

A close-up photograph of a child's hands, wearing an orange sweater, cracking a brown egg into a white bowl. The egg is held in both hands, and the yolk is being broken. Several pieces of eggshell are scattered on a white surface to the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

Tiny Chef Kitchen

GETTING STARTED GUIDE

Sample

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Here at the Tiny Chef Kitchen, my goal is to teach parents and caregivers how to prepare food with their preschool-aged children. If your children are slightly older (early elementary), the preparation strategies and cooking activities in the following six lessons will likely still interest you.

Introduction

Who am I?

My name is Dr. Kendall Becherer, but I usually refer to myself as “Teacher Kendall.”

I’m an author, photographer, teacher, and learning scientist, with a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Washington. I am passionate about investigating how both children and adults learn, and I love thinking about ways to help families naturally integrate their children in their everyday activities (such as preparing food).

I live near Seattle, Washington with my husband and young son (a.k.a. The Tiny Chef).



When I refer to “us” or “our” (as in “our Tiny Chef”), I’m referring to myself and Daddy Chef, who is actually the closest thing to a real chef in our family. He’s worked in professional kitchens and loves to cook, but decided to preserve his passion for cooking and not pursue it as a career. Every chance he gets, he reads about and prepares food, and he loves sharing these experiences with our Tiny Chef.

Who is Our Tiny Chef?

Our Tiny Chef is 3 years old (as of February, 2017). I usually refer to him as TC or our Tiny Chef (as opposed to YOUR Tiny Chef). This a picture of his Halloween costume when he was 2!



When TC was younger, I was looking for something educational for him to watch on TV and came across ["Mexico: One Plate at a Time"](#) on PBS (I can't stand cartoons!). He loves to watch Chef Rick Bayless cook and travel to Mexico. When he wants to watch an episode, he says: "Mexico time?"

What is the Tiny Chef Kitchen?

The [Tiny Chef Kitchen](#) is a resource for people to read and share information about how to prepare food with preschoolers. I started the Tiny Chef Kitchen because I was searching for (and still can't find) good resources on how to work with a toddler in the kitchen. There are few cookbooks on this topic and scarce resources on the internet. I'm hoping that this ebook and ["The Tiny Chef" recipe book](#) can support others who are searching for information on how to help their curious, hungry, and very capable young children learn skills and gain confidence in food preparation.

Getting Started Guide: What's Next?

There are six lessons in this guide that are organized to teach you about preparing food with young kids: who and what is involved, where & how to work together, and when & why you want to do this kind of work. The following are the main topics and driving questions for the next six lessons:

1. Motivation

What interests you and your child about food preparation?

2. Simplification

What activities can young children do in the kitchen?

3. Learning Zones

How do you figure out what food prep activities your child can do?

4. Development

What developmental needs do you need to consider when including a young child in such complex activities?

5. Small Steps

When and how do you get started?

6. Environment

How do you accommodate preschoolers in a cooking space?

Motivation

This is a good time for me to admit that *I don't really like cooking*. I know, I know, you're wondering why on earth I'm spending all this time photographing and writing about food preparation if I don't like it? My response is three-fold:

- 1. Food is a necessary part of life and I will always be working on the best ways for ME to prepare quick, healthy meals.*
- 2. I actually LOVE food photography even though I don't really like preparing the food.*
- 3. All ten of the values I list in the next section are important to me.*

You'll notice that I haven't asked you whether or not YOU enjoy cooking. While it might have gotten you to this point (motivating you to read this guide), I just don't think it's a great motivator for preparing food with your child. Actually, I think if you enjoy cooking or baking, it might be HARDER for you to welcome your child into the process of food preparation. The kitchen is your space, your kingdom, and it has a certain order and appeal to it that is completely disrupted by unpredictable and messy kids. You might need to take extra steps to preserve your happiness and calm when you allow your child into your sacred kitchen space (look forward to [Lesson 5](#) on preparing the environment), so that you can enjoy your time together.

What interests you about preparing food with your child?

Before you ask them to join you in the kitchen, it is important for you to know why you want to prepare more food with your child.



