

News Release
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Help in the Kitchen

In the holiday rush, parents can miss opportunities to build memories with their children and family.

Adults know that it can be easier to say 'I'll do that,' rather than encourage children to get involved in preparing foods and planning gatherings during the holidays. Asking your children to be involved can help them learn more about food, nutrition, and health. Doing so also can help a child build basic cooking skills and a better understanding of what it takes to get a meal on the table.

Being able to say 'I made the gingerbread' or 'I set the table, folded the napkins or made the place cards' allows a child to share ownership in a holiday gathering and helps to build his or her self-esteem. A three-year-old may be able to fold napkins. A five-year-old may be able to set the table, and a six- or seven-year-old may be able to decorate and print names on place cards or arrange relishes on a tray. Older children will be more able to help with food preparation, and, in the process, can learn cooking skills, and about kitchen tools and appliances.

Mixing quick breads such as muffins or gingerbread, or kneading and shaping dinner rolls are other child-friendly tasks. Parents who work side-by-side with their children in planning and preparing holiday foods may be surprised by the family discussion as he or she helps to mix the bread or cookie dough. Focusing on a task can take the pressure off, and make it easy for a child to tell a parent what's really on their mind.

Encouraging a child to be creative also may yield some new tasty treats for the holiday dinner or for leftovers. A child might, for example, combine leftover mashed potatoes, turkey and cranberry sauce as a sandwich filling, prefer to stuff a pita pocket with chopped turkey and a spoonful of one or more salads, or prefer to re-heat turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce in a spinach wrap.

Teaching a child that he or she needs to do his or her share in the clean-up can help to lighten the load and give busy parents a little break.

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