person**

- Chairs and writing surface for participants
- Projector and screen for PowerPoint presentation
- Materials for selected optional activities (e.g., cooking activity)

### **Virtual**

- Computer and virtual lesson platform access
- Webcam
- Internet connection

## **MARKETING**

### **Newsletter/Newspaper**

The \_\_\_\_\_ County Extension Office will be hosting a workshop titled “Inspiring Grandchildren to Become Grand Cooks” at INSERT TIME, DATE, and LOCATION and OTHER DETAILS IF OFFERING THE CLASS VIRTUALLY. Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. But changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home. With fewer chances to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations. We are going to highlight the important role older adults can play in helping children learn how to cook. Whether you are a seasoned chef or just getting started, we’ve got a recipe for mostly fun and a little

mess. (ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU WANT TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM OR PLANNED ACTIVITIES-ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO HAVE CHILDREN ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE).

## **Social Media**

We often hear younger generations do not have cooking skills like they used to. We are looking for older adults who are willing to make a little mess and have lots of fun in the kitchen with children. Join the \_\_\_\_\_ County Extension Office at INSERT TIME and DATE to learn how to inspire children to become grand cooks.

## **PROGRAM CONTENT**

*Facilitator Note: These talking points are also in the notes section of the PowerPoint slide deck.*

**Introduction:** Welcome everyone

Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. But changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home. With fewer chances to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations.

Older adults are a valuable resource to younger generations for time and cooking skills. So today, we are going to talk about how time spent cooking together benefits older adults and children, developmentally appropriate ways to get children involved in the kitchen, and making plans for getting started.

*Note to facilitator: If the group decided on a special optional activity (e.g., cooking or potluck activity) in advance, you can mention this here.*

**Introduction Activity Part 1:** To get us started, let's talk about our favorite foods prepared at home when we were growing up.

Instructions: This is a think-pair-share. Allow people to take a moment to think about a favorite food from their childhood. Then prompt them to share thoughts with a partner, small group, or the larger group. If with a partner or small group, then bring the group together and invite people to share. They can share their or their partners' reactions to the question.

**Introduction Activity Part 2:** Let's dig into these memories a little more.

*Facilitator Note: Invite people to answer the following prompts as they feel comfortable.*

- Why is that dish meaningful?
- How did you feel while eating it?
- Who prepared that dish? Were you part of the process to prepare that dish?
- Was there a story behind it?

*Facilitator Note: After people share continue.*

Sometimes our favorite foods are because of the flavor, but often it is because of the experience behind the preparation or who we ate with or what the dish symbolized. Being part of the cooking process is memorable.

In fact, cooking experiences support children's development in many ways. Cooking helps children develop fine and gross motor skills. It inspires creativity and problem solving. Cooking can also help children practice following directions and gain independence. Language and literacy can develop through talking and reading about what they are cooking. Cooking increases children's confidence and can increase their willingness to try and ultimately eat more fruits and vegetables. Learning cooking skills at an early age has a lasting impact on attitudes about cooking, skills, diet quality, and health in adulthood.

With all the ways cooking supports child development, we might assume that children are spending a lot of time in the kitchen. But they aren't.

Parents, usually mothers, have been the primary source for teaching children how to cook. However, changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home and how involved children are in that process. In the past, school programs taught cooking skills, but fewer people report learning to cook in school. Research also shows transportation, cost, and disability can prevent children from taking cooking classes outside of school. With fewer occasions to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations. **What can we do about this?**

*Facilitator Note: Allow participants to share ideas.*

**OBJECTIVE 1:** List at least two benefits of older adults and children cooking together.

One solution – older adults can teach cooking skills.

Older adults have ever more important and varied roles in the lives of children. In Kentucky, approximately 58,000 children live with their grandparents. Many more children regularly spend time with older adults as a form of child care. But you don't have to be related or an expert chef to have a positive impact on a special young person in your life. You just need to share time, patience, and experience.

**Discussion question:** Who are the special young people in your life who you could share your time and talents with?

The shared experience of cooking benefits children and older adults. Working together in the kitchen provides time for meaningful conversation and builds trust. Young people and older adults can learn more about one another. They can share knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next and create lasting memories.