If it's just because it seems like the right thing to do or someone else said you should do it, you may not have enough intrinsic motivation to see you through the challenges of working with young children and food (especially the mess, slow pace, and mistakes). The following are ten common reasons caregivers want to involve their children in learning to prepare food—do any of these ring true for you?

1. Quality time
2. Skill development
3. Independence
4. Pickiness
5. Motor development
6. Executive function
7. Problem solving
8. Personal satisfaction
9. Emotional well-being
10. Community

Mark which of these motivators aligns with your values so you can return to it when you are feeling frustrated or lost.

Quality time

You'd like more activities to do with your child to strengthen your relationship.

Skill development

You think cooking is an important life skill, and you'd like your child to start learning it as soon as possible.

Independence

You know that being able to prepare your own food means more independence and self-sufficiency, especially for college students and young adults who are learning to care for themselves outside of the home.

Pickiness

You'd like your child to experience a wider variety of foods than they are currently eating, and you agree that they're more likely to taste something they've helped to prepare.

Motor development

You know that food preparation involves a lot of fine motor tasks, and you'd like your child to get more experience in this area.

Executive function

You'd like your child to improve their ability to reach goals and focus, both of which can be improved through the process of preparing increasingly challenging foods.

Problem solving

You like how cooking involves complex processes that often involve active problem solving—a skill that you'd really like to help your child develop.

Personal satisfaction

It is important and incredibly satisfying to be able to meet your own needs and take care of yourself, and being able to make a healthy and satisfying meal is one way that we can accomplish this.

Emotional well-being

You value contentment, happiness, confidence, and the ability to cope with challenges, and you want your child to experience these things by being able to care for themselves and others.

Community

Preparing food with others is a great way to build and maintain relationships with others. You want your child to be able to contribute to the community in meaningful ways: working in a soup kitchen, cooking a spaghetti dinner fundraiser, doing a bake sale, barbecuing at a block party, contributing nutritious food to a potluck, and just connecting with others over a shared love of food.

Make note if there's another reason that I didn't list here. You need at least one clear reason you're pursuing this activity that aligns with your beliefs. Most likely, more reasons will become important to you as you begin working with your child.

Is your child interested in food preparation?

It's important to think about your child's motivation as well.



Are they already interested in food preparation or is this a completely new area for them?

Adults and children develop an interest in things when we are familiar with them and the people around us are involved with them. I believe that food and cooking are naturally exciting and interesting because eating is a part of our everyday worlds. However, your child might only be interested in eating (and not necessarily cooking) if they haven't had much exposure to food preparation.

Many children (especially preschoolers) have mostly seen food come from a restaurant, microwave, store-bought package, or just magically appear in front of them when they're hungry (so if this is your family, don't worry!). My mom loves to remind us about how shocked she was when she went to a friend's house in high school where their mom was baking a cake (from scratch) and there was not cake box to be found. She had no idea that you could make a cake without a boxed cake mix!

When considering how much exposure your child has had to food preparation, think about the following questions.

Does your child regularly:

- *See someone preparing food or using a knife?*
- *See someone using kitchen machines like a blender or food processor?*
- *Hear people talk about cooking or preparing food?*
- *Smell food as it's cooking (for longer than 5 minutes in a microwave)?*
- *Ask to touch food in the store or while you're preparing it?*
- *Ask to touch or taste new foods?*
- *Recognize whole foods at the grocery store (such as carrots, peppers, oranges, etc.)?*

If you answered YES to a lot of these questions, your child probably already has an interest in making food and will be intrinsically motivated to prepare food with you. If you frequently answered NO, you may need to actively work on developing their interest or provide some extrinsic motivators (such as extra excitement or a special treat). Consider showing them some pictures or videos of kids or adults preparing food to pique their interest. [The Tiny Chef book](#) and [Facebook page](#) are a great resources for this!

We all eat, and it's never too early or too late to start interacting more with the whole foods that make-up our meals and diets. Even young kids with no exposure to food preparation will quickly develop an interest if they see how much it interests you and if they get to taste delicious ingredients along the way.

To purchase the rest of this book, visit
<http://TinyChefKitchen.com/ebook>