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## Cooking in school



# Knife safety

Supporting the safe selection, use and storage of knives when teaching cooking and enhancing the development and progression of cooking in primary schools.

The information focusses on food related activities for children aged between 4 - 11 years.

## Choosing the right equipment

Selection of appropriate knives for use in primary schools is paramount. Here are some do's and don'ts.

- **Do use** small serrated paring or vegetable knives. These are the right size for children's hands. It is also easy to identify which edge is the sharp cutting edge and the serrated edge assists with the 'sawing' action, enhancing greater concentration on the cutting technique.



- **For adult use**, do have a cook's knife for cutting large items such as pumpkins and pineapples.



- **Do use** chopping boards with rubberised non-slip edges. These prevent the board from slipping and moving around whilst cutting the food.



- **Don't use** plastic knives, these will break easily and will splinter into sharp and dangerous shards.



- **Don't use** table knives, they are not sharp enough and with the additional force required to cut the food, they will slip and result in a serious cut.



## Knife storage

- **All knives** must be stored safely, preferably in a locked drawer or cupboard. They should be counted out and counted back at the start and end of a session. The number of knives in use at a time must be controlled and monitored by the staff.

## Using knives safely

- When teaching children how to use knives, introduce them to the different parts of the knife, indicating the handle, blade and serrated edge.
- Staff must be diligent and make sure that whenever they are teaching cooking that involves knife skills they must ensure that the children and staff use the correct cutting techniques.
- Children need to be taught to respect the knives that they use, as knives are only dangerous if they are used incorrectly or inappropriately.

## Different cutting techniques

### When cutting food, start with the 'bridge' technique

- Before being given a knife the children should practice the '**bridge**' shape on the food they are going to cut. They should be checked that they are actually holding the food.
- The children should use a finger as if it was a knife to practice the cutting action to see if they would cut themselves if the finger had been a knife.
- 'Bridges' should be high and any fingers not holding the food must be lifted out of the way. Staff will need to assess if the child is performing a safe bridge shape before a knife is given to the child.
- Until the staff feel confident that all the children are skilled enough to use the knives safely they should control the number of knives that are given out, so that they are able to supervise safely. In time it should be possible to give all the children a knife. Professional judgement will be needed, as well as knowledge of the children they are working with.
- Knives should always be on the chopping board unless they are being used for cutting (ie not played with or waved around).
- Knives should not be used to scrape food from a chopping board into a dish or kept in the hand when separating food into pieces.





## Cooking in school



### Different cutting techniques, continued ...

#### The claw technique

- Once the children have mastered the 'bridge' technique they can move onto learning the '**claw**' technique. This is a progression skill. It is important not to move onto the claw technique until staff are confident that all the children have mastered the bridge technique.
- The claw requires that the fingers are curled over like a claw with the tips of the fingers touching the food and the thumb must be tucked at the back holding the food safely.
- Avoid pinching the food when cutting; staff must be vigilant that this does not happen. Adults often find the claw technique more difficult to master than children, but it is important that the staff use the correct technique.
- Always carry out cooking activities whilst standing; it is important not to sit down while cooking as control will be diminished.
- Scissors can be used safely as a cutting tool when chopping small soft ingredients, such as herbs, by placing the herbs into a jug and snipping downwards, but never use scissors to chop foods whilst holding them with fingers.



#### This is an illustration of '**how not to**' carry out a cooking activity

##### Why?

- The child is sitting down
- A plastic knife is being used for cutting
- The 'pinch' method is being used to cut the food (note how close the blade is to the forefinger!)
- The chopping board does not have rubberised/non-slip edges
- The child is not wearing an apron

