

Keep Your Kids Busy This Summer Learning to Cook



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Perhaps nobody looks forward to the summer months more than children. After all, school is out for the summer and these are the months that mean freedom. Freedom from homework. Freedom from teachers. Unfortunately, this may also mean freedom from activity. After all, some kids believe sitting on a couch watching TV is a rite of passage for the season.

The average school-aged child watches 27 hours of television per week. Solitary pursuits such as watching TV, the internet and video games can mean kids spend less time just hanging out with their parents.

Of course, one of the traditional ways for families to spend time together has been at the dinner table. A recent study from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that parents who eat with their children at least five times a week report having a better relationship with their child. If spending time at the dinner table has shown good results, what happens when parents and kids actually cook the meal together?

Renee Lais may know the answer. Lais is the Reservations Manager for the Culinary Institute of Kansas City. The Institute currently offers hundreds of cooking classes every year, including classes designed especially for children. With the recent popularity of cooking shows on cable TV, cooking has grown into a popular pastime for adults. But now kids are giving it a try as well.

"Cooking strengthens and reinforces their math and reading skills. They work as a team, so teamwork comes into play as well. And it's a good, fun way of learning", said Ms. Lais.

For some kids, the very thought of cooking anything sends shivers down their spine. Putting a burrito in the microwave is one thing. But following directions, planning and mixing multiple ingredients into something resembling an edible item is another thing altogether. Is there a danger of kids feeling intimidated by the process?

"You can often tell the ones (kids) who don't hang out in the kitchen with their parents. But they are often easily coaxed into helping."

Lais notes that many of the kids who participate in the classes become hooked on cooking as an activity. And returning students are commonplace. As the kids develop more confidence in their cooking abilities, some are even setting their sights on cooking as a potential career.

"We've had several children who say they want to be a chef when they grow up. I think when they

