

6-1-2004

## Building Basic Living Skills in Youth--Kid's Chef School

Lois Clark

*Ohio State University Extension*, [clark.21@osu.edu](mailto:clark.21@osu.edu)

Ruth Anne Foote

*Ohio State University Extension*, [foote.3@osu.edu](mailto:foote.3@osu.edu)



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### Recommended Citation

Clark, L., & Foote, R. A. (2004). Building Basic Living Skills in Youth--Kid's Chef School. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(3), Article 23. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss3/23>

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## Building Basic Living Skills in Youth--Kid's Chef School

### Abstract

Kid's Chef School was created to strengthen personal development of youth representing the changing diversity of today's families. It was based on results of county needs assessments indicating a perceived lack of basic living skills in children. Kid's Chef Schools address these needs by giving children opportunities to practice skills as they learn. Learning is accomplished through activities and simulations to teach nutrition, manners, table setting, food safety, hand washing, food preparation skills, and kitchen safety. Program evaluation includes participant and parent evaluation indicating knowledge gain and practice change. Demand for Kid's Chef Schools continues to be strong.

### Lois Clark

Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Auglaize County  
Wapakoneta, Ohio  
[clark.21@osu.edu](mailto:clark.21@osu.edu)

### Ruth Anne Foote

Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Mercer County  
Celina, Ohio  
[foote.3@osu.edu](mailto:foote.3@osu.edu)

Ohio State University Extension

## Introduction

Children living in single-parent households or two-working-parent households often find themselves in latchkey situations. Everyday in America thirteen million preschool children are left in child care arrangements, twenty-four million school-age youth are in need of programs (Valentine, 1998), and about seven million children 5 to 14 years old are regularly left unsupervised while their parents are at work or away for other reasons (Smith, 2000).

In Auglaize and Mercer Counties, 72% (Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, 1998) and 74% (Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, 1998), respectively, of all children live in homes headed by either a single parent or two working parents. By necessity, these children need basic knowledge and skills in food preparation, sanitation, kitchen safety, and nutrition. It is important to make these messages developmentally appropriate. Specific behavioral messages should be delivered to help children make informed food choices (American Dietetic Association, 1999).

Kid's Chef School was developed to reflect unique and special needs in Auglaize and Mercer Counties based on program review results, needs assessment, and advisory committee findings. The objectives of Kid's Chef School are to:

- Expand nutrition knowledge,
- Practice good manners and etiquette,
- Demonstrate correct table setting,
- Learn food safety and proper hand washing techniques,
- Prepare nutritious foods, and
- Experience new and unusual foods.

Kid's Chef School addresses these needs by giving children opportunities to practice skills as they

learn. Children have fun while developing basic life skills through experiential learning.

## Kid's Chef School Program Content

Learning is accomplished through activities and simulations to teach nutrition, manners, table setting, food safety, hand washing, food preparation skills, and kitchen safety. Kid's Chef School includes the following activities and simulations.

Nutrition and Food Guide Pyramid activities include classification of foods, identification of food groups, and number of servings by playing Nutrition Bingo and Food Pyramid Fun, an easily created game using masking tape and food models.

Children practice good manners and etiquette as they make introductions, talk to people they are meeting for the first time, and practice using please, thank you, and excuse me. They learn correct table setting by playing Table Setting Relay.

Food safety activities include hand washing and sanitation using "Glo-Germ" supplies. They also find hidden germs illustrated on an overhead transparency. Other activities and games used to teach food safety include Food Safety Balloon Relay or Frisbee Toss. Children also practice safe food storage by discussing proper handling of leftover food.

Food preparation skills include measuring dry and liquid ingredients, preparing foods, and demonstrating knowledge of food preparation terminology. Children learn to safely use mixers, blenders, electric skillet, woks, knives, and the range, depending on the focus of each school. Foods are chosen based on the season, availability of equipment, and children's skill level. Youth have an opportunity to see, prepare, and taste unfamiliar foods.

