

Younger children mainly engage with tasting, knowing the names of different foods, cutting and holding them. Simple cooking ingredients are combined together for the experience of mixing and transformation (e.g. adding water to flour and making a sticky mixture).

For older children, the cooking area is structured to promote independence. Ingredients are stored where children can reach them and are clearly labelled. Recipes are laid out so that children can follow them, first with adult help, and then independently. Children gain experience of how to gradually add liquids, to stir, beat, and fold ingredients together etc.

Cooking is an accessible way for children to find out about different cultures and traditions, and develop positive attitudes about diversity. By taking part in preparing and clearing up after meals, children have a strong experience of living in a community, sharing out work and making a positive contribution to the smooth running of the day.

The whole cooking process is important, from the decision to choose a recipe, to the washing up at the end, sharing food (or taking it home) and reflecting on the processes of change.

Cookery as a context for development and learning in the EYFS

Cooking helps children's personal, social and emotional development by providing opportunities for exploration, developing skills, confidence and autonomy, and sometimes involvement for long periods of time with or without adult support. Cooking can be difficult, so children feel a sense of pride and satisfaction when they eat or take home what they have made. Older children can cook independently, following a recipe, selecting ingredients and tools themselves and asking for support if they need it from other children or adults.

Cooking also supports children's developing communication, language and literacy as they talk about what they are doing and collaborate with others. Children will often have to follow precise instructions from adults, and use talk to organise, order and clarify what they are doing. In following recipes, children are learning how to select and retrieve information from books.

Children develop their problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy by finding out about quantity, starting with ideas of "more", "a lot", and over time developing more sophisticated ideas of exact measurement (of quantity, weight, size and time). Cooking presents a "real context" for the use of number – counting out the spoons of sugar, for example, correctly reading a number in a recipe, or placing muffin mixture into cases to experience division and one-to-one correspondence.

Cooking is a good context for children to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world, finding out about different ingredients, what happens when things are mixed together and how heat and cold changes substances. Through preparing and eating food, children can find out about other cultures and traditions. Whilst cooking, children can observe materials closely and explore them with all their senses, and talk about what they see and how things change. They can gain first-hand experience of cause-effect relationships, and observe which changes are one-way and which are reversible (you can melt ice, but can't get the flour and butter back from a cake you have baked).

They can use tools for a purpose, supporting their physical development, and learn about keeping safe whilst experiencing risks (e.g. cutting with sharp knives). They can find out how substances can be changed by tools, for example by whisking egg whites.

Children's creative development is supported as they develop their own ideas and tastes in cooking (e.g. choosing to make a chocolate or plain cake, cutting cookies like animals, or into mathematical shapes). They can talk about and evaluate what they have done.