

You & Your Child in the Kitchen: More than just cooking!

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The holidays are quickly approaching. This can be the perfect way to increase your child's exposure to language skills! You may think there is no time between roasting your turkey and baking the pumpkin pie to worry about language skills. But don't think of them as separate activities.

Put your child in a highchair, chair, or stepstool in the kitchen and let the learning begin! The easiest way to teach your child language skills is through listening to speech and every day interactions. These interactions can be for all children, whether you are talking, signing, using pictures, or your child's communication device. When you prepare your next meal, communicate with your child.



Think about your favorite cooking show. The host or star of the show communicates deliberately and in a way to teach about the components of cooking and the ingredients used. You can now be the star of the kitchen! Your child's eyes will be on you.

Tell your child about the ingredients and cooking utensils you will be using for your recipe. You will build your child's vocabulary skills this way.

For example say, sign or gesture, "This is a can of pumpkin. A pumpkin is a part of the gourd or squash family and grows on a vine. In this can is puree, which is a mashed up version of a pumpkin. It is in a can that has a top and a bottom." (Show your child the can.) "To open it, you need to use a can opener. I am going to walk over and get my can opener from the drawer." (Show your child.) "I am going to give a few good turns—1, 2, 3!—and we can see what is inside! Oh, look at that gorgeous orange color." (Show your child the color.) "We need a half of a cup, so I am going to scoop some out with this spoon and use my measuring cup to make sure that I have exactly what I need."

This type of explanation will continue throughout until your recipe is complete.

Remember—to keep you child engaged, you may need to change your communication mode or voice. You could try different tones (like singing), using different facial expressions (like smiles) or using hand motions, like using your arms in large movements to point or touch. You know your child best and know if they can sit and listen, or if they need to be involved in the process more.



You could also encourage your child to do some of the steps, like scooping ingredients into measuring cups. Some children will prefer to hold a wooden spoon or spatula to match what you are doing. Some children may not want touch the ingredients.

Consider trying this easy way to get some of your holiday cooking to-do-list complete while being actively engaged with your child. Bond with this quality time activity AND help develop language skills! That's a happy holiday for sure!