

Building relationships with family and food

Teaching children how to cook can help instil healthy eating habits early on and it turns out it's never too soon to start, as Mattie Lacey-Davidson discovers

Cooking with children can help teach them about different food groups, and what is or isn't healthy, therefore instilling good eating habits. And as you go, you can teach them about different ingredients, where they come from and why they're nutritional.

Children's cookery author and food expert Annabel Karmel says: "When they were little, my children used to love growing cress in egg cups on the shelf in our kitchen. Growing your own vegetables in the garden or even herbs on the windowsill is a great way to get children excited about food. They'll love putting freshly picked home-grown cress, chives or tomatoes in their sandwiches.

"Getting children to take an active interest in what they're eating is essential for their general health and wellbeing. You'll stand a good chance of instilling a love of good, healthy food when preparing simple meals together from scratch. And if you have a fussy eater in the family, they're far more likely to eat

something they've actually prepared rather than something you've simply plonked in front of them."

Aside from nutrition, calculating ingredients and following the processes will also help develop children's maths and motor skills, while cooking food from around the world can also encourage cultural understanding.

According to Rosalind Rathouse, who runs Cookery School at Little Portland Street and has been teaching for more than 50 years, it's never too soon to get your little ones involved: "The earlier, the better. They need to have fun getting messy and putting their hands in dough, then eating what they've made. They even love playing with water when they're little, so they can help with washing up."

Other than sharp knives or hot hobs, the main thing you need to be wary of is doing too much for too long — this could make it either overwhelming or boring.

This doesn't mean you have to keep things plain and simple though. Introducing new textures, colours

and interesting flavours is a good way to teach little ones about a variety of foods while keeping the process fun and intriguing.

"It needs to be short and fun, so they come away remembering how enjoyable cooking is and wanting more," Rathouse explains.

Over time, you can give your child more and more responsibility. This could include giving them weighed-out ingredients when they're able to read and follow recipes and asking them to weigh things for you. As they become more independent, it's still important to remain present to keep an eye.

Of course, you may want to continue cooking together no matter how advanced they get. Rathouse explains: "For me, one of the most important things is that it creates good parent/child relationships. It gives children an opportunity to talk about what's happening in their lives with an older person, and it's also a chance for the adult to discuss what's on their mind, such as family finances or sibling issues."



▲ Cookery School at Little Portland Street PHOTOGRAPH: GAVIN WREN

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