

**I'VE BEEN  
WORKING  
IN THE  
KITCHEN !**

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Kids, even preschoolers, are learning all the time.  
A small child spends a lot of time learning how to use muscles —

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...for tasks like scooping, stirring, pouring, patting, and shaping.



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And the child is also learning how to figure things out. Will the sand in the little container fit into the big one? Sure it will.

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Will the sand in the big container fit into the little one? Maybe. Maybe not. Children may spend many minutes experimenting and getting the feel of the sand as they pour it and sift it through their fingers.

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Kids love to pretend, too, and much of what they pretend is what they see adults doing. All this may seem like play to a grown-up

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...but for children this is both learning and important work, as well as fun. In some ways it's like the work of an experimental scientist...

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...or an engineer in a laboratory. Or like a chef in the kitchen.  
And while these children are...



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...pretending to cook, they are also learning about cooperation  
and even about family responsibilities

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After a lot of scooping and pouring in the sandbox and “pretending” to cook, it’s not a very big step...

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...to real work in the kitchen, even for small children. It's a kind of learning that will last a lifetime, and getting started young is not too soon.



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Kids can start learning about food outside, right at the source.  
Apples, of course, grow on trees — not in grocery stores

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A child can develop a new physical skill, picking. There are other things to be learning about picking, like choosing the right size, color, shape, and testing for firmness.



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Maybe a grown-up needs to give a little boost to get the job done.



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The child learns to be careful putting the apples into the bag so they aren't bruised. The apples

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...they pick are special because they did it themselves.

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A trip to a storage facility is a good place to show the youngster long-term storage.



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Children learn how cold storage keeps the apples fresh, and that apples come in different colors. When you bring the apples home, it's time to do something with them...

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...other than just eating them. Getting a good start in cooking begins with washing thoroughly. And clean clothes suitable for food preparation are just as important as clean hands.

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Children want to do something “grownup”. They want to learn jobs that adults do in the kitchen. But start with jobs that fit a child’s mental



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...and physical ability. Cleaning and preparing a work area is something that a two-year old can do using big muscles.

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Give little reminders and hints from time to time, like how to check for crumbs and water spots. What may seem obvious to you is the basic stuff the child needs to know — and may often need to be reminded of.

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Make the kitchen work as safe and convenient as possible. Set up a large towel to catch the scraps, or use a tray.



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Give the child the right tool: a cloth or sponge the right size, or paper towels. Make it a special color, different from the one used to clean the floor. Once they know how to do the job, they'll tackle it with typical kid gusto. And they're ready for similar tasks, like scrubbing potatoes or apples. Or even cleaning finger marks from woodwork

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Now let's try something simple, like making uncooked applesauce. It's a good beginning activity because no hot pans are needed. Eventually, kids will learn that there is more than one way to make it. Involve...

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...the child in selecting sweet or tart apples, in deciding whether to keep the skins on or take them off, and in selecting seasonings. Much of the success of kids in the kitchen depends on the decisions they can help make.



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Children three years old can learn to handle table knives to cut the apples small enough to fit in the blender and to peel the skin.

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Here's a safety hint: Tell children that sharp knives are for big people. Ask the child where his fingers are; show him the sharp knife edge and how to keep his fingers away from the edge.

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Sometimes a little help from adult hands can make the difference between success and frustration.



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The child must understand one basic safety rule: a task that involves anything hot, heavy, sharp , or electrical is a grown-up job. For an older child using these skills, the tasks should never be done alone.

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A three-year-old can safely put in apple pieces, sugar, and cinnamon, and...

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...turn on the switch— with close adult supervision. It's fun to watch the pieces go round and round and get all mushy.



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A five-year old can determine which measuring utensil to use, how much to fill it, and add the ingredients to the mixture.

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It's a safe, easy job to scoop the apple sauce into bowls—just like sand in the sandbox. And children can use big spoons, bowls, and spatulas, because they already have some experience with similar sandbox tools.

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Children can use many of the same skills learned in making applesauce to make fruit salad.



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This way they will learn about how different foods can be used together.

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Of course, no matter what you decide to make, be sure to give your child the clean-up job. It's part of learning the responsibility of grown-up work, and learning safety and sanitation procedures.

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The child learns that apples can be used to make quite different foods. Many of the same skills of cutting, peeling, coring, and mixing that were used to make apple sauce and fruit salad can be used to make muffins.



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New ingredients: flour, baking powder, milk, eggs, and salt will expand the child's knowledge of new mixtures and flavors.

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Let the children feel the flour and make comparisons: is the texture of flour like that of sand? Is the mushiness of the batter like that of sand and water mixed together?

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Let the child take little tastes of some of the ingredients to see how much they will be changed when they are baked. Even egg shells are interesting.



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To give arm muscles a workout, show the child how to use an egg beater...

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...with perhaps a little help. Avoid using an electric mixer: moving beaters and little fingers are a bad combination.

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Easily-cleaned play clothes, or a special cooking shirt or an apron can help control the mess. A bath at the nearest opportunity may be the only solution. Things may be messy at first, but that's part of learning— especially if the kid is learning grown-up behavior and responsibility.



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When it's time to pour the batter, the child will use a different kind of pan and can get a workout counting the number of muffin cups

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Some kids use a forehand technique for spooning,

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...while others may prefer a backhand. Whatever does the job is just fine. There's a fine bit...



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...of judgment to be learned about sorting cups and dividing batter. This also helps develop hand-eye coordination.

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Amazing! What happened to the milk, flour, and other stuff? It baked into muffins! What magic! Helping to make that magic is a big booster to

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...a child's self-confidence and sense of worth. And it's a reward for the responsibility that the child took. The smile says it all.



