SECTION 2

Cooking and Food Preparation Experiences



Cooking and food preparation experiences

Within ECEC settings, cooking and food preparation experiences can provide children with opportunities to enhance their learning, development and wellbeing.

By allowing children to engage in cooking and food preparation, educators can support learning and development across multiple areas of the EYLF.

Experiences versus activities

Both experiences and activities play crucial roles in ECEC, but they have distinct characteristics.

Activities are planned, intentional, structured, focus on skill development and are guided by the educator (e.g. games, play-based small group work).[3]

Experiences on the other hand are holistic (consider and respond to various aspects of child development), are often child-led, and provide real world context by providing ongoing opportunities for children to be curious explorers in their everyday environment.[3] Experiences can often be spontaneous (by following a child's lead) and incorporate broader societal themes such as cultural diversity (e.g. seeing how other cultures prepare food).

With this difference in mind, cooking and food preparation sit firmly within the category of experiences and are among the richest available to children in ECEC settings.

Developmentally and contextually appropriate experiences refer to intentional, appropriate experiences that engage young children in the safe preparation of food. These are designed to support holistic development and child agency through sensory-rich, hands-on learning that integrates physical, social, cognitive and emotional domains[3,4,5], underpinned by an appropriate risk assessment (including individual child needs such as food allergies). Early involvement in food preparation experiences can also support development of food literacy skills such as confidence with kitchen equipment, food preparation and knowledge about foods including where foods come from.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA5

Reflective questions



Educators

- *How do you currently involve children in planning cooking and food preparation experiences? Can you think of more opportunities to include their voice and input?*
- *Have you completed the relevant food safety and allergen management training? Do you feel confident applying that knowledge during cooking and food preparation experiences with children?*
- *How does your service support new staff to build risk awareness around food and cooking experiences during induction? Is this revisited as part of ongoing professional development?*

Service leadership team

- *How do you ensure staff have the skills, confidence and support to safely lead cooking and food preparation experiences with children? How would you know if a staff member didn't feel confident and what could you do about it?*

Supporting learning and development through cooking and food preparation experiences

Fun and engaging cooking and food preparation experiences can support children's holistic learning and development in many ways, including:

Physical development

- Improving fine motor skills.[5]
- Providing opportunities for children to use all senses through engagement, exploration, explanation, extension and evaluation.[4]

Socio-cultural awareness

- Encouraging cultural understanding.[5]
- Encouraging collaboration with their peers.[5]

Numeracy, literacy and science skills

- Measuring and counting ingredients builds early number sense and an understanding of quantity.[4,6]
- Reading and following a recipe together builds vocabulary and understanding of sequence and process.[5,6]
- Tasting, observing and predicting what will happen builds curiosity and encourages children to make discoveries about the world around them.[4]

Food safety and hygiene

- Understanding basic food hygiene principles such as washing hands before cooking, tying hair back and wearing an apron.
- Learning how to handle foods safely such as using tongs, clean utensils, awareness of keeping certain foods hot or cold and separating raw and cooked food.

Confidence and pride

- Supporting curiosity and confidence when completing hands-on tasks.[4]
- Fostering a sense of pride in achievements.[4,5]

Promoting environmental sustainability awareness and eco-citizenship

- Nurturing and supporting young children to be engaged eco-citizens through understanding how food is linked to the environment.[7]
- Beginning to build an understanding of where food comes from (e.g. plants, animals), including agriculture, local foods, and seasonality.[8]

Fostering further learning and development

Cooking and food preparation experiences naturally support children's social and cognitive development. They involve social interaction, and they sit right at the edge of what a child can do alone and what they can do with a bit of support, which is exactly where children learn best (Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, as cited in Barry & King, 1998).[9]

In addition to the preparation and cooking skills developed during cooking experiences, participating children:

- Are more likely to consume foods such as fruits and vegetables.[10,11,12]

See Mealtime Environment and Practices, Section 3, page 31

- Develop collaboration and teamwork skills.
- Develop social-emotional, cognitive, communication, and empathy skills.

Understanding why cooking and food preparation experiences matter is the foundation. The following section focuses on how to bring them to life safely, confidently and well, covering what service leaders, educators and families each need to know.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA5

COOKING AND FOOD PREPARATION EXPERIENCES

Preparing and planning

Thorough planning and preparation for cooking and food preparation experiences ensures that these experiences are safe for all children and staff, run smoothly and are fun for everyone involved. Planning requires support from service leaders, time allocated to staff who are planning, delivering and supervising the experience, and clear communication with families.

→ **Service Leader's Perspective**

→ **Educator's Perspective**

Supporting cooking – service leader's perspective

Service leaders play an important role in encouraging and supporting staff to plan and prepare cooking and food preparation experiences.

Key considerations

- Keep communication open.
- Ensure staff are involved in the planning of the experience.
- Support staff to build their skills, training and agency.
- Allow staff plenty of time to plan and prepare.
- Ensure the experience is carried out in a safe way for all children and staff involved.

Staff engagement and communication

- Talk to staff and ask about what they are confident doing, time constraints, what they would like to do, etc.
- Get to know staff knowledge, skills, strength and agency around cooking.
- Allocate time for cooks to work with the children – cooks hold a wealth of knowledge and skills that add richness to these experiences and can also enhance their engagement in the service.
- Build engagement with the cook by explaining the intention of the cooking experience and involving the cook in the planning of cooking and food preparation experience – this will also ensure that there has been good communication between educators and cooks and alignment with the planned menu.

