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Teacher's Guide to Food Discovery Sessions



A Complete Guide for Delivering Practical Cookery Sessions

Introduction

This guide is a rich, practical resource designed to empower educators to deliver engaging, safe, and curriculum-aligned cookery sessions in primary and secondary schools.

Developed by SIL's Health & Wellbeing team, it blends pedagogical insight with hands-on food education, aiming to build children's confidence, creativity, and competence in the kitchen.

Why It Matters

This guide doesn't just teach cooking; it cultivates a whole-school culture around food. It helps children become confident, curious, and capable chefs while supporting staff to deliver meaningful, inclusive, and safe learning experiences. Whether you're launching a new food curriculum or enhancing existing provision, this resource is a powerful tool for embedding food education into everyday school life.



How It Helps Staff and Pupils Become Confident Chefs

For Staff:

- Step-by-step guidance on planning, delivering, and evaluating cookery sessions.
- Curriculum alignment with Design & Technology and cross-curricular links (Science, Maths, PSHE, Geography, English).
- Risk assessment templates and food safety protocols to ensure safe practice.
- Differentiation strategies to include all learners, including SEND and those with allergies or religious dietary needs.
- Skill progression charts to scaffold learning from EYFS through to Key Stage 3.
- Practical tips on equipment, space setup, hygiene, and inclusive teaching.

For Pupils:

- Builds life skills: cooking, measuring, hygiene, teamwork, and responsibility.
- Boosts wellbeing: through nutrition education, sensory exploration, and confidence-building.
- Promotes sustainability and cultural awareness: understanding food origins, seasonality, and diverse diets.
- Encourages creativity: experimenting with flavours, textures, and presentation.
- Supports communication: through recipe writing, discussion, and peer collaboration.

What's Inside?

| Section | Focus |
|-------------------------|--|
| National Curriculum | Statutory cooking & nutrition goals for KS1–KS3 |
| Healthy Diet Principles | Carbohydrates, proteins, fats, fruits & vegetables |
| Eatwell Guide | Visual tool for balanced eating |
| Food Origins | Farming, processing, sustainability |
| Skills Progression | Age-appropriate food prep techniques |
| Knife Skills | Bridge & claw methods for safety |
| Planning & Risk | Consent, allergies, staff ratios, safety checks |
| Food Safety & Hygiene | Training, storage, cross-contamination prevention |
| Religious Diets | Inclusive practices for diverse beliefs |
| Lesson Planning | Templates, differentiation, assessment |
| TasteEd Approach | Sensory exploration without pressure |
| Evaluation & Reflection | Continuous improvement and pupil feedback |
| Resources | Links to national food education platforms |

Benefits of Food Discovery Sessions



Educating children about cooking, food and nutrition can profoundly impact their quality of life; fostering confidence, independence, and healthy food choices.

Learning to cook from an early age helps maintain a healthy weight, improves oral and general health, and enhances mental wellbeing. It also provides life-long skills, economic benefits, and promotes sustainability. Cooking together in the classroom strengthens peer relationships and connects children with diverse cultural heritages.

Understanding nutrition is a crucial component of this education. By learning about the nutritional value of different foods, children can make informed decisions that lead to balanced diets rich in essential vitamins and minerals.

This knowledge helps them understand the importance of consuming a variety of foods to meet their dietary needs, thereby developing healthy habits that can prevent chronic diseases and promote long-term wellbeing.

Introducing practical cookery sessions in primary school equips children with essential life skills that prepare them for secondary school and beyond. Cooking fosters creativity, allowing children to experiment with flavours and ingredients, and encourages them to take pride in their culinary creations.

Additionally, it provides a hands-on way to incorporate other curriculum subjects: measuring ingredients enhances their mathematics skills, following and writing recipes strengthens their English literacy, and understanding the nutritional content of food ties into science and health education etc.

By engaging in practical cookery sessions, children gain confidence, learn to work collaboratively, and develop a sense of responsibility, all of which are crucial for their transition to secondary school. Our cooking sessions aim to nurture these skills, ensuring children are well-rounded, capable, and prepared for future academic challenges.

Cooking and nutrition are compulsory components of the Design and Technology national curriculum, reflecting the importance of equipping children with essential life skills.