Cooking together can strengthen relationships and enhance well-being. Children can learn about (family) history and benefit from receiving love, support, acceptance, patience, and wisdom. Older adults can have boosts in brain function and protection against depression. Additionally, sharing cooking skills can provide opportunities that protect against social isolation and help maintain skills for longer independent living.

Learning about nutritious foods together can help families change routines in ways that support healthier eating habits.

## Learning Activity 1: Group Discussion

How did you benefit from cooking with a special older adult? In what ways have you benefited from cooking with children?

Cooking together allows for a conversation and can strengthen the relationship. It allows knowledge and tradition to be passed along in meaningful ways. Including children in the kitchen can foster these wonderful memories, too.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Explain developmentally appropriate ways to involve children in the kitchen.

Children of all ages can help with food prep, table setup, or cleanup. With very young children, the experience is all about senses and teaching safe kitchen practices. Over time, children will gain skills and independence. We can set children up for success in the kitchen by building a foundation of age-appropriate skills. Let's look at the handout.

Skills are organized by age group and build on one another. For example, if a child is 6 years old, they can try everything listed on that level and above. But let's remember each child develops at their own pace. Selecting tasks that match a child's skill level can help build confidence and limit frustration.

## Learning Activity 2: Matching Game

Instructions: You can do this activity on paper with the Matching Game handout or as a movement break as space and abilities allow.

If your group is completing this task on paper, pass out the Matching Game handout. Then instruct participants to match the skills listed with the youngest appropriate age group that could complete a task with assistance. Age groups may be used more than once.

For example, "grease pans" can be done by 6 – 7, 8 – 9, and 10 years or older, but probably cannot be completed by a 4 – 5-year-old. So, 6 – 7 would be the correct answer.

If your group is completing this task as a movement break, designate spots of the room for different age groups (2-3 years, 3-5 years, 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10 years or older), or have people raise hands and use fingers to show the age group. Then read the list of activities and allow people to move around to show the youngest age appropriate to do the task.

See answers on Matching Game answer key.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Create a plan for working in the kitchen with grandchildren.

Start by setting ground rules around safety. Start by checking with parents about safety concerns and boundaries in the kitchen. This ensures everyone is on the same page. Next, teach or review basic food safety rules throughout the cooking process. You are an important role model for showing and explaining food safety practices like correct hand-washing techniques and checking the temperature of food with a food thermometer. Encourage tasting while cooking but have rules about no double dipping. Have everyone pull back long hair and wash their hands. Be sure to clean all work surface areas and work with children to clean up along the way. If children put fingers in their nose or mouth, remind them to wash their hands. Finally, keep in mind safety risks related to heat, sharp knives or peelers, and electric cooking utensils. Set expectations about tasks children



can complete independently and those that require help or supervision.

Engage in conversation. Use time to talk and listen. Describe what you are doing. Talk about where the food or recipe came from. Ask children questions and help them problem solve. Teach them about safety in the kitchen. Share observations throughout each food preparation step. Tell stories. This is a time to build strong bonds.

Work through the mess. It is important to remember that children need help learning new skills. One can expect some messy moments during the learning process. Doing things together over and over will supply the practice and guidance needed to master a skill. As cooking skills improve, there should be less mess. Learning how to clean up messes is also an important life skill for children to learn. The willingness and time to work through messes in the kitchen is an opportunity for you to jump in and help parents.

Make it a habit. Any amount of cooking together is helpful, but more is better. Regular opportunities to prepare meals together allow children to learn and practice the variety of skills needed to confidently cook. Schedule and plan daily, weekly, or monthly times to cook with grandchildren. This can be done in person, or with a little preparation, through a video call. Writing down notes about the recipes made together can create a record of memories of the process for favorite dishes. Consider a special notebook or shared electronic file to record who was present during the cooking process, changes made to the recipe, where the recipe came from, what was most enjoyable about making or eating the dish, and any other memorable moments of the cooking process.