Staff involvement

- Involve staff in selecting experiences as there will be more buy-in if they are part of the process.
- Cooking and food preparation experiences may be new for some educators, so it's important to meet them where they are at. For example, if an educator is not feeling confident about running the experience, find something simple to start with.

Support and agency

- Ensure staff know the service leader is there to support them.
- Ask staff – What would make you feel comfortable? What do you need from me?
- Guide staff until they are confident they can carry out the experience themselves.
- Provide peer support for the experience if needed.
- Allocate leadership roles for those with most interest and high cooking ability.

Planning

- Have flexibility with options as there may not be time to upskill staff or backfill with other staff.
- Allow staff time to prepare for activities and experiences.
- Have a standard procedure for running cooking experiences for all staff.
- For large centres, a roster for cooking experiences can share the load amongst educators.

Training

- Seek training for those who are interested in facilitating these experiences but have no experience or limited ability.

Food safety awareness, assessment and management

- Ensure food safety management practices are in place and a risk assessment has been conducted. More information can be found from the ACECQA website.
- Educators must complete food safety training (such as DoFoodSafely, FoodSafe Online or I'm Alert Food Safety Training) before commencing any cooking or food preparation experiences.

Food allergen management

- Ensure all staff have completed **All About Allergens for Childhood Education and Care (CEC)** training in the last 12 months.
- Ensure all staff have training about other special dietary needs relevant to the children in the service.
- Communicate with staff regarding the food allergies and intolerances of children at the service.
- Ensure the cooking experience is safe for all children to participate, including those with food allergies.

Policy and procedures

- Make sure policy and procedures are in place.
- Adhere to supervisor ratios at all times.

Playing with food can be an ethical and sustainability concern, as it may contribute to food waste and be insensitive to cultural values and socioeconomic circumstances, particularly for children who may be experiencing food insecurity.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA4, QA7

Planning and delivering – educator's perspective

Cooking and food preparation experiences are a great way to help children develop new skills and explore their world. Planning and preparation are key to ensuring these experiences are safe for all children and staff involved, run smoothly and that children get the most out of them.

Planning involves deciding what, when, and how. Preparing involves getting the space, equipment and ingredients ready. Delivering involves facilitating the experience itself.

1 Planning

Planning the experience

- Plan where the experience will be run, what will be done, what will be needed:
  - Have a clear aim and learning outcomes.
  - Spontaneous experiences are also possible and can be documented and evaluated afterwards. These may be more common in smaller services.
- Communicate with families well beforehand if their child has food allergies. Ideally, the food prepared will be safe for all children, including those with food allergy.
- Organise children into small groups of 4–5.
- Depending on resources available, it may be possible to have all the same type and colour of equipment for children, which can reduce the choice of tools taking over the experience. Alternatively, having a variety of options provides a child a sense of agency and opportunity to build resilience.
  - It can be a valuable learning opportunity in itself to discuss that there are only X number of blue bowls and this time they didn't get their first choice, but they can choose a green or red one instead.
- Plan for an experience to take at least double the time to complete than stated on the recipe.

Collaboration and communication with the cook

Communication and collaboration with the service cook is crucial to ensure the smooth running of activities and experiences. Consider asking the cook to run cooking experiences as they hold a wealth of knowledge and skills which add richness and can broaden their involvement in the service.

- Where possible give the cooks at least one week's notice before a cooking or food preparation experience so they can prepare anything that is needed:
  - This will depend on size of the centre and number of children – larger services may need to give more notice to the cook.
  - For food allergies: cooks usually have processes in place for food allergen management, and they will have tools and templates for allergens and suitable alternatives for ingredients – utilise their knowledge and experience to help ensure the experience is safe for all children involved.
- Give the cook notice if kitchen equipment is needed.
- Understand the intention of the experience and communicate this to the cook if collaborating.
- Communicate clearly with the cook on the day of the experience, including what will be prepared, and when, to ensure food preparation is not doubled up. Clear communication will prevent this from happening and allow kitchen planning to be amended for the day to reduce waste.

1 Planning (continued)

Collaboration and communication with other educators

- Discuss the experience with the team and incorporate other non-food learning experiences during the day that align with the recipe or ingredients being prepared, for example stories, songs and crafting experiences.
- Discuss with other staff members involved about what will be happening so everyone is prepared.
- Communicate clearly – talk through specific movements so if another staff member needs to step in temporarily, this can be facilitated.

Collaboration and communication with children

- Where possible, involve children in choosing what to cook – this supports child agency and builds investment in the experience.
- Allow children choice when they are involved in cooking. This can include involving children in food selection to take their preferences into account.
- Children with food allergy should not be responsible for checking or managing the safety of their food – this is the responsibility of the adults caring for them. Their preferences should still be sought and accommodated with safe options.
- Offer a variety of ingredients to support curiosity and sensory exploration. Encourage interest in food through stress free experiences – it could be a sensory experience, rather than an eating experience.
- Allow time for feedback from children regarding how they felt about the experience.

Considerations

- Take into account any diverse needs that children may have, for example sensory processing accommodations.
- Take into account any dietary restrictions. Ensure all staff have training about special dietary needs relevant to the children in the service.
- Take into account, or avoid, potentially hazardous ingredients that require training to handle safely – such as raw whole eggs, raw meats, etc. (anything that has bacteria on it that will cross-contaminate surfaces).
- The National Allergy Council recommends that ECEC services do not rely on volunteers to care for children with food allergy in this setting.

