Kids in the Kitchen

Many adults think that when kids cook, it will be a disaster. Not true! Some adults foresee messy pots and pans, spilled foods, and dishes that are either too burned to eat or not cooked enough. But while teaching kids to cook may not be easy, it can be done. Whether kids are preschoolers or preteens, it’s never too early or too late for kids to learn a few handy tricks in the kitchen.

Here are a few tips for cooking with kids of all ages:

**Toddlers and preschoolers:** Pick recipes that have only a few easy steps. Prepackaged mixes like pudding, instant oatmeal, and cookies are simple to make. Young children can also help make toasted waffles, smoothies, and even pizza. Show kids how to preheat the oven, and then have them put their favorite toppings on a prepared crust. (You will want to bake the pizza yourself, however.)

**School-age children:** Teach kids kitchen basics like prewashing fruits and vegetables before cooking. Kids can tackle more difficult dishes with adult help. They can also help plan the family’s menu for the week. Good dishes to try include pasta salad, simple soups from scratch, macaroni and cheese, and sandwiches.

**Teens:** Teens should be able to cook anything an adult can cook, so long as they follow safety precautions. Encourage teens to whip up some pancakes from scratch, a pot of chili, or tacos with plenty of chopped fresh vegetables.

Be forewarned—teaching kids to cook does take a bit of work. First and foremost, the kitchen must be safe for kids. Knives and other sharp objects must be safely stored. Kids must also be taught how to avoid burns and prevent fires.