### **Learning Activity 3: Divide and Discuss**

Let's create plans to get children involved in our kitchens. Get out the Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids handout for space to jot down ideas.

- First, think about who the special young people are who you can work in the kitchen with. Do you have grandchildren or grandnephews or nieces? Do you have neighbors you are close with? Are there youth groups that you could volunteer with?
- Then, think about where you can work in a kitchen with them. Your home? Theirs? A cooking class?
- Now it's time to think about when you can work in a kitchen together. Are you available for a re-occurring time together on Tuesday evenings or Saturday mornings?
- What will you make together? You could heat up leftovers, make a family favorite, or stick with a simple snack.
- How will you get children involved? Let's split up the entire cooking process into three parts: the preparation, the cooking, and the cleanup.

We can talk through a peanut butter and jelly sandwich as an example. Let's start with the preparation of this food. We could have a 3–5-year-old get the bread out of the pantry. A 6–7-year-old could get a butter knife out of the drawer. A child aged 8 years or older could probably reach the peanut butter and/or jelly if it is higher in the refrigerator or pantry.

Now think about a food you have in mind to make with children. How will you get your helper involved?

Next, we'll talk about the "cooking" part of the process. My PB&J doesn't involve any equipment, heat, or water, but yours might! I might ask a 3-5-year-old to spread jelly on the bread.

What are you going to ask your helper to do?

Lastly, after we've enjoyed our meal, we have to do the cleanup. I might ask a 6–7-year-old to wash the dishes or load the dishwasher. What is something you can ask your helper to do to help clean up the kitchen?

Delegating some of these tasks helps you in the kitchen and it also teaches knowledge of cooking tasks, empowers the child to do things on their own, and creates a team environment.

**SUMMARY:** Children need more time and guidance in the kitchen to reap the many benefits of knowing how to cook. Older adults are a valuable resource for time and talent. Time spent cooking together can provide many special moments that benefit children and older adults. Sharing stories about recipes exercises memory, gives children a sense of connection, and passes knowledge from generation to generation. Most of all, giving children time, space, and support to gain confidence in the kitchen yields priceless experiences that will last a lifetime.

**EVALUATION:** Please take a moment to provide feedback on this session. You can complete the paper copy or scan the QR code to complete online.

### **SAMPLE SUCCESS STORY**

Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. But changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home. With fewer chances to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations. In MONTH YEAR, the \_\_\_\_\_ County Extension Office hosted \_\_\_\_\_ people for a session called Inspiring Children to Become Grand Cooks. This program highlighted the important role older adults play in helping children learn how to cook, whether they are a seasoned chef or just getting started. Participants left with a recipe for mostly fun and a little mess with special young ones.

Of those surveyed after the program, \_\_\_\_\_% reported the ability to list at least two benefits of older adults and children cooking together. Also, \_\_\_\_\_% of people reported the ability to explain developmentally appropriate ways to involve children in the kitchen, and \_\_\_\_\_% can create a plan for working with children in the kitchen. As a result of this program, \_\_\_\_\_% said they intend to share their cooking skills with one or more children at least once, and \_\_\_\_\_% will plan ongoing opportunities to cook with children.

*For the conclusion, insert any observations from the lesson, personal testimony, comments from participant(s), and/or details about special activities you did.*

### **RESOURCES:**

Are you looking for activities or programming to do with adults and children during this session or as a follow-up series? Check these resources in the Food and Nutrition resources section of the Master Resource List.

**Building a Better Smoothie.** This lesson package walks through the basics of making smoothies.

**Chop Chop magazines.** A fun children's cooking magazine.

**Cook Together, Eat Together.** This is a set of seven to eight facilitated cooking socials to teach and inspire families to prepare and share nutritious, low-cost family meals together.

**Super Star Baking Chef.** This series offers activities and publications about the art of baking bread, quick breads, cookies, cakes, and pies and cobblers.

**Super Star Chef.** This curriculum covers basic cooking skills, kitchen safety and appliance use, and food safety procedures.

**Super Star Goes to the Farmers' Market.** This series includes activities and recipes related to herbs, vegetables, and fruits that you can find at the farmers' market.