Food allergen awareness

- Include food allergies in the initial risk management assessment.
- Discuss plans for any cooking experience with families in the early planning stages – aim for safe inclusion.
- Ensure all staff have completed the **All about Allergens for CEC** training in the last 12 months.
- Communicate with all staff involved regarding the food allergies and intolerances of children participating in the experience.
- Allergens and dietary requirements should be known and accommodated.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 3

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4, QA6

2 Preparing

Environment

- Clean the area where the cooking or food preparation experience will take place. Use warm water and detergent and a clean cloth/sponge that is only used for food preparation areas.
- Ensure the physical environment is safe. Surfaces should be clean and dry, hazardous equipment stored out of reach, and the space adequate for the group size.
- Keep cooking experience ingredients in a separate area from general food preparation ingredients.

Equipment

- Prepare all equipment beforehand.
- Allocate separate equipment that can be used out of the kitchen which will not affect the cook's ability to prepare regular meals.

Ingredients

- Add additional ingredients for the cooking experience on the food order/purchasing list.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA2, QA3



3 Delivering

- Plan for small groups rotating through the experience for better supervision, improved safety, and best experience for children and staff.
- Ensure appropriate supervision of children throughout the cooking or food preparation experience by maintaining correct ratios at all times.
- Clearly explain expectations for the experience to children before you start.
- Be flexible as plans may need to be adapted throughout.

Engaging families

- Ask families to volunteer to run or assist with cooking experiences at the service:
- Ask families to provide a Working with Children Check prior to conducting the session. Refer to your state or territory Working With Children guidelines regarding parent volunteer requirements. Ensure adherence to the child safe standards and follow the service's policies and procedures around child safety and safeguarding.
- If they agree to run a session, ask families to provide the service with a list of ingredients and equipment necessary for the session they will run, in addition to the recipe that will be used.
- Inform families whether any food allergens/intolerances/food preferences will need to be considered.
- Speak with families prior to running the session and ask if there are any special requirements.
  - Ask staff for assistance with supervision while running the session.
- Get families involved via open-door sessions or invite them to join meals at the service. If the service has an open-door policy, parents can come in at any time and can eat with the children if they come at mealtimes.
- Ask families to contribute ingredients e.g. a vegetable for a mixed vegetable soup.
- Share menus with families.
- Include cultural elements on the menu – e.g. write on the menu in the language that the dish comes from.

See Case study, page 104 of this module

- Communicate with families regarding a child's likes/dislikes, food allergies and other dietary requirements.
- On Country experiences – invite families to lead children on a walk on Country to share knowledge and experience of traditional bush foods. Remember to label all foods provided for children to try, and to be mindful of food allergies and intolerances.

See Case study, page 102 of this module

- On Country food – ask families to bring in special ingredients to talk about with the children.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA4, QA6

CASE STUDY

Connecting education to real life

The mini-chef experience

SERVICE	Montessori Minds Childcare
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	1 to 6 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	127
NUMBER OF STAFF	35–40
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Major cities

LOCATION

Geelong, Victoria



Background

Montessori Minds Childcare is a relatively new service in Victoria, which has been in operation for around two and a half years. The centre serves a highly diverse and vulnerable area and plays an important role in education and support for the whole community.

The building was designed with the aim of creating a learning environment where sustainability, food education, cultural inclusion, and community engagement were embedded into daily practice rather than treated as stand-alone programs or events.

The Montessori philosophy underpins all learning experiences, emphasising real-world connections, practical life skills, observation, and respect for living things. This approach creates an inclusive environment where learning flows between the centre, families, and the wider community.

The weekly cooking experiences with the centre chef play a part in that flow of learning to the home. Children bring cooking skills and knowledge learned at the centre back to their families – everyone learns and enjoys!

What did you want to do?

- Both the centre director and owner wanted to help children develop practical cooking skills while they were at the centre.
  - Practical cooking experiences help children build independence, confidence and everyday life skills.
  - They support fine motor development, concentration and early maths and science concepts through measuring, pouring, mixing and following steps.
  - Cooking also encourages confidence and curiosity with food, language development and a sense of contribution as children take part in meaningful real-life tasks.
- One way to do this was through hands-on cooking experiences with the chef.
- This would also allow children the opportunity to develop skills that they could use throughout life, and even bring them into their family homes.

What did you do?

- Chef-led cooking experiences were integrated into the program at the service.
- It was decided that these experiences would be 'no fire cooking' to reduce risk.
- Chef experiences are used with the three- to five-year-old children at the centre.
- The children cook every week with the chef, as part of the program.
  - Smoothies are a favourite, with many parents reporting that the children have been able to remember the recipe to re-create the smoothies at home.
- Children also collect herbs from the centre's garden to use in the chef experiences, supporting sensory learning and food literacy.

The difference it has made

- Learning has extended into homes, with families reporting that children are increasingly leading cooking at home.
  - Parents have reported that children often want to re-create the food they have made at the service at home, and lead the way with creating a shopping list to buy the ingredients.
- Children have also built strong social skills, confidence and collaboration through play and cooking experiences with the centre chef.

Top tips

Use real-world activities and experiences wherever possible to create rich learning experiences for children.

Through real-world cooking experiences, children at Montessori Minds are learning all about food and cooking, building confidence and skills that will benefit them, and their families, throughout life.

These experiences also create opportunities to explore cultural foods and family traditions, strengthening children's sense of identity, belonging and respect for diversity, while inviting valuable parent involvement.

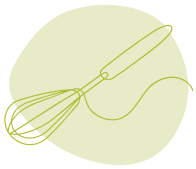
Most importantly, cooking experiences are planned around the rights, interests and wellbeing of children, ensuring their safety, voice and enjoyment remain central at all times.

