



# Exploring Food at Home

A Booklet of Ideas  
for Parents & Carers



## Exploring food at home for parents and carers

Whether your child is with a childminder, goes to preschool or nursery, their setting will be following the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The most important principles of the EYFS are that learning is based on play, is active, fun and encourages confidence and independence. If we follow their lead, children will teach us too. You can include food in this learning at home, which encourages a healthy start to eating.

### Exploring food at home ideas:

**Exploring food** Cooking with young children does not have to be about baking or following recipes. Early Years children build confidence to try new foods through exploring, through play and repeated experiences. Try giving your child some interesting vegetables to explore and let them do this in their own time, with you tasting and exploring alongside.

**Keep tasting** Children often need to taste a new food over ten times before developing a taste for it. Don't expect children to like something the first time they try it. Always start with very small portions, or testers, of new foods. If you can let them explore the new food before it is cooked, and then get them to help cook it, they are more likely to feel secure eating it.

**Positive language** Children may feel uncertain and need gentle encouragement to taste new foods. Try to be positive and make comments to support their confidence 'I wonder what this tastes like?' 'Mine is crunchy.' They will notice if you try new foods such as different fruits and vegetables and be encouraged to have a go themselves.

**Pick some fresh food** Children learn about where food comes from through seeing it grow. You can plant and grow seeds at home, on a windowsill if you don't have much space. If you don't have anything growing at home, you could visit a local Community Farm or Incredible Edible growing bed. Potted living herbs from a supermarket are a great way to start growing at home.



**Helping to make lunch** Young children can get involved with preparing food from an early age. They can help to choose what to make and decide how to serve the food.

**Look at recipes together** You can look at recipe books, or online sites, so that you can both see some ideas of different types of cooking. This is a great way to get children interested in food. If you want to see some inspiring children cooking check out My World Kitchen on CBeebies which has children from all over the world cooking their favourite foods.

**Tasting** Have small amounts of a selection of different foods and have a taste test different tastes and textures together.

**Easy chopping** Start to chop with soft produce rather than hard carrots. It takes a bit of practice and for a child to handle a knife. Brilliant things to practice chopping with are cucumbers (you can cut one into long sticks first to make this even easier) mushrooms, bananas, lettuce, herbs, cabbage or peppers



**Shop together** Spend time in your local supermarket looking at the fresh fruit and vegetables; you don't need to buy them, noticing and talking about the colours and interesting shapes and textures can be a really good way to encourage children to try eating them. Children may also have tried something in their childcare setting and may be able to tell you about it.

**Plan your eating** Children are used to a routine at their setting and it is ideal to carry this on at home if you can. In an Early Years Setting they may have had breakfast at home (or sometimes at the setting) a snack at about 10 followed by lunch at 12, then an afternoon snack at 2 and then a meal at home at around 4.

**Snack time** Young children have very small stomachs (about the size of their fist) so serve small portions. Healthy snacks could be vegetable sticks (which they can cut themselves) with cream cheese or rice cakes and dips or a small serving of fruit with a toasted crumpet, pitta bread or toast. This a valuable time to spend together talking and supporting language skills



## Supporting your child's safety:

**Cook in a safe place** You don't need to do all of your cooking in the kitchen-working at a table, or even on the floor on a clean sheet or tablecloth, can be safer and easier to manage.

**Stay close** You always need to be aware of safety when exploring food or cooking with your child. Never leave them unattended as there is always a risk of choking for young children.

**Safe chopping** Always use a safe knife; in nurseries we recommend using plastic knives called 'lettuce knives' or 'salad knives' which are designed to cut food but not fingers. You can buy them cheaply online or from cheap home-wear shops (we have Rajani in Bristol which is great for affordable equipment.) Never let a young child use a sharp knife unattended.

**Great grating** You also need to be really careful of peelers and graters, which can be very dangerous to small fingers. If you want to peel and grate it is safest to do this with your hand holding theirs gently.

**Be food hygiene aware** Fruit and vegetables are low in risk, but they always need to be well washed before children explore them-mud can carry nasty toxins that can make them ill.



## All the ideas here support the 7 areas of the EYFS:

<b>Personal, social and emotional development</b>	Tasting and describing foods, talking about what has been eaten and food preferences. Eating and sharing food with others builds social development between children. Understanding where food comes from and developing a broad taste is part of personal development. Mealtimes and cooking together can encourage sharing, co-operation, empathy and understanding of others.
<b>Communication, language and literacy</b>	Developing ways to share ingredients and try foods builds communication skills, encouraging talk and conversation. Linking food to stories, songs and play develops language and literacy. Children can develop their own ways of writing simple recipes and investigate cookery books.
<b>Problem solving, reasoning &amp; numeracy</b>	Exploring and experimenting with food and cooking is all about problem solving and reasoning. Experimenting with different ingredients develops ways of working through and testing ideas. Numeracy can be part of cookery through measuring and timing or counting activities.
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding of the world</b>	Learning about how plants grow, the environment and sustainability through growing and composting. Learning about foods from around the world and the food that is eaten by friends and family. Understanding how to use different pieces of equipment and tools.
<b>Physical development</b>	Developing fine motor skills and coordination. Building strength through skills such as chopping, whisking, mixing and rolling. Talking about food that keeps us healthy.
<b>Creative development</b>	Using all of the senses to explore food. Role play, imagination and creativity can be encouraged by child led cookery. Stories can be developed around food and visual art involved in mark-making with ingredients and drawing or painting food.

## Some useful websites:

### Growing:

[Incredible Edible Bristol](#). There are raised beds with free fruit and vegetables across Bristol, which are established by You can see what is growing and take something home to cook

[Community growing](#) The Bristol Food Network site has lots of links to food support and projects, and this great map showing all the growing projects and farms in Bristol

### Recipes and cooking activities:

[The Children's Kitchen](#) Recipes for children to cook with a bit of help, translated into 16 different languages

[Jo Ingleby BBC Food](#) Jo's recipes are aimed at children cooking with a tiny bit of adult help, with heat and using cheap ingredients.

[Nomster Chef recipes](#): Fun recipe picture books and videos for kids to follow with their adults.

[My World Kitchen](#): Talented young cooks take over the kitchen and celebrate their heritage by cooking some special recipes. We find out where these dishes and ingredients come from along the way.

[Make Bake Create](#): Blue Peter site with ideas for recipes and craft activities.

**Bristol Early Years Website**  
[www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk](http://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk)

**Find us on Social Media**



[www.twitter.com/BristolEarly](https://www.twitter.com/BristolEarly)



[www.instagram.com/bristol\\_ey](https://www.instagram.com/bristol_ey)



[www.facebook.com/BristolEarly](https://www.facebook.com/BristolEarly)