**Travel the World without Leaving your Kitchen.** This international cooking series provides information and recipes from around the world.

## RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

### No-cook snacks

- Apple nachos
- Berry crunch rollups

### Meals

- Colorful quesadillas
- One pot cheesy spaghetti
- Oven-baked chicken nuggets and fries
- Turkey meatball wraps
- Whole-grain strawberry pancakes

### Dessert

- Farmers' market strawberry sorbet

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# INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN TO BECOME GRAND COOKS



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### Introduction

Cooking calls for a variety of skills. Cooking involves planning and organization so that all dishes are ready at the same time. Cooking requires understanding how to safely handle food. It also involves judgment about when food has been cooked enough or how to adapt recipes. Cooking allows for creativity of combining flavors and textures. It also builds technical skills like slicing, dicing, and mixing.

Getting children involved with cooking supports their development in many ways. Cooking helps children develop fine and gross motor skills. It inspires creativity and problem solving. Cooking can also help children practice following directions and gain independence. Language and literacy can develop through talking and reading about what they are cooking. Cooking increases children's confidence and can increase their willingness to try and ultimately eat more fruits and vegetables. Learning cooking skills at an early age has lasting impact on attitudes about cooking, skills, diet quality, and health in adulthood.

### Children need more time in the kitchen

Parents, usually mothers, are the primary source for teaching children how to cook. However, changes in culture, family structure, and food costs have led to changes in cooking at home. Between 1965 and



the early 2000s, cooking at home decreased. Even though cooking at home is on the rise, children are not usually helping.

Mothers report extra stress when children are in the kitchen because they feel a lack of control and that children are a distraction. They also report safety concerns and not wanting to clean up messes. In the past, school programs taught cooking skills, but fewer people report learning to cook in school. Research shows transportation, cost, and disability can prevent children from taking cooking classes outside of school. With fewer occasions to learn and practice cooking, there are concerns that cooking skills will be lost in younger generations.

### Grandparents can teach cooking skills

Grandparents have ever more important and varied roles in the lives of their grandchildren.

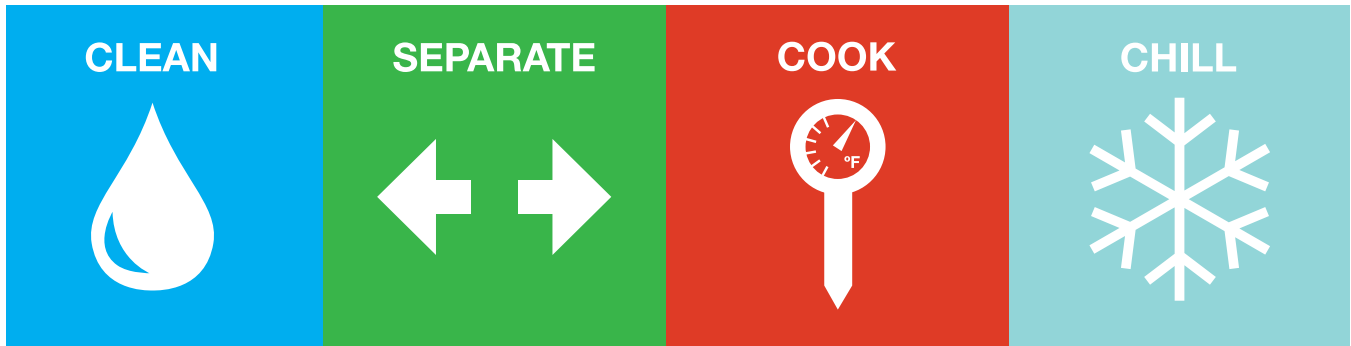


Figure 1. Food Safety Basics

- **CLEAN** - Wash hands and all work surfaces often.
- **SEPARATE** - Keep raw meat, eggs, seafood, and poultry separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- **COOK** - Cook food to the right temperature.
- **CHILL** - Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

(United States government, 2023)

It is common for grandparents to provide regular child care, live in multiple-generation households, or have custodial care. In Kentucky, approximately 58,000 children live with their grandparents. The increased presence of grandparents makes them an important resource for cooking skills. While grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to report cooking for or with grandchildren, grandfathers have shown greater comfort with food preparation than grandchildren, particularly grilling. Grandparents do not need to be expert chefs. They just need to share time, patience, and experience with grandchildren.