COOKING AND FOOD PREPARATION EXPERIENCES

Developing and delivering – ideas, procedures and prompts for planning

Cooking and food preparation ideas

This section contains four tables with food preparations and cooking ideas from four different perspectives:



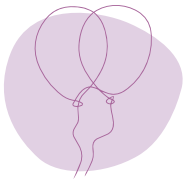
Resources and equipment available



Budget



Educator cooking skills



Developmental stage of the child

Use these tables as ideas to get started, then use the **standard operating procedure template** and the **practice questions** that follow to create food preparation and cooking experiences tailored to the ECEC service where they will be used. Remember it's important to consider food safety, including food allergies and anaphylaxis, when planning all cooking and food preparation experiences.

Strategies

Risk assessment

- Ensure a thorough risk assessment, including food allergies, is completed before the experience begins. Risk assessment should also include, for example: what materials are being used and if they are developmentally appropriate, introducing safe use of equipment before using (e.g. teaching children how to hold a peeler or a knife safely), ensuring compliance with local food safety and council requirements, hygiene practices and cultural inclusion.
- Ensure medical and dietary management plans are in place and communicated to all staff involved in the experience.
- Use an allergen matrix and create placemats or allergen cards for educators to use during the experience.
- Compost that contains manure might not be suitable for young children to handle, unless you gear them up with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements stated on the packaging (e.g. gloves, mask).

Planning, time and resources

- Ensure enough time is allocated to research recipe and resources needed to create experience.
- Ensure enough time for preparation of the experience and actual learning outcomes that are to be the focus.
- Use pictorial recipes that include pictures of equipment and ingredients needed as well as pictures of each step – this will help children to understand and remember what they have to do next.

Supervision and group management

- Support colleagues in the delivery of the experience and with supervision.
- Follow the procedure prepared for the experience step by step.
- Make small to medium groups of 4-5 children at a time for the experience – smaller groups lead to a better cooking experience for both staff and children as supervision can be maintained and children can get the assistance they need to learn the new skills.
- Give some instructions to staff and children on timing of the experience.
- Give children recipes – step by step.
- Create a culture that invites learning not just for the children, but also for staff – make resources easy to understand and make no assumptions about what staff might know.

Planning and organising experiences

These are some experiences that require no to minimal equipment and can be prepared in any type of service. Examples include sorting fruits and vegetables and involving children in menu planning.

- Sorting food into colours.
- Sorting fruit into sizes and shapes.
- Colour grouping and counting of vegetables/fruits to incorporate mathematics, then tasting the foods.
- Allowing children to have input into menu planning.
- Including children in planning for celebrations.
- Making fruit skewers (using paddle pop sticks) in sorting patterns.

For children with sensory needs, touching food with their hands may cause undue stress.

Instead, the child may be more comfortable touching the food with a fork or tongs. Alternatively, an educator could sit next to the child who may prefer to instruct the educator how to sort or move the food.

This way, the educator can do the manipulation of the foods if it is preferred.

The educator could also ask the child every now and again if they would like to do the sorting themselves, in case they have changed their mind and now feel comfortable with the food experience.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA4

TABLE 2: *Cooking and food preparation ideas based on material resources*

No oven, minimal to no utensils or equipment

Preparation experiences

These experiences require no specialist equipment and are easy to plan and prepare for.

- Washing fruit or vegetables
- Cut up an apple cross wise to see a star hiding inside
- Peeling hard boiled eggs
- Growing vegetables
- Chopping
- Grating
- Spreading
- Rolling
- Kneading

Cooking experiences

These are no-bake cooking ideas that just need a fridge or freezer.
Examples include no-bake foods such as fruit balls or making no cook/raw playdough.

Spreading mashed avocado on bread	Preparing simple sandwiches or wraps	Making simple dips e.g. with canned beans + yoghurt
Making a basic green salad – tearing lettuce, breaking up peas, and washing cherry tomatoes	Exploring vegetables using child safe knives and cutters such as crinkle cutters	Chopping soft fruits (banana, watermelon, kiwi, mango, pear) with child safe knives
Making fruit and custard/yogurt parfaits where children can choose the fruit they will add	Make pasta/noodles with water and flour – mix by hand, shape by hand, take home to cook	Making fruit sticks using paddle pop sticks
Making sandwich sushi using a rolling pin to roll bread slices flat, and then add ingredients and roll up like sushi	Making dough with yeast. Observe the yeast bloom in water before adding to flour to make dough. Observe the dough rising when rested	Chopping vegetables to make crudité (vegetable sticks) to dip in hummus etc. with child safe knives *Note: This is not a suitable experience for children under the age of 5 years due to the risk of choking*
Washing, tearing, assembling, shaking (e.g. dressing in jars)	"Painting" bread with olive oil using pastry brush	

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3

Kitchenette (no oven) some utensils and equipment

Preparation experiences

These experiences require basic equipment such as pouring jugs, ladles, bowls, scales for weighing, sieves for flour items/sensory mixtures.

- Mixing
- Measuring
- Pouring
- Chopping
- Blending
- Flipping (on frypan)
- Kneading
- Blending
- Beating
- Whisking
- Brushing (pastry brush)
- Spiralising an apple
- Microwaving

Cooking experiences

These are experiences that need basic kitchen utensils and equipment. Examples include pikelets and toasted sandwiches.

