Saturday, Sept. 13, is Kids Take Over the Kitchen Day.

You can start kids early learning many skills in addition to cooking while in the kitchen. Invite kids to help with different stages of preparation according to their skills. Even toddlers love to be a part of the action. Granted, it does take a lot of patience from mom and dad but the results are worth taking a deep breath and letting your kids participate.

Self-worth and self-confidence are two big important values that can be learned in the kitchen. In the early stages of development, this takes a lot of guidance and some planning from parents. When letting younger kids help in the kitchen, make sure the kitchen is safe — safe stools to stand on, pan handles turned away from the edge of the stove or counter, knives in a safe place, etc. Being there to guide is important, and it is also important to not take over the project. If you want to teach your child self-confidence, there will be a bit of spilling in the process. Teaching them how to clean as you go is another valuable skill. Look at it as a process, not a mistake.

Other valuable concepts that can be learned in a kitchen are teamwork and taking turns, especially if you have more than one child. The more kids are exposed to situations where they can share and work together, the more they develop the skills to do so. Let the kids be a part of the decision-making process, even little decisions such as whether to add blueberries or cranberries to the pancakes or muffins, what to add to a salad or what to make for a meal. If you have a finicky eater, it may be that letting them help will encourage them to eat better.

Planning meals can save money at the grocery store. Find a time each week to sit down with the family and plan a menu. Assign the kids a day to “cook” and let them suggest what they want to cook for that meal with your help. As they get older, they will need less help and will be well on their way to being self-sufficient. Allowing kids to experiment with a bit of guidance, for a positive outcome, goes a long way to building many skills that can last a lifetime. Parents can help with reading and math skills as the kids learn to use recipes.
Kids can be quite capable if given a chance. Give them age-appropriate jobs. The following is a general guideline of what different ages can work on. This is only a guideline and all kids are different in their abilities. You’ll never know unless you let them try. And remember that developing skills takes time and practice. If the parent always steps in to “rescue” the situation, it thwarts the learning curve of the kid.

- Two-year-olds: peel eggs; spread with a butter knife; and cut (soft fruits, toast, etc.) with a butter knife
- Three-year-olds: spread, sprinkle, shake, crack eggs (into a separate bowl), stir and pour
- Four-year-olds: measure, sift, roll dough, grease pans, shake and mix
- Five-year-olds: pat, measure, mix, tear, cut, toss, stir, roll and knead
- Six-year-olds: pour, stir, cut, whip cream, sauté, grate cheese, sift, measure and beat
- Seven-year-olds: read simple recipes, peel, wash, cut, wrap, stir and mix
- Eight-year-olds: shape dough, cut fat into ingredients, fold
- Nine-year-olds: drain, roll, use pastry blender, fill muffin cups, brown meat, read recipes, and cook most things with a little supervision.

The bottom line is to have fun with the kids. Experiment with new recipes. Explore new foods. Think about how foods can be presented differently. Let some of that kid creativity bubble over. Here is a great website to get you started: [www.nutrition.gov/life-stages/children/kids-kitchen](http://www.nutrition.gov/life-stages/children/kids-kitchen). There are lots of ideas on the Internet if you have a chance to look.

So make a date with your kid on Kids Take Over the Kitchen Day and let that be the start or the continuation of life skills that will last a lifetime.

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