### **Benefits of cooking together**

The shared experience of cooking benefits grandchildren and grandparents. Working together in the kitchen provides time for meaningful conversation and builds trust. Grandchildren and grandparents can learn more about one another. They can share knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next and create lasting memories. Learning about nutritious foods together can help families change routines in ways that support healthier eating habits.

Cooking together can strengthen relationships and enhance well-being. Grandchildren can learn about family history and benefit from receiving love, support, acceptance, patience, and wisdom. Grandparents can have boosts in brain function and protection against depression. Additionally, sharing cooking skills can provide opportunities that protect against social isolation and help maintain skills for longer independent living.

### **Ideas for guiding grandchildren through the cooking process**

Create ground rules around safety. Children need supervision. Start by checking with parents about safety concerns and boundaries in the kitchen. This ensures everyone is on the same page. Next, teach or review basic food safety rules throughout the cooking process. Figure 1 shows the four steps to food safety – clean, separate, cook, and chill. Grandparents are an important role model for showing and explaining food safety practices like correct hand-washing techniques and checking the temperature of food with a food thermometer. Encourage tasting while cooking but have rules

about no double dipping. Have everyone pull back long hair and wash their hands. Be sure to clean all work surface areas and work with children to clean up along the way. If children put fingers in their nose or mouth, remind them to wash their hands. Finally, keep in mind safety risks related to heat, sharp knives or peelers, and electric cooking utensils. Set expectations about tasks children can complete independently and those that require help or supervision.

Set them up for success. Children of all ages can help with food preparation, table setup, and cleanup. With very young children, the experience is all about senses and teaching safe kitchen practices. Over time, children will gain skills and independence. Table 1 shows a general idea of age-appropriate skills. This can be particularly helpful if it has been a while since grandparents were in the kitchen with grandchildren. Skills in Table 1 are organized by age group and build upon one another. A 6-year-old child can try everything listed on that level and above. Selecting tasks that match a child's skill level can build confidence and limit frustration. It is important to remember each child develops at their own pace.

Engage in conversation. Focus on listening as well as talking. Describe what you are doing. Talk about where the food or recipe came from. Ask children questions and help them problem solve. Teach them about safety in the kitchen. Share observations throughout each food preparation step. Telling stories can create and build strong bonds.

Work through the mess. It is important to remember, children need help learning new skills. One can expect some messy moments during the learning process. Doing things together over and over will supply the practice and guidance needed to master a skill. As cooking skills improve, there should be less mess. Learning how to clean up messes is also an important life skill for children to learn. The willingness and time to work through messes in the kitchen is an opportunity for grandparents to jump in and help parents.



Make it a habit. Any amount of cooking together is helpful, but more is better. Regular opportunities to prepare meals together allow children to learn and practice the variety of skills needed to confidently. Schedule and plan daily, weekly, or monthly times to cook with grandchildren. This can be in person, or with a little preparation, through a video call. Writing down notes about the recipes made together can create a record of memories of the process for favorite dishes. Consider a special notebook or shared electronic file to record who was present during the cooking process, changes made to the recipe, where the recipe came from, what was most enjoyable about making or eating the dish, and any other memorable moments of the cooking process.

### **Conclusion**

Children need more time and guidance in the kitchen to reap the lifelong benefits of knowing how to cook. Grandparents are a valuable resource for teaching cooking skills. The special moments that occur when cooking together can supply benefits for both grandparents and grandchildren. Sharing stories about family recipes exercises memory, gives children a sense of connection, and passes family heritage from generation to generation. Most of all, giving children time, space, and support to gain confidence in the kitchen yields priceless experiences that will last a lifetime.

## Resources

For more information about how children benefit from time in the kitchen, check out this fact sheet from Utah State University Extension.