For 0–2 years, organise food sensory experiences or tuff tray exploration using pantry items such as flour or corn flour mixed with water and food colouring. For older children this can be extended to how these ingredients can be used for other recipes	Chopping fruits, combining with natural yogurts and blending to make smoothies, and then freezing some to create frozen icy poles, such as frozen banana pops	Quesadillas or gozleme made with base dough and filled with choice of grated cheese, spinach, corn, feta, spring onion, tomato etc. using the sandwich press
Steaming vegetable dumplings using an electric steamer	Making smoothies using portable blenders	Mixing pikelet mixture with hand operated beaters
Making and cooking flat bread using either sandwich press or electric frypan	Making frozen fruit slushies or granita using food processor to blend frozen fruit	Making recipes that need the fridge or freezer to set (e.g. juice-based jelly, chia pudding cups, panna cotta)
Making pikelets in electric frying pan	Toasted sandwiches or jaffles	Making fruit/vegetable platters
Making pita crisps using sandwich press to crispen chopped pieces of pita bread	Making bliss balls using food processor to blitz dried fruit with oats, cereal and honey *Note: Honey should not be given to children under 12 months of age*	Making sweet (strawberry and ricotta on raisin bread) or savoury (tomato) bruschetta using sandwich press to toast bread
Whisking eggs to make omelettes or fritters	Making potato patties based on mashed potato and cooking them in a frypan	Making vegetable-based fritters in electric frypan

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3

Kitchen with utensils and equipment

Preparation experiences

These experiences require access to more specialist equipment such as an oven, stove and cookware.

- Baking
- Frying and sautéing
- Roasting

Cooking experiences

These are experiences that use the full range of equipment available if there is access to a kitchen. Examples include fried rice and rainbow wedges.

Scones/muffins	Mini pizzas	Cooking fried rice
Making flat breads	Use a mini frying pan or pancake maker to make pancakes	Yeast based foods like basic breads or crumpets
Make naan by mixing flour and water, then frying in frypan	Making sushi	Baking bread (e.g. rolls and scrolls)
Roasting rainbow wedges (e.g. potato, sweet potato, carrot, beetroot)	Making mini quiches using bread rolled flat as a base	Making mini frittatas using muffin trays
Creating a full paddock to plate experience for children to explore how to grow, care for foods, then create their own meal plan with the ingredients they have grown. Children will then participate in the cooking and tasting experience	Making oven baked pita crisps – brush the pita with oil and flavours (e.g. cinnamon and brown sugar for sweet; cheese and paprika for savoury)	

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3

TABLE 3: *Cooking and food preparation ideas based on budgetary resources*

Minimal budget

Non-food experiences

These experiences allow children to explore food at minimal cost. Examples include books with cooking stories and ingredient collages.

Non-food experiences such as food and cooking based story books, and stories that involve cooking but may not be the main focus	Wombat stew experience – reading the book, using wombat toy, pretend fire and cauldron. Add mud and all bits from the book	Making ingredient collages for recipes using picture cut outs or printed images
Making playdough as a cooking experience	Planting seeds in windowsill planter	Watching seeds grow on cotton wool
Ordering recipe method pictures	Creating fruit and vegetable rainbow collage	Utilising the home corner for food-based play experiences
Categorising pictures/photos of fruits/vegetables by colour	Online recipe sharing between families and ECEC service	

Budget recipe ideas

Budget recipes

These experiences have some cost involved. Examples include scones and overnight oats.

Toasted sandwiches	Rice balls	Scones
Rainbow salad jars	Banana bread	Monthly home recipe day*
Tasting plates with a wider range of fruit/vegetables than usual, dips and bread	Simple overnight oats with seeds and fruit	Flat bread – this can be used to make cheesy quesadillas
Hummus or bean dip made with tinned legumes, fresh salsa	Smoothies with children selecting their fruit to add	Marshmallow snowmen for Christmas – make and send home
Pikelets – children mix wet and dry ingredients, cook/educator cooks pikelets, children get to put jam and cream after or create a sweet option using various fruit options, or a savoury option using various grated vegetables. Allow children to choose their fruit or vegetables	Air fried Anzac biscuits around Remembrance Day – children mix biscuit dough, educator puts them in the air fryer	Fried rice – the cook precooks rice, children add ingredients, cook fries it up
Johnny Cakes/damper	Zucchini fritters using garden produce	Decorating pancakes with yoghurt and fruit

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3

Extended budget

Cooking and preparation experiences if an extended budget is available

These experiences are ideal for services with an unlimited budget for cooking experiences. Examples include excursions to local markets and having a dedicated food preparation area for the children.

Engage a consultant to undertake food/cooking incursions with children and outsource cooking experiences	Set up a dedicated hands-on cooking space for groups of children to undertake cooking experiences	Make Gulab Jamun for the Hindu celebration of Diwali
Visits from different cultural groups	Bread making with use of food mixer and oven	Grazing board – food from around the world
Visit local markets and purchase produce to explore and prepare	Kitchen garden program *See Section 2, page 37*	Full bread making, beginning from grinding grain
Fresh pesto	Community feasts	Banquets
Purchase adaptive tools to help little hands e.g. hand operated mixers, choppers and crinkle cutters	Dedicated food preparation area for children that includes child-friendly utensils and gadgets	Have a food exploration table, offering a small food exploration or provocation, within the learning environment. It could include a selection of the food being explored, photographs or picture cards, a relevant children's book, pretend food or cooking utensils, and opportunities for children to engage in conversations, sensory exploration, dramatic play, drawing, or simple food preparation.
All recipes used are pictorial and laminated, and kept in a dedicated folder	Weekly cooking experiences for all children delivered by a dedicated and trained educator	

Budgeting strategies

- Use what is already on the menu – turn meals into make your own plate, wraps, salads.
- Use pantry staples (oats, flour, tinned vegetables).
- Use garden produce.
  See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75
- Plant and harvest a small range of herbs and vegetables to use in recipes.
- Plan low-cost bulk recipes (soups, stews, muffins) that have the same ingredients as your existing menu, so you just need to extend current shopping list slightly.
- Use existing tools, repurpose bowls, jugs, spoons.
- Cooking experiences can be in existing routines, for example wash vegetables at the table with children instead of having the cook do it in the kitchen where the children may not be able to see – these are short simple tasks that fit with supervision.
- Saving parts of food for growing experiences – e.g. sprout spring onion roots, avocado seeds, carrot tops and sweet potatoes to make greens.
- Invite families to donate a vegetable or fruit to make a combined vegetable soup or fruit salad.
- Compost waste.
- Using food scraps for worm farm – creating worm juice to feed gardens and plants.

