

Facilitating Language in the Kitchen

Suggestions from Speech Pathologist, Janet Morrow, M.S., CCC-SLP, 2019

Cooking together in the kitchen can be so much fun and a great way for children to learn new skills. As you work together and interact, you can build receptive and expressive language, critical thinking, perspective taking, social language skills, and executive functioning.

Some ideas to stimulate and facilitate language while working together are included below. Look and see which ones may be appropriate for your child. Pick one or two skills to focus on while you shop and cook together. Have fun!!

Language

When you are in the kitchen, talk with your child, describe what is happening, what you are thinking, and what you are feeling. In doing this, you are facilitating language development.

Vocabulary Development - Label items and talk about them. You can ask questions to talk about items. For example, "Where does an egg come from?" or "Where do apples grow?" Use rich language to describe using adjectives, like, "This feels slimy." or "This tastes delicious."

Review the recipe together. You can label items and discuss them as you get them out. This is a good opportunity to talk about where items can be found and let your child locate them. If you need to go to the store, make your list together.

Categorizing is a language skill involved in semantic development. Have your child help you find items at the store and notice how they are categorized (produce, meats, dairy, etc.). Have your child tell you what category the shopping items belong in and look for them together (e.g., "apples, onions, and carrots will all be together, so we will look for all those in the produce section").

Sequencing refers to students' abilities to put events in order. You can practice this skill by discussing the steps in the recipe. As you are working together, describe what you are doing, highlight temporal words like 'before', 'after', 'first', 'next', 'finally', etc. These are important language concepts to learn. You can line up the ingredients in the order that you are going to use them.

Listening/Following Directions - Give directions in a way that your child is able to process one step at a time or more if they are able. Provide gestures and visuals to assist. As you are asking them to follow longer, more complex directions, you are stretching their auditory memory.

Listen carefully to your child and let them know that you are interested in what they are sharing. Respond and expand on their comments. For example, if your child says, "I like ice cream." You might say, "I like ice cream too. What is your favorite kind?"

Social language - Examples of social language include attending to the task, participating, sharing items, initiating communication, asking questions, protesting, taking turns talking, and asking for help. These and many more can all be practiced while cooking together. Be sure to praise your child when you observe them using these skills if it is something they are working on. For example, "Good job using your words to tell me you didn't like that." or "You're doing a great job sharing. That makes your sister feel good when you share."

Encourage your child to use his/her words to make requests, ask for help, or protest. Hold off in responding even if you know what they may be trying to communicate. If it is difficult for them, you may accept a close proximity to the word, phrase, or gesture. You want to stretch them to use their skills, but not frustrate them.

Eating together at the table is a routine that is so important to help children develop social skills. During this time, they are practicing so many critical social cognitive skills such as participating in a shared activity, conversing, interpreting others' nonverbal messages, responding on topic, taking turns, and resolving conflicts, just to name a few.

Critical thinking - Ask questions or for opinions such as "Do you think this would be a better meal for breakfast or dinner?", "Why?", or "What else could we add to this recipe to make it interesting?" Encourage your child to make predictions such as "I wonder what would happen if we cooked it a little longer?"

Planning and organizing - You can ask your child to determine how much time the recipe may take and what time everyone plans to eat or involve them in making a shopping list and finding items at the store.

Perspective Taking - Look for opportunities to consider others' perspectives. For example, "Do you think dad would like to eat this for breakfast or for dinner?" or "Dad really likes bacon. How could we change this recipe so that he would really like it?"

These are a few general ideas of how to facilitate language development during your time together. Of course, not all of them will apply, since each child is at a different stage of development.