

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

If creating the perfect family pastime is on your radar, why not pop into the kitchen and instead of "handing out the dough" for entertaining the kids you can roll out the dough...!

One of the most important things to remember when cooking with your kids is to have fun. If they spill a little flour and the kitchen is a mess, it is okay. Learning how to clean up as they are cooking is very much part of the learning experience!



There are a great many benefits to letting kids lend a hand with the cooking. Not only does it boost their self esteem, it teaches them math skills, science and how to provide for themselves.

If you incorporate lots of healthy food and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, you'll even be teaching your kids how to have a healthy lifestyle. Teaching your kids to cook will have benefits that will last them a lifetime.

It's also a great party idea, have some of your kids' friends over and have a cooking party. It saves lots of money, instead of hiring a bouncy castle and in-house entertainment like clowns and face painters, spend some time in the kitchen rolling out pizza dough (you will quickly realise that flour is a natural face paint!)

If you plan ahead, they can prepare and present their own lunch. Not only will they be having fun together, they will be learning to cook. You can also print out the recipes that they can take home and show their own families how to make a fantastic pizza with their favourite toppings.

You can get the kids to help you plan a weeks' menu and then help with the shopping. Learning how to plan a menu will help them when they are on their own. If you teach them this simple skill now while they are still young they will be less likely to be calling for a pizza delivery every night when they go away to college.

Here's a simple two step approach:

Develop an outline Menu Plan.

Decide a food category for each night of the week. For example:

Sunday- casserole
Monday-chicken
Tuesday- vegetarian
Wednesday-Hamburger/beef
Thursday- pasta
Friday fun night- pizza, hot dogs, etc.

Saturday- soup

Think about what your family enjoys eating - it is what will work best.

If you don't eat beef or pork then leave that out.

Now go through the outline and be specific on what you want for each night.

For example:

Sunday- Lamb Casserole

Monday- Chicken a la king

Tuesday- Vegetarian lasagne

Wednesday- Grilled hamburgers

Thursday- Pasta Bolognese or Tuna bake

Friday- Homemade Pizza

Saturday- Chicken noodle soup

Sometimes just narrowing your choices down makes planning your menus easier. Think favourites, think ease of preparing, think cost and Enjoy!

During the school holidays or weekends you might like to plan your time in the kitchen around a particular theme and let the kids help put it together. Centring the dinner on one idea can create a lot of fun for the kids

Here's a great idea to get you started... Create a colour themed dinner, like meatballs in spaghetti sauce with roasted red beetroot and strawberries for a red night. You could even dress to match your theme!

It's easy to get carried away with rice crispy bars, fairy cakes and strawberry meringue nests but it is really important to think beyond desserts. Think about incorporating lots of kids' lunchbox ideas, tasty breakfasts and healthy snacks. It doesn't mean you shouldn't make desserts, just balance making desserts with healthy food too. Learning to eat healthy is an important life skill.

Try and spend time in the kitchen as often as you can, perhaps spending one night a week with each child, encouraging them to help with the menu planning and preparing the meal. The designated cooking time gives you great one on one time with each child whilst creating long lasting memories!