- Malan, C., Bevan, S., & Savoie-Roskos, M. R. (2022). The benefits of including kids in the kitchen [Fact sheet]. Utah State University Extension. [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension\\_curall/2288/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_curall/2288/)

For more information about food safety practices, check out this website.

Table 1. Suitable cooking skills by age		
Age Group	Cooking Skills	Kitchen Skills
Under 2 years	Very young children are not quite ready to help in the kitchen. They can play nearby with pots, pans, or storage containers as well as toy foods or kitchen sets. Talk about what is going on in the kitchen.	
2-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wash fruit and vegetables</li> <li>Knead and mix with hands</li> <li>Tear or break foods into pieces</li> <li>Use a rolling pin</li> <li>Use a cookie cutter</li> <li>Roll mixtures into a ball</li> <li>Squeeze lemons and limes</li> </ul>	Put things in the trash
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add ingredients to a bowl</li> <li>Stir and mix</li> <li>Mash foods</li> <li>Cut, chop, or slice with plastic, kid-safe knives</li> <li>Spread butter with a butter knife</li> <li>Scrape batter down a bowl</li> <li>Brush oils on food with a pastry brush</li> <li>Cut green onions and herbs with blunt kitchen scissors</li> <li>Peel fruits and vegetables with peeler</li> <li>Deseed fruits and vegetables with a spoon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put things away</li> <li>Fill drink cups</li> <li>Help set the table</li> <li>Move dirty dishes to the sink</li> <li>Wipe tables and countertops</li>   <li>Explore the garden</li> </ul>
6-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measure ingredients (with help)</li> <li>Crack eggs in a bowl</li> <li>Shuck corn</li> <li>Snap green beans</li> <li>Grease pans</li> <li>Peel fruit with fingers</li> <li>Skewer foods</li> <li>Bread, flour, and dip foods</li> <li>Sprinkle ingredients</li> <li>Juice lemon, lime, or orange using a juicer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make guided menu choices</li>   <li>Gather ingredients</li> <li>Load dishwasher</li> <li>Wash dishes</li>   <li>Help dig, plant, and harvest the garden</li>   <li>Help find items while grocery shopping</li> </ul>

Age Group	Cooking Skills	Kitchen Skills
8-9 years	Weigh and measure ingredients Beat eggs Open cans with can opener Use food thermometer to check temperature of food Use an oven or microwave Pound foods with a kitchen mallet Pour from a container Drain canned foods Shake liquids in a closed container Use a hand mixer	Set the table Store and refrigerate leftovers  Help plan gardens
10 years or older	Follow a recipe Cut, slice, and chop with kitchen knives Simmer ingredients on stovetop Boil pasta Bake foods in the oven	Once children show they can follow kitchen safety rules, they can begin doing things on their own.  Become the expert of a family recipe so that it passes down generations

Table adapted from Dean and colleagues (2021) and Ellis (2022).



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INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN  
TO BECOME  
GRAND COOKS

## Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids: Suitable Cooking and Kitchen Skills by Age

Age Group	Cooking Skills	Kitchen Skills
Under 2 years	Very young children are not quite ready to help in the kitchen. They can play nearby with pots, pans, or storage containers as well as toy foods or kitchen sets. Talk about what is going on in the kitchen.	
2-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wash fruits and vegetables</li> <li>Knead and mix with hands</li> <li>Tear or break foods into pieces</li> <li>Use a rolling pin</li> <li>Use a cookie cutter</li> <li>Roll mixtures into a ball</li> <li>Squeeze lemons and limes</li> </ul>	Put things in the trash
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add ingredients to a bowl</li> <li>Stir and mix</li> <li>Mash foods</li> <li>Cut, chop, or slice with plastic, kid-safe knives</li> <li>Spread butter with a butter knife</li> <li>Scrape batter down a bowl</li> <li>Brush oils on food with a pastry brush</li> <li>Cut green onions and herbs with blunt kitchen scissors</li> <li>Peel fruits and vegetables with peeler</li> <li>Deseed fruits and vegetables with a spoon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put things away</li> <li>Fill drink cups</li> <li>Help set the table</li> <li>Move dirty dishes to the sink</li> <li>Wipe tables and countertops</li> </ul>
6-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measure ingredients (with help)</li> <li>Crack eggs in a bowl</li> <li>Shuck corn</li> <li>Snap green beans</li> <li>Grease pans</li> <li>Peel fruit with fingers</li> <li>Skewer foods</li> <li>Bread, flour, and dip foods</li> <li>Sprinkle ingredients</li> <li>Juice lemon, lime, or orange using a juicer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather ingredients</li> <li>Load dishwasher</li> <li>Wash dishes</li> </ul>