Accessibility strategies

This budget-friendly strategy may also be useful for services that struggle to access resources, even with a budget.

- Growing seeds on windowsill is a great way for children to see how a plant grows from a seed and can be used in services without extra space outdoors for a garden or garden beds.

*Food allergy awareness and food allergen management

If food has been brought in from other families' homes to share or cook with, it is not recommended that the food be consumed by a child with food allergies. The risk of unintentional cross-contamination with allergens, and an allergic reaction or anaphylaxis, is too great.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA6

TABLE 4: *Cooking and food preparation ideas based on educator cooking skills*

Limited cooking experience and skills

Experiences for those with minimal cooking skills

These experiences are ideal for all staff, including those who are beginning their cooking experience with children, to help them build their capacity for more involved cooking in the future. They include washing and sorting foods and peeling vegetables.

Sorting experiences	Washing fruits or vegetables	Planting seeds
Role playing cooking	Pretend cooking with play dough	Singing food and cooking songs
Harvesting and handling produce from vegetables gardens *See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75*	Reading food-based or cooking stories	Making ingredient collages and recipe method sorting experiences
Using food-based resources to simulate purchasing and food preparation that is not feasible to do in real life	Food exploration experiences (e.g. corn peeling, pea podding)	Making basic fruit skewers using pop-sticks

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4

Average level of cooking experience and skills

Experiences for those with average cooking skills

These experiences are ideal for staff who have some experience with cooking, or who want to try something a bit more involved. They include chopping fruits and vegetables and making salads.

Experiences with simple ingredients	Cutting up fruit and vegetables	Experiences with a cooking step
No bake recipes	Salads and wraps	Microwave toaster recipes
Basic sandwich, smoothie or parfait style food experiences	Helping children to use toddler knives	

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4,

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA3, QA4

Confident with cooking and food experiences

Experiences for those who are confident in the kitchen

See Section 2, page 37

These experiences are ideal for staff who have a lot of experience with cooking and may want to provide a greater challenge for the children. They include cooking with heat sources and using multi-staged recipes.

Baking	Leading special events	Using recipes with multiple steps
Full heat-based meals like soups, curries, fried rice	Teaching knife skills, grating or peeling skills	Dough-based experiences like rolls and scrolls
Conducting garden to table sessions See Sustainable Food Practices, Section 6, page 75	Any experience that requires time to cook	Leading larger groups of children
Safety knives – confident educators will use these – but those that are not confident may worry that children will cut themselves	Facilitating experiences for children with multiple food allergies or other complex medical needs	Any experience that requires the handling of high-risk foods – eggs, meats, raw vegetables/fruit that has come in contact with soil. Reduce the risk by pre-cracking eggs, and pre-chopping other high-risk ingredients to minimise children's direct contact with these foods.
More complex food preparation experiences that might need adapting on the go	Any experience that requires children possibly coming in contact with a heat source	

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4

TABLE 5: *Cooking and food preparation ideas based on the developmental stage of the child*

Cooking and food preparation ideas based on the developmental stage of the child

From the very beginning of planning a cooking experience, consider the developmental stage of the children involved. The cooking experience should link with current planning, experiences, calendar of events, cultural celebrations, child interests and parents as partners. Take into account any diverse needs of children that need to be catered for so that all children can participate safely in the experience.

Note: All children develop at their own rate. The age categories below are a guide only, and developmental descriptions are also provided for additional context.

Under 2 years

These experiences are suitable for children who are exploring through their senses and developing early physical, social and communication skills. They include sensory as well as exploratory experiences.

Exploring different foods and talk about their colours, shapes, smell and taste to enhance vocabulary	Mashing whole banana or cooked pumpkin in front of children so they can watch it changing, rather than serving it to them already mashed	Smelling and touching herbs and spices or watching an adult tear or chop them
Exploring safe large pieces of food like steamed carrot sticks or bread crusts	Watching an adult stir or shake a food and talk about what they are doing	Exploring bowls of dry foods e.g. different types of bread.
Joining in hand-washing songs	Patting or poking soft dough	Washing fruits and vegetables
Food exploration (e.g. banana in different forms – cut circles, sticks and mashed, passing food to put in their bowl – a piece of soft pear or watermelon, banana)		

Cooking and food preparation ideas based on the developmental stage of the child (continued)

2-3 years

These experiences are suitable for children who are building independence, language, fine-motor skills and early problem-solving abilities. They include role play and simple food preparation experiences.

Pouring ingredients	Mashing bananas or potatoes	Washing fruits and vegetables
Tearing lettuce or herbs	Kneading dough	Mashing their own soft foods
Stirring the bowl	Winding an apple spiraliser	Shaking a jar of salad dressing
Brushing with pastry brush	Sprinkling herbs and spices	Threading fruit on a pop stick
Role play using foods in everyday situations	Mixing a marinade e.g. for vegetables	Cutting soft foods with child safe knife

4 years and up

These experiences are suitable for children who are ready for greater independence, collaboration, creativity, planning and problem-solving. They include experiences that require a greater amount of fine motor skills and comprehension of danger from e.g. heat.

