**Cooking Skills**

Engaging in food preparation and cooking skills is a great way to develop a range of motor skills (movement), process skills (understanding and interacting with the environment) and independence. For example, use of cutlery / tools, bi-manual integration (coordinated use of both hands together), hand strength and grasp, organisational skills and safety awareness can be developed through cooking skills practice.

**Things to Consider**

**Tools – adapted or alternative options to support independence such as:**

* Cutlery to support positioning and grasp – Kura Cutlery (older children or young people), Caring Cutlery (younger children), Nana’s Manners Cutlery (3 stages from infant to older child)
* Knives – Kiddi-Kutter (safety knife), crinkle / wavy cutters, serrated nylon safety knives

* Vegetable Peelers – Left or right-handed peelers, thicker handled, palm peelers or electric peelers.
* Other - non-slip matting or adapted chopping board (with prongs to hold food steady), jar openers, plate gripper or fitted oven glove.

**Instructions – teaching or support strategies**

* Side-on modelling
* Hand-over-hand
* Pictures or now and next
* Verbal prompts

**Risks**

**Think about and discuss risks and safety with your child (ensure your child has good awareness of these and/or is monitored to ensure safety)**

* Allergies / intolerances
* Injury from use of tools (knives, peelers etc.)
* Injury from use of appliances (safety around electrical items, open flames etc.)

**Challenge – setting the right challenge:**

In order to keep an activity motivating, we have to ensure it is simple enough to be achievable but also challenging enough to be rewarding and to progress skills.

Follow these rules to set the right challenge:

1. **Identify meaningful goal/s -** Discuss with your child, what they would like to achieve. This will ensure they remain motivated: this might be to make their own snack, make their breakfast, support you with evening meal preparation or to improve their confidence with cutlery skills.
2. **Plan -** Once you have identified a goal, think about what resources you need to be able to do this. What are the steps needed and how long will this take? It might be that you focus on a simplified version of the goal or a specific skill first and build up.
3. **Cook** - Work together to achieve the goal you have set. This might be through direct support to position a knife, gather the ingredients or it might be that you support your child through verbal prompts for the next steps and technique. Strategies such as side-on modelling and hand-over-hand are very beneficial to support cooking skills.
4. **Review -** Did you achieve your goal? What worked well? What was difficult? Use this as an opportunity to identify more goals for specific skills to work on e.g. chopping or peeling. Think about what you would like to achieve next?

**Activities to try:**

Here are examples of cooking skills activities – these can be done to observe current skill levels and/or as a starting point to build confidence.

**Level I – no cooking, use of tools only e.g.**

Fruit kebabs or salad

Sandwich with one filling (ham, premade filling, cheese)

Cereal with milk

Chopping vegetables for evening meal

Sweet Pizza (wrap or pitta with spread of choice and fruit or other toppings)

**Level II – a degree of cooking, using appliances and tools e.g.**

Toast with spread (butter, jam etc.)

Beans / Scrambled egg on toast

Instant noodles (on the hob or microwave)

Tuna and sweetcorn pasta

**Level III – complex meals which require using appliances, tools and sequencing e.g.**

Pasta with meat and sauce (pre-made or homemade)

Baked potato with filling (beans, grated cheese)

Cakes, muffins or brownies (with fruit or nuts, toppings and/or icing)

Pizza with one-to-two toppings (premade or homemade dough base with chopped vegetables, meat or cheese)