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Before eating, there's another clean-up job—wiping the table top

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Setting the places and putting out the napkins.

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Give the child a glass and a pitcher that fit his hand. Note the two-handed pouring technique for security. Remember, if there are spills, she knows how to clean up the mess. The adult is there to help only if a glass breaks.

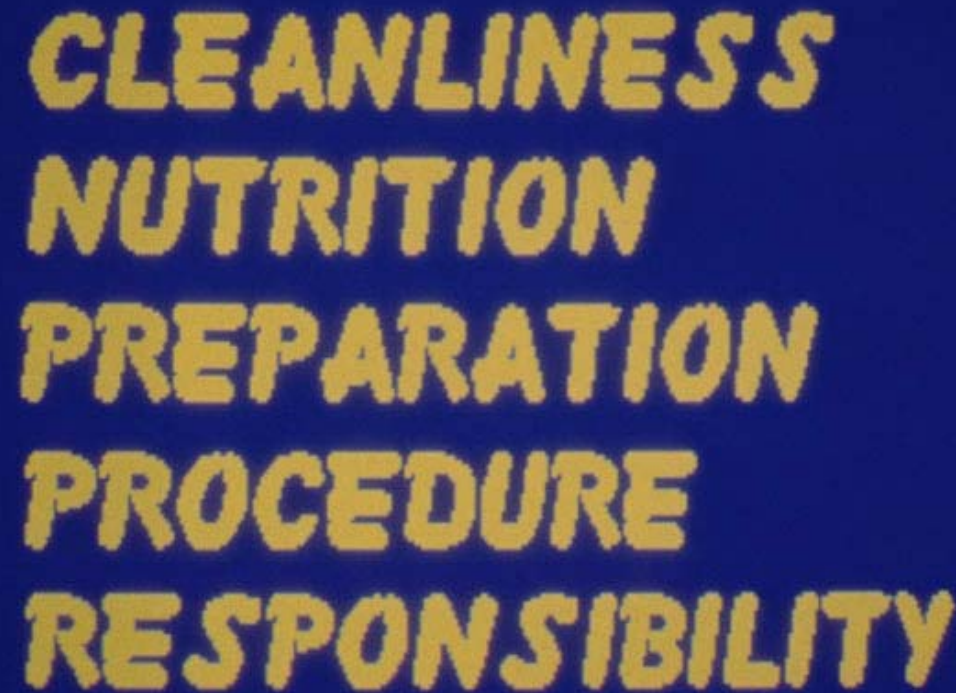


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Just as the children share the work of food preparation, now they share the fun scarfing down those muffins.

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**CLEANLINESS  
NUTRITION  
PREPARATION  
PROCEDURE  
RESPONSIBILITY**

As kids learn cooking skills, they learn many grown-up values as well: cleanliness—to protect health; nutrition— many different foods are needed for health and growth; preparation— food and equipment are needed to get the job done; procedure—the order of operations is vital to success; and responsibility— getting a job done and being able to do grown-up jobs. These skills and attitudes will last a lifetime.

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As children develop basic skills, they can learn new techniques and handle some new foods, like ice cream and yoghurt.



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They will explore new textures and consistencies: it's creamy, smooth, and cold. And yoghurt in...

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...milkshakes are yummy as well as nutritious. That's a combination that's hard to beat.

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And they can learn other ways to use yoghurt— in salad dressings, in fruit mixtures, or just by itself.



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Peanut butter is a universal favorite, but few of us get the chance to make our own.

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A food blender makes smooth peanut butter, or an old-fashioned hand grinder makes crunchy...

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...peanut butter. Two textures for one food.



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There's a lot of fun in figuring out new ways to open foods. Take the humble hardboiled egg. You and I don't give much thought to removing the shell, but for a four-year old the hen fruit is a challenge. How is she doing it?

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Or try banging it on the edge of the plate to get started.

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...then sort of poke around inside. The peeling process can be used for oranges or shrimp.



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A child's tastes are often acquired rather than inborn. And it's often a problem to get her to try something new. It may be helpful to start off with a favorite food for a first kitchen experience and then move on to getting the child to help you with...

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...a food that's not familiar. It might even work with lemons!  
She doesn't believe it now...

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...but if it's good enough for Susy, maybe she'll try it.



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To kids, colors seem richer than they do to grown-ups...

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...and so do flavors. Yellow lemons...

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...and yellow cheese.



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But what a difference in taste!

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Shopping. Everybody does it. A child who knows something about food names and colors and shapes and can count is ready to learn about shopping.

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The grocery store is the place for concepts like budgeting, value, quality, variety.



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There's order to a store: how the products are arranged, with paper products all in one place, vegetables in another, and so on.

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The kindergartner learning the alphabet will find all kinds of letters on cans, boxes, and bottles. And of course there are pictures and colors of all sorts to help them figure out what's inside a package.

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Even a little kid can start with a simple concept like “little and big”.



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Since the child knows something about apples, he's ready to make comparisons with other round fruit, like lemons and limes. And there's a matter of judging the difference in color and aroma between the yellow lemon and the green lime.

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Or color and size differences between red and brown potatoes.  
Can he count a dozen oranges for you?

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Or read the numbers on a scale? He'll learn to count in a big hurry when he knows that he's helping you shop like a grown-up.



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Learning about foods and cooking is not a “one-time thing”. It’s a lifelong skill that depends...

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...planning, judgment, and timing.

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When a child begins learning about these things at a very young...



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...age he or she is developing useful skills that will last all through life. But more importantly,

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...the child is gaining in confidence and building a sense of accomplishment and independence.

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These qualities are hard to measure, but they are vital to growth and maturity.



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So when you see a child “playing” in the sandbox, you know she’s having fun, and she’s learning, too.

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