Rolling protein ball mixture into balls	Following simple picture recipe	Using tongs and spatulas
Role-playing 'restaurant'	Peeling boiled eggs	Shaping dough and making scrolls
Putting muffin mix into patty pans e.g. with an ice cream scoop	Spreading toppings on bread or crackers	Using graters and peelers with supervision
Counting and naming ingredients	Cracking eggs *Ensure children wash hands straight after cracking the eggs and before touching other foods and surfaces to avoid cross-contamination.*	Weighing and measuring ingredients

Promote physical literacy by demonstrating the actions needed for cooking and the language to support each movement, e.g. stirring, rolling, kneading	Support extensions of role play by including experiences, incorporating specific language, and bringing in science and mathematics such as scales, colours and measurements

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3 , Outcome 4

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA6

Planning and delivering – standard operating procedure template

Unlike the information and guidance in the rest of this module, Table 6 is a practical planning template designed to be filled in and used directly at your service. Use it to bring together information and ideas from across this module and create cooking and food preparation experiences tailored to the children, staff and resources unique to your ECEC setting.

TABLE 6: *Standard Operating Procedure Template: Cooking and Food Preparation Experiences*

Pre-planning – safety first	
Safety task *What safety elements need to be considered*	• List food safety and food allergy considerations – identify children with food allergies and do not plan experiences that include their food allergen. • List any choking risks. • List other safety considerations – burn/scald risk? • Consider heat, sharps, electricity, trip hazards etc. • List any high-risk foods that can pose a food safety hazard and need to be kept cold such as meat, dairy foods and/or need to be cooked thoroughly such as raw meat and egg.
Support resources *What support resources are available to make decisions regarding risk*	• Complete a risk assessment specific to the food experience. *See Section 2, page 37* • Consider utilising a risk assessment tool like the one provided on the: ACECQA website • Complete the National Allergy Council All about Allergens for CEC online food allergen management training – The All about Allergens Kitchen Handbook is an accompanying tool for this training. • Complete the National Allergy Council – CEC Kitchen handbook checklist (pp. 38-39).[13] • To assist with ingredient substitutions, consult the All About Allergens ingredient substitution tool.
Decision *State the decision on experience, adaptations or mitigations*	• All food-based experiences must accommodate children with food allergies. They must not include that child's food allergen. Use recipes that are easy to adapt. • Consider a risk mitigation tool. For example, if food allergies exist what alternative can be provided? If a heat source is involved, how are children protected from burns? • Decisions can be guided by the outcomes of the risk assessment tool. Consider using something like a flow chart whereby if too many risks are ticked then revert to a safer food preparation or cooking experience.
Pre-planning tasks	
Equipment	**Utensils** • Have the correct utensils to undertake the experience safely. • Ensure there are child accessible tools like tongs, spoons and knives. **Resources** • Use a pictorial equipment guide if possible. **Serving and dining equipment** • Ensure there is appropriate serving equipment and consumables. For example: - Use service crockery where possible to support sustainable practices, before considering the use of disposable paper plates. - Have serviettes, hand wipes and plenty of paper towels ready for messy hands. - If making taste testers use patty pans or mini sauce tubs etc. • Consider whether seating is needed for children at the tables.

Pre-planning tasks (continued)	
Equipment *(continued)*	**Cleaning** • Ensure there is appropriate cleaning equipment – bench cloths, paper towels, tub of soapy water if no kitchen sink or at least have a separate tub to place dirty dishes. • If using a tub of soapy water to wash dishes, this should then be followed up when possible with proper washing and sanitising before the equipment is used again. **Food wastage** • Scraps bowl – save food scraps for worm farm and compost. • Ensure there is a disposal bin, including for recyclables.
Ingredients	**Food allergen management** • Remember to first consider which children are participating in the experience – these could include children with specific dietary needs or food allergies, diverse support needs and abilities that need to be considered. • Check all ingredients within an experience including the precautionary allergen labelling. • List all of the allergens using a food allergen matrix. If a child with a food allergy is present (considering children attending each day) then that allergen should not be present at all in the experience. • Any ingredient substitutions must be considered against the allergen matrix. • Create a standard recipe to be used for the experience. **Food safety** • Food safety – take note of high-risk ingredients and the time they are left in the temperature danger zone (5-60°C).[14] **Ingredient preparation** • Consider which foods children will be allowed to engage with (for example touching, smelling, tasting). • Check ingredient quantities – will the dish form a meal or is it just for a taste test? • Consider which ingredients will be allowed, how will they be presented on the table, etc. • Consider whether any ingredients need to be pre-prepared – e.g. chopped or peeled, to help make the cooking experience easier and less stressful. • Consider how children will access the ingredients to ensure all children can participate. • Consider whether ingredients will be set out in pre-measured quantities. **Budget** • Seek low cost, home brand, ingredients. Consider substitutions for in-season produce.
Location	• Consider where the experience will be run? • Consider the cleanliness of the location for the experience (e.g. not in the paint room) and ease of cleaning afterwards. • Avoid planning food experiences in carpeted areas. • Consider if there needs to be access to electricity and water. • Consider whether there is enough room for ingredients/equipment and tables for food preparation.

