

KNIFE SKILLS AND KITCHEN SAFETY

Proper knife handling is probably the most important lesson the children will learn in the kitchen throughout the ASP – and is arguably the most popular. In this essential cooking lesson, children learn how to manoeuvre safely through the kitchen and how to cook carefully and with skill. This lesson lays the groundwork for future cooking sessions and usually takes place within the first few sessions of the ASP.

RUNNING THE LESSON

1. To prepare: disperse ingredients among the chopping stations. Place the knives along the top edge of the cutting boards with the blade facing away from the child – the “resting position”.
2. Assign participants to the different chopping stations. Teach the first skill: how to safely manoeuvre around the kitchen with knives. Emphasize that whenever kids are not immediately using their knife, it should be in resting position. Knives should never be used for pointing at items, for shooing people away, for scratching oneself, etc. Whenever one is not using the knife it should be put back into “resting position.”
3. Demonstrate how to safely take a participant’s knife from their workstation to the sink for cleaning when they are done using it:
 - Kids should take the knife firmly into one hand, with the point of the knife facing down to the floor and the blade facing to the back
 - They then turn their body so that the arm holding the knife is furthest from their workstation and from other people. Say, clearly and loudly, “knife behind” while keeping space between themselves and others as they pass from their workstation to the sink. They practice going around the kitchen safely holding their knife and passing others.
4. Now the children are ready to learn how to properly hold a knife. Instruct them to hold the handle firmly with all fingers wrapped around the handle, as if they were holding a hammer. Correct common habits such as placing the index finger on the dull side of the knife, or holding the knife loosely with the fingers. A firmer grip is safer than handling the knife with hesitation. Make sure all children are pointing their knife away from other children.

AGE: 8-12, flexible

TIME: 30-45 min. Plus 30 minutes for recipe preparation

MATERIALS AND SETUP:

- A variety of vegetables (bell peppers, cucumbers, etc.)
- At least one knife per child, of varying sizes and style including a larger chef’s knife and a paring knife
- One cutting board per child and/or enough space for each child to work
- Images or prepared examples of food cuts: chopped, finely diced, minced, sliced, etc.
- Recipes calling for a variety of chopped vegetables or fruits (e.g. a salad bar, fruit salad, veggie quesadilla, or the following recipes)

What to cook?

The knife skills lesson is great because it flexibly pairs well with so many recipes. Kids can show off their new knowledge of slicing and dicing with the recipes that follow (**rainbow noodle salad** and **party wraps**). Discuss which cut would work best for each ingredient to showcase the taste and crunch factor. Do kids prefer giant pieces of onion or a fine dice? Do they want slices of red pepper or chunks? As kitchen ninjas, they get to choose.

To promote making connections between this task and the art of cooking, you may want to ask the children during the lesson why they would chop different ingredients to different sizes versus just chopping everything to the same size. Explain that for some recipes it is better to have the flavours blend together, and that is why you would dice or mince ingredients. For other recipes you may want the flavour of certain ingredients to stand out, and thus would chop or slice them into bigger pieces.

5. Demonstrate the proper motion of cutting: keeping the tip of the knife on the cutting board as much as possible, and gliding the knife in a circular motion as they chop (like the wheels of a locomotive train!). Get kids to practice this motion on their boards without chopping anything just yet.
6. With their non-chopping hand, have the kids mimic a claw: their fingers are rounded and fingertips are curled inwards. Have them place their “claw” on the item they are chopping. This protects their fingertips from the blade of the knife and keeps the ingredient in place on the cutting board. Start by just having them pin down the food with their “claw.”
7. Once kids understand the concept of the claw, they can slowly begin chopping for the recipes. Adults will have to pay close attention to each child, helping them with specific techniques for the foods they’re chopping. Finally, use the chopped ingredients to make a fantastic meal!

Kitchen safety

It’s extremely important that all adults model safe behaviours in the kitchen at all times. Children are very perceptive and will be quick to call out adults who are not following the rules. A fun way to cover this topic is to have an adult volunteer dress or behave inappropriately and get the kids to point out what they’re doing wrong.

ASPs begin their first day by taking children on a tour of the kitchen area, showing where everything is, and pointing out special places to take care, i.e. around the oven and stove. Kids see how to use the dishwashing station and where cleaning supplies are kept.

1. Emphasize the importance of appropriate attire in the kitchen — closed toed shoes, shirts with sleeves, no large dangling jewellery — as well as the requirement to safely tie back loose hair.
2. Show kids where the clean aprons are located and show them how to put them on properly — children can be notorious for letting their apron strings come loose, creating a tripping hazard!
3. Show how to properly wash their hands and in a humorous manner show how not to contaminate their hands once they are washed: by scratching their skin or their hair, wiping their nose or their eyes, or licking their fingers/eating while cooking.

Cut to the chase: Tips from The Local CFC on working with kids and knives

- A board that is sliding is not safe. Here at The Local, we put a non-slip surface under our cutting boards. Carpet underlay cut into small squares works well. Damp cloths also do the trick.
- Round foods are dangerous. Slice a flat “bottom” to the food to stabilize it.
- We recommend participants get comfortable pulling or pushing the whole length of the knife through the food when cutting. This method means that less pressure needs to be put on the knife, meaning less strain on the hand and less chance of the knife getting stuck.
- For total beginners, start by using soft foods like bananas or mushrooms and cut with butter knives or a plastic lettuce knife.



Rainbow noodle salad

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

MAKES: 8 SERVINGS

Ingredients

For the sauce

3 tbsp sugar
6 tbsp lime juice
3 tbsp Thai/Vietnamese fish sauce
2 tbsp sesame oil

For the salad

600g rice noodles — vermicelli or spaghetti
2 red peppers, julienned
2 large or 3 medium carrots, julienned
3 green onions, sliced diagonally
½ head red cabbage, diced
½ bunch cilantro and/or mint, washed and roughly chopped
1 inch ginger, minced (1 tbsp)
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 handfuls peanuts, roughly chopped
1-2 red Thai chilis, seeded and diced (by an adult wearing gloves) (optional)

Directions

1. Mix all sauce ingredients together in a medium bowl. Set aside.
2. Bring a pot of water to a boil and cook noodles according to package directions. Rinse cooked noodles under cool water. Drain and transfer to a large bowl.
3. Add remaining salad ingredients to the noodles.
4. Add sauce, toss well, and slurp away!



Party wraps

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

MAKES: 6 SERVINGS

Ingredients

For the wraps

- 1 medium yellow onion, sliced
- 1 cup mushrooms, sliced
- 1 bunch spinach, finely chopped
- 1 red, 1 orange, and 1 yellow pepper, sliced
- ¼ cup radishes, thinly sliced
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 cup cheese (cheddar and/or Havarti), grated
- 250g sliced turkey or chicken (optional)
- 12 small or 6 large whole wheat tortillas

For the spread

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ bunch parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 cup mayonnaise

Method

1. In a frying pan on medium-high heat, sauté onion and mushrooms for about six minutes or until mushrooms have browned. Add spinach and quickly sauté until wilted. Remove pan from heat.
2. Assemble all chopped vegetables, cheese, and meat (if using) into separate bowls and lay them out like a buffet.
3. Mix all ingredients for spread together in a bowl. Transfer to a squeeze bottle, if you have one.
4. Stack tortillas at front of the line.
5. To assemble, spread or squeeze about a half tablespoon of mayonnaise mixture on each tortilla. Fill wraps with all the colours. Then fold and roll up wraps before chowing down!