Age Group	Cooking Skills	Kitchen Skills
8-9 years	Weigh and measure ingredients Beat eggs Open cans with can opener Use food thermometer to check temperature of food Use an oven or microwave Pound foods with a kitchen mallet Pour from a container Drain canned foods Shake liquids in a closed container Use a hand mixer	Set the table Store and refrigerate leftovers
10+ years	Follow a recipe Cut, slice, and chop with kitchen knives Simmer ingredients on stovetop Boil pasta Bake foods in the oven	Once children show they can follow kitchen safety rules, they can begin doing things on their own.

# Divide and Conquer the Kitchen with Kids

## Let's Plan

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WHO</b></p> <p><i>Who are the special young people you can work with in the kitchen? (think grandkids, neighbors, nieces and nephews, etc.)</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WHERE</b></p> <p><i>Where can you work in a kitchen together? Yours? Theirs? A local cooking class?</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WHEN</b></p> <p><i>When can you work in a kitchen together? And how often? Maybe Tuesday nights? Or Saturday mornings? What works for each of you?</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WHAT</b></p> <p><i>What are you making together? Maybe a favorite recipe? Or heating up leftovers? An afternoon snack?</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HOW</b></p> <p><i>How will you get children involved? Use the table on the front for age-appropriate ideas. Walk through your "what" from above and pick out the tasks to entrust them with.</i></p>	

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INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN  
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**Matching Game**

Match cooking and kitchen skills with the youngest age group that could appropriately complete the task with assistance. Age groups may be used more than once.

*For example, “grease pans” can be done by 6 – 7, 8 – 9, and 10+ years, but probably cannot be completed by a 4 – 5-year-old. So, 6 – 7 would be the correct answer.*

*Age group answer options: 2 – 3 years, 3 – 5 years, 6 – 7 years, 8 – 9 years, 10 years or older*

**Cooking and Kitchen Skills**



Temperature check foods with food thermometer \_\_\_\_\_



Beat eggs \_\_\_\_\_



Knead and mix with hands \_\_\_\_\_



Put things in the trash \_\_\_\_\_



Bake foods in the oven \_\_\_\_\_



Drain canned foods \_\_\_\_\_



Load dishwasher \_\_\_\_\_



Crack eggs in a bowl \_\_\_\_\_



Brush oils on food with pastry brush \_\_\_\_\_



Store and refrigerate leftovers \_\_\_\_\_



Fill drink cups \_\_\_\_\_

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**MARTIN-GATTON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT**

INSPIRING GRANDCHILDREN  
TO BECOME  
GRAND COOKS



## Matching Game Answer Key

Match cooking and kitchen skills with the youngest age group that could appropriately complete the task with assistance. Age groups may be used more than once.

*For example, “grease pans” can be done by 6 – 7, 8 – 9, and 10+ years, but probably cannot be completed by a 4 – 5-year-old. So, 6 – 7 would be the correct answer.*

Temperature check foods with food thermometer **(8 – 9 years)**

Knead and mix with hands **(2 – 3 years)**

Bake foods in the oven **(10 years or older)**

Load dishwasher **(6 – 7 years)**

Brush oils on food with pastry brush **(3 – 5 years)**

Fill drink cups **(3 – 5 years)**

Beat eggs **(8 – 9 years)**

Put things in the trash **(2 – 3 years)**

Drain canned foods **(8 – 9 years)**

Crack eggs in a bowl **(6 – 7 years)**

Store and refrigerate leftovers **(8 – 9 years)**

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