

Benefits of baking for students with Complex Needs

Baking with children can be very messy but lots of fun, but most importantly there are many benefits that can be gained. Some of these include:



Bilateral Coordination – Students are given the opportunity to use both hands together in a co-ordinated manner. Rolling out pastry, flattening dough, cutting out cookies, sifting flour. Bilateral co-ordination supports students when learning how to tie laces and cutting with scissors.



Hand-Eye Coordination – Pouring ingredients into bowls and jugs, spooning batter into tins, spreading icing on cookies, decorating cupcakes, all help to develop good hand-eye coordination. This in turn will support children's handwriting, reading, visual tracking and playing sport.



Spatial Perception and Planning Skills – Always provide a recipe for students when baking. Following a set of instructions, whether written, aurally or following a sequence of pictures develops students listening and sequencing skills. Following instructions is a very important life skill. Support the student to organise themselves in the kitchen, getting the ingredients, following a set of instructions, and cleaning up afterward all support spatial perception and planning skills.



Hand Strengthening – Baking provides great opportunities for students to strengthen their hand and finger muscles. For instance rolling pastry, squeezing dough into balls, squeezing icing bags all support hand and finger muscle strengthening.



Real life Maths – When students bake they are learning maths through “real – life” opportunities, making maths real and relevant for students is a vital life skill. Students will naturally learn measuring: measuring liquids, measuring flour, counting the number of eggs needed are just some of the opportunities afforded when baking.

Considerations for students with complex needs:



Use Visuals: Using visuals when baking is very useful. These can be in the format of pictures or the real life object depending on your individual student's needs. Encourage the student to find the items in the kitchen required to complete the recipe that they are following. Many online visual recipes are available for students with complex needs.

<http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com/2011/01/updated-free-visual-recipes.html>

You will also find some other visual baking resources within the NCSE's baking theme of the week.

Offer Multi-sensory experiences: Encourage the student to touch, smell and taste (when safe and appropriate). Baking by its very nature is an extremely sensory activity. If the student is sensory defensive allow a gradual introduction of new sensory activities, perhaps starting with feeling dry ingredients first, before providing opportunities to explore wetter, stickier ingredients. When a student is encouraged to touch, taste and smell the foods they are working with they may be more inclined to taste new food items.

Motivation: Use the student's food likes to increase the want and motivation so as to enhance engagement. Including new foods can be done as the student becomes familiar and comfortable with baking.

Make it “do-able” and encourage individual independence: Making simple recipes works best. The student will be successful quickly, success is very motivating for all children. Again using visuals can encourage independence, students can choose the correct ingredient, follow the next step in the recipe independently.

Incorporate assistive technology and augmentative communication tools where appropriate: Students who are using a simple switch can operate any type of kitchen equipment that needs to be plugged in, for instance, a link between a blender or food processor and a switch can be created. Students that use PECS or other types of picture communication systems could ask for an ingredient needed to complete a step in the recipe. Using some available online recipes (some are available on the NCSE website under this week’s theme) encourage the student to find and click the arrow for the next step in the recipe.

Some useful information for baking with students with complex needs can be found through the following links:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/cooking-special-needs-children>

<https://www.cerebralpalsy.org/blog/cooking-with-a-child-with-special-needs>

<https://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/food/recipe-collections/easy-baking-recipes-for-kids-14656>

<https://autismclassroomresources.com/cooking-in-classroom-resources-for/>