The curriculum emphasises the significance of 'instilling a love of food and cooking' from a young age, recognising that these skills contribute to overall well-being and lifelong healthy habits.

It highlights the need for children to understand where food comes from, how to prepare it safely, and the nutritional value of different foods. By engaging in hands-on cooking activities, children learn to appreciate the sensory and cultural aspects of food, fostering creativity and collaboration.

This foundational knowledge not only supports their academic learning but also encourages a positive relationship with food, setting the stage for a healthier future.





Meeting the National Curriculum

Delivering cookery sessions that align with Design and Technology: Cooking and Nutrition Curriculum, ensures your lessons have clear educational purpose and support broader learning goals.

These sessions are not just about making food; they help children develop practical life skills, understand healthy eating, and learning where food comes from.

They also contribute to achieving key curriculum objectives around nutrition, food preparation, and evaluating finished dishes.



Cross-Curricular Links

Cooking and nutrition can also enhance:

- **Science:** digestion, food chains, materials and changes of state.
- **PSHE/RSHE:** healthy eating, making choices, cultural awareness.
- **Geography:** food miles, climate, global food supply, seasonality.
- **Maths:** weighing, measuring, time, ratios.
- **English:** instructional writing, speaking and listening, vocabulary development.

This section provides a solid foundation for planning your whole-school approach to cooking and nutrition, ensuring clear progression and strong curriculum coverage from Year 1 to Year 9.

The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell guide was created by Public Health England to help people understand how to maintain a healthy balanced diet.

It is a simplified visual tool to guide us on the foods and proportions we should eat to maintain a healthy and balanced diet.

It divides foods into five main groups: fruits and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, proteins, dairy or dairy alternatives and oils and spreads, highlighting the importance of variety and moderation.

In primary and secondary education this visual educational resource helps children make informed decisions on the food they should eat and why those food are important for overall health and wellbeing.





Skills Progression Guidance

On the next few pages, you will find guidance of skills children should be performing in practical cookery sessions for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

School Food Policy and Whole-School Food Approach

Why It Matters

A whole school approach to food ensures that what pupils learn in cookery lessons is reinforced across all areas of school life, from the dining hall to assemblies, after-school clubs, and home engagement. Ofsted encourages schools to embed a culture of healthy eating, not just teach it in isolation.

School Food Policy

Every school should have a School Food Policy that outlines:

- The aims and values around food and nutrition.
- Food and drink provision (including packed lunches) across the school day.
- Curriculum links (including cooking & nutrition).
- Allergy Information.
- Celebration and reward practices involving food.
- Staff training and role modelling.

Cookery sessions should support and reflect this policy, helping reinforce messages around:

- Healthy eating.
- Sustainability.
- Cultural diversity.



Whole School Food Approach Includes:

- Leadership: Senior leaders committed to promoting food education and healthy eating.
- Consistency: Lessons align with school food standards and healthy choices promoted at lunchtime.
- Pupil voice: Involving pupils in food choices, growing, and cooking.
- Parental engagement: Sharing recipes and nutrition tips with families.
- Community links: Working with local farms, allotments, or food charities.
- Monitoring: Regular review of food education and food provision in school.

Tips for Teachers:

- Check your school's food policy before planning cookery topics.
- Work with kitchen staff or school caterers to complement what is being served.
- Reinforce Eatwell Guide principles and portion sizes.
- Avoid using high fat/sugar treats in lessons unless exploring food occasionally eaten in moderation.
- Encourage pupils to try unfamiliar ingredients and relate them to cultural food traditions.



Risk Assessments in Cookery Sessions

Risk assessments are essential for identifying and minimising potential hazards when delivering cookery sessions.

They protect both staff and pupils and help ensure a safe, smooth, and enjoyable learning experience.

All schools are required by law to assess risks under the [Health and Safety at Work Act \(1974\)](#) and [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations \(1999\)](#).

