

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



Kids in the kitchen



“The kitchen is a great place to start developing the skills of independent living in your kids. Cooking by nature is practical, a lot of fun and you get to eat the results of your efforts immediately.”

Things have certainly hotted up in many Australian kitchens as family members go head-to-head inspired by some recent TV reality cooking show type competitions. Father-son cook-offs, mother-daughter bake-offs and all-in family challenges are the go as families rediscover what was once the hub of every home – the **kitchen**.

The positive spin-off from all this activity, apart from promoting better family relationships, is that kids are learning how to cook. For someone like me, who believes the fundamental goal of all parents is to make themselves redundant, teaching kids to cook is a no-brainer.

The kitchen is a great place to start developing the skills of independent living in your kids. Cooking by nature is practical, a lot of fun and you get to eat the results of your efforts immediately.

It has the added bonus of being boy-friendly. Many boys love to cook because it's hands-on, messy and encourages creativity and experimentation. These characteristics suit the learning styles of many boys, particularly those who abhor being stuck behind a school desk. It's little wonder that many of our top chefs are men.

If your kids haven't been bitten by the cooking bug yet, here are some ideas guaranteed to get them into the kitchen, and developing a bunch of great skills as well:



- ✓ **Start young:** Kids should be able to cook an edible, interesting two course meal for the whole family by the time they finish primary school. They are perfectly capable of doing this, but from my experience, few kids can. The key is to start when children are young.
- ✓ **Start small:** If your kids are strangers to cooking and preparing meals, start by showing them how to make their school lunches, prepare snacks and prepare parts of the family meals. Little by little, increase the number of food preparation activities until they are familiar with the kitchen, feel comfortable with many of the utensils and can read some basic recipes.
- ✓ **You help me:** Cooking is one of the few activities that parents and kids can do together, so try to get a child involved in some way, each time you cook a meal. Whether it's peeling vegetables, pouring water into a pot or stirring chocolate sauce in a bowl there are plenty of ways to involve kids with you in the kitchen.
- ✓ **Give them a purpose:** I've always found kids will usually do just about anything if they see a purpose for what they do. So if your child is a reluctant mini-chef, get him or her cooking for you, their friends or part of a family celebration. They will feel good about all the compliments they receive.
- ✓ **Let them choose:** Kids are more likely to stick to any decision that they have had a say in making. This is why I've always asked my children's opinion about a range of matters. It's about establishing some buy-in. The same principle applies to the kitchen. Invite your kids to choose a meal to cook, perhaps once a week, and be willing to work alongside them to produce a joint masterpiece.

If all this sounds a little high maintenance for your liking, consider the time spent developing the cooking habit in your kids as an investment in your future redundancy. You don't want to be cooking for them forever.

Cooking is also a great way to get kids talking, because while their hands are busy, their tongues loosen up. So if you have a conversational clam in the family who keeps things close to their chest try some shoulder-to-shoulder parenting that cooking together provides.

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