Extension agents use creative thinking and knowledge of cognitive and developmental abilities of second and third grade youth to make learning meaningful and fun (Figure 1). Innovative simulations and games developed include:

- Set the Table Relay;
- Manners...Say Please, Thank You, and Excuse Me;
- What's the Measure? Relay;
- Nutrition Bingo;
- Manners Multiple Choice;
- Food Pyramid Fun;
- Frisbee Toss Relay;
- Food Safety Balloon Relay;
- Sweep the Floor Relay; and
- Conversation Starters.

**Figure 1.**  
Selected Kid's Chef School Activities and Simulations

### **Say Please, Thank You, and Excuse Me**

Sixty-eight manner statements were developed. Each statement is read aloud, and children select the correct response. Examples of statements include:

Help me carry these boxes, \_\_\_\_\_.

Your dad helps you solve a problem, say \_\_\_\_\_.

You step on your friend's toe, say \_\_\_\_\_.

You squirt ketchup on your friend's shirt, you say \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Food Safety Balloon Relay**

Twenty-five food safety messages are placed in balloons. The children are divided into two teams. Each child breaks a balloon and reads the food safety message aloud. Examples of messages include:

Wash your hands before you begin to cook.

Don't use a dish towel to wipe your face.

Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food, not those used in making the food.

Wash your hands after touching your pets or other animals.

## Conversation Starters

Thirty-four conversation starter questions were developed. Conversation topics are about weather, health, hobbies, family, travel, and school. Examples of questions include:

What do you enjoy doing?

Tell me about your family.

Do you like to travel?

Where have you been?

What is your favorite school subject?

## Implementation

Each Kid's Chef School is conducted as a one-time, 1 1/2- to 2-hour session at schools, churches, community parks, or county Extension offices. Individual schools are based on a variety of themes: holiday, seasonal, international, inter-generational (with invited guests), picnic, fall, and after school.

Kid's Chef School is designed for 20 second and third grade youth. Children are divided into small groups of four to six children. Each group is assisted by a teen leader(s) or adult volunteer. Volunteers, adults, parents, and colleagues provide leadership by assisting with activities and teaching as needed.

Kid's Chef School has been conducted twice a year in two adjacent rural counties for 8 years. Participants learn about upcoming Kid's Chef Schools through promotional flyers distributed in schools or news releases. Kid's Chef School continues to be implemented annually with minor adaptations based on audience, ages and needs.

Originally, Kid's Chef Schools were funded by a commodity seed grant and university innovative funds. Subsequently, local endowment funds and registration fees have provided necessary resources.

## Evaluation

Three evaluation methods are used. Evaluations are completed by children following each session. Several weeks after the Kid's Chef School, parents are asked to complete an evaluation. Teen leaders are asked to share suggestions for improving Kid's Chef School based on their observations and participation.

The participant evaluation asks six questions:

- "My favorite session was..." followed by a list of sessions,
- "My least favorite session was..." followed by the same list,
- "I learned..." followed by space to write,
- "I wish we could have..." followed by space to write,
- "The foods we made were..." followed by list of foods and a choice of "Yummy" or "Yuk", and
- "I want you to know that..." followed by space to write.

Children's evaluations report a 62% increase in food preparation knowledge, a 26% increase in food safety knowledge, a 25% increase in understanding manners, and a 13% increase in nutrition knowledge. Parents report knowledge gain in the same areas but also indicate growth in self-esteem and development of self-direction. The most enjoyed aspects of the program are preparing food and gaming activities. Activities least enjoyed are the pencil/paper games. Teenage youth assisting with Kid's Chef School gain leadership skills and knowledge of child development.

## Implications

Extension professionals can easily adapt the Kid's Chef School program model to meet identified local community needs to develop living skills and self-confidence in youth. The program model is easily replicated for use with other youth groups and organizations that may not be familiar with Extension's educational focus. Registration fees may be a source of revenue generation dollars for local extension offices.

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