What to Include in a Cookery Risk Assessment

| Risk Area | What to Consider |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Food Allergies / Intolerances | Collect medical and allergy info in advance. Avoid cross-contamination. |
| Equipment | Check all tools (knives, graters, peelers, hobs) for safe use and condition. |
| Heat Sources | Supervise oven, hob, kettles, and ensure safe zones and heatproof mats are used. |
| Knife Use | Ensure age-appropriate training and supervision. Teach bridge and claw grips. |
| Hygiene | Handwashing, clean surfaces, tied-back hair, and use of aprons. |
| Slips, Trips, and Spills | Keep floors clear and dry. Manage wires and equipment placement. |
| Choking Hazards | Especially in Key Stage 1. Cut food into safe sizes and supervise tasting. |
| Pupil Behaviour | Risk increases with inattention or unsafe conduct. Set clear rules and expectations. |
| Fire Safety | Know evacuation procedures and location of fire extinguishers and blankets. |
| Storage and Waste | Store food correctly and dispose of waste safely and hygienically. |

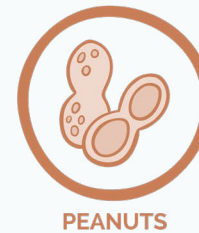
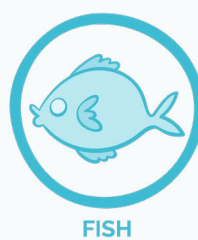
Food Allergies

Food allergies can cause serious, and sometimes life-threatening reactions. When delivering cookery sessions, it's vital that all staff are vigilant and fully aware of pupil allergies, intolerances, and special dietary needs.

Even trace amounts of an allergen can trigger a response, so good communication, clear labelling, and cross-contamination prevention are essential. By creating an allergy-aware environment, schools not only safeguard children's health but also foster an inclusive space where all pupils can take part safely and confidently in food education.



On the next page, you will see an allergy timeline this gives you steps to follow to ensure all allergy related actions are covered to minimise risk of harm to children with allergies.



Religious Diets

Considering Religious Diets in Practical Cookery Sessions.

When planning and delivering practical cookery sessions, it is vital to be sensitive to the dietary needs of pupils from different religious backgrounds. Just like allergies, religious dietary requirements must be respected to ensure all children feel included, safe and valued in the classroom.

Being inclusive of religious dietary needs:

- Encourages respect and understanding of cultural and religious diversity.
- Prevents exclusion or distress for pupils who may feel uncomfortable or unsafe preparing or eating certain foods.
- Aligns with school values around equality, diversity, and safeguarding.



Equipment: Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

Equipment will vary depending on the dish that is being created and the skills being taught.

The following pages provide basic equipment suggestions.
(*This list is not exhaustive)



Curriculum Links

Cookery can also strengthen learning across other subjects.

Science: exploring materials, changes in state (e.g., melting, dissolving), or the human body and nutrition.

Maths: measuring ingredients, weighing, timing, and scaling up or down.

English: following instructions, writing recipes, or discussing food origins and experiences.

Geography: learning about where ingredients come from and the concept of seasonality.

PSHE: encouraging teamwork, independence, and discussions around healthy lifestyles.





Planning: Getting Children Ready to Cook

At the start of every session go through the “Let’s get ready to cook” guidelines so they become habitual.

Start of the Lesson

Importance of health & Safety of washing hands:

- Use ‘Let’s Get Ready to Cook’ Guidelines outlined on the next page.
- Clear instructions & expectations.
- ‘No one has to try, no one has to like’ Taste Ed Principles



“ Let’s Get Ready to Cook ”



A young child with blonde hair is shown from the chest up, holding a large slice of watermelon. The child is wearing a pink and white checkered shirt. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The watermelon slice is bright red with black seeds and a green rind.

Tasting, Taking or Both

“To take, or not to take”

Encourage children to explore food using the TasteEd principles without any pressure.

Taste should be the last sense explored. Use touch, smell, sight and hearing first.

Explain two important rules:

- No-one has to try.
- No-one has to like.

If children are finished and have time to taste what they’ve made in the session, they can discuss topics like what they might add or takeaway if they were to make this dish again. This can help them with the evaluation process.

Storage and communication with parents about safe storage and cooking instructions for reheating is important for food safety.

You can use sticky labels and print or write out instructions and stick to containers.



Evaluation & Reflection

After each practical cookery session, it's essential to evaluate how it went.

This supports continuous improvement and ensures future sessions run even more smoothly.

Teachers should consider documenting the points on the following pages.




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