Pre-planning tasks (continued)	
Group management and supervision during the cooking or food preparation experience	**Food allergen management** • Anybody with a diagnosed food allergy is to be considered. **Physical safety** • Allow time for children to wash their hands before and after the experience. • Keep the number of children to a maximum of four or five for the experience. - Consideration needs to be given as to how the experience is made available for all children in the room – thought must be put into the amount of time and the opportunity for all children to participate. • Consider the specific steps that the children will be undertaking. Consider whether the children will be observing or actively participating, and whether other children will be allowed to watch. • Consider number of children, their age and development. • Ensure adequate supervision – extra hands to help children may be needed. • Define child tasks and educator only tasks for cooking experiences. For example, using the electric frypan may be an educator task. • List down the possible things that can potentially go wrong/not go according to plan, then how to adapt/or terminate if the experience can no longer be carried out safely. - Develop a quick scenario sheet – if experience hasn't gone to plan, this is what to do.
Staff experience and experience familiarity	• Consider the experience level of educators to supervise the experience. • Consider the confidence of educators to safely undertake the task. - When planning the experience, discuss with the staff who will be present at the time to gauge their confidence and discuss any concerns. • Test the standard operating procedure (SOP) – either by physically making the recipe or getting someone to duplicate the SOP. Educators should pre-test recipes before undertaking cooking experiences to increase their confidence in the delivery of the experience. • Ideally have a lead educator who is tasked with coordination of cooking experiences. This can also help new educators learn how to carry them out in the future. • Building a culture of these experiences ensures everyone is on board and any decisions in SOPs are properly communicated to all staff and family members involved.
Preparation	
Physical cleaning	**Cleaning** • Clean food contact surfaces with soap and water before cooking. • Disinfect tap handles regularly throughout the day. • Ensure clean utensils and equipment are used for the experience. • Keep a cloth and soapy water nearby. **Equipment** • Prepare waste management before cooking – have food waste, recycling and landfill bins nearby and ready for use. • Ensure there is a dustpan and brush nearby for clean up after the experience. • Ensure there is a mop and bucket to clean up after cooking. • Ensure there are clean tables for ingredients and for children to prepare food.
Ingredients gathering	• Gather all ingredients before the cooking experience begins. • Double check for allergens. • Pre-prepare and pre-measure as needed.
Produce preparation	• Ask food handlers to pre-cook high-risk foods, such as raw meat.

Delivery	
Professional practice	• Demonstrate the experience or work through each step together with the children.
Hygiene	• Ensure children have washed their hands with soap and water before, during (if needed) and after the experience: - The Happy birthday song is a good length song for children to sing while washing hands to ensure proper hand-washing length and procedure. • Drying hands with a paper towel or air dryer is crucial (not on pants!). • Use aprons – for staff and children. • Ensure hair is tied back. • Ensure floppy sleeves are pulled back. • Monitor nose picking, coughing and sneezing and remind children about preventing the spread of germs. - In these cases, access to hand -washing facilities, tissues and hand sanitiser is essential before the child cooks. • Clean up spills quickly to avoid cross-contamination.
Eating the prepared food	Remember to keep children safe, sitting down, and use right food to right child protocols if food allergy is involved. This is important as adverse events occur when things that are out of the ordinary routine are happening as children might be excited and staff might be distracted.
Pack down	
Physical cleaning	• Clean surfaces and wash utensils, especially if used for serving later. • Repack the equipment ready for next time. Consider a separate cooking equipment kit/tub for cooking experiences to prevent using kitchen equipment that is needed by the cook/chef.
Hygiene	• Children must wash and dry hands properly.
Reflection	• Plan → Do → Act – What went well, what would I do differently? Please see Prompts for Planning for more ideas. - When reflecting, remember to evaluate each stage of the experience to ensure a more productive experience in the future. • Would we do it again with the same children? Was this too simple/too complex? • Include a self-evaluation section for staff, and an evaluation section for children where they can have a say about the experience.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4

COOKING AND FOOD PREPARATION EXPERIENCES

Risk awareness, common risk factors and safety

Risk awareness

This section of the FE module aims to provide support and guidance with respect to risk awareness only in relation to cooking and food preparation experiences, not risk assessment or management. For information on risk assessment and management, please see the ACECQA website.

For more information on Standard 3.3.1 Food Safety Programs for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons, visit the FSANZ website:

Food safety for vulnerable people

What is meant by risk awareness, risk assessment and risk management

For the purpose of the Best Practice Guide, the following definitions are used:

Risk awareness: Knowledge of the sorts of foods and food handling practices that can cause harm to children.

Risk assessment: Identify potential food safety and physical hazards in association with any cooking and food preparation experiences with children.

Risk management: Apply practices that avoid exposure to hazards in line with the centre Food Safety Program.

Using training and knowledge to support cooking and food preparation experiences

By following the relevant policies and regulations, and completing the correct training, outlined below, cooking and food preparation experiences can be carried out safely for all children and staff involved.

Policy and regulations

- Safe food handling and hygiene practices in ECEC are supported under Regulation 77 and Element 2.1.2.[15,16]
- If a service provides potentially hazardous food, they must have a food safety supervisor.
  - Additional food safety requirements may vary across states and territories.
  - Please check the requirements of your specific state or territory.
  - Remember to review service policies and procedures to ensure they align with your relevant state and territory requirements.

Training

- It is recommended that all staff planning, preparing and supervising meals and food-based experiences for children with food allergy have completed the All about Allergens for Children's Education and Care online food allergen management training.
- Free, introductory food safety training (such as DoFoodSafely, FoodSafe Online and I'm Alert Food Safety Training) can support staff induction and refresher learning.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA2, QA7

Risk awareness: considerations

Table 7 is a good starting point for