



CARE & NATURAL LEARNING

Guidance for Families at Home with Young Children

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Participating in meal prep and table setting

Cooking and prepping meals with kids can be as simple or as elaborate as you decide. I know, as a busy parent, sometimes I cherish my alone time cooking and find that inviting my kids to help makes more work for me. I need to be in the right frame of mind to slow down and include my children and remember that while they might make a big mess cooking, or might not load the dishwasher the way I want them to – it is an essential part of their growth to gain these skills, as well as an important part of our relationship and our family life. You might be able to integrate your children into your cooking and meal prep rituals naturally, or you might find it challenging, but just know that you can start in very simple ways and take small steps. These small steps go a long way in showing children your trust, giving them real meaningful work, helping them experience their agency and belonging as well as offering a good transition activity. I find that in the last 10 minutes before dinner goes on the table, and when the whole house smells delicious, children become antsy -and it can be the perfect time to pull them into meal prep. Remember, it might take your attention at first to get your children involved in meal prep, but it pays off in the long run once it becomes a ritual and they know what to do.

Salad prep: Save salad preparation for last and save a job for your child- such as peeling the carrots or chopping the cucumbers. Here is a kid friendly [dog-shaped knife](#), from *Kuhn Rikon* that makes the job fun! Sometimes children who won't eat salad will enjoy a vegetable relish tray with choices of veggies they can eat with their fingers such as carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, peas or sliced peppers.

Setting the table: Leave a stack of plates, and utensils on the counter and ask your child to set the table. If you are worried about children carrying breakable ceramic plates or glass dishes, just ask them to do one piece at a time. The back and forth repetitive motor activity of getting each item is a good calming and organizing activity before sitting at a meal. Trusting children with real dishes motivates them to move cautiously and handle items with care. Placing one plate in front of each chair, or matching up forks and spoons is good practice in counting, showing one-to-one correspondence, and demonstrating visual spatial activity.

Making Name Cards: Ask your child to make name cards for everyone. These can be decorated or changed weekly. Maybe your family sits in the same places at each meal, but every now and then your child can decide who sits where by setting up the name cards while setting the table.

Center piece arrangement: Collect a basket of interesting items such as stones, flowers, moss and plastic figurines. Ask your child to make a center piece arrangement for the table. Arranging items can really occupy children and allow them some creative expression while making your table lovely and creating a unique conversation piece. This time of year when our yards are full of dandelions, daffodils and forsythia – you could ask your child to prepare a yellow bouquet for the center piece.

I discuss these ideas very briefly here Topic: setting the table with children Meeting Recording:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/vpd-l-Ghpz83EoWS5gSDV_98W9Trfa6shyhKrvZczR62B3IKNVqiZ7MbZrcn15o5itY-XpHf002NQozq?autoplay=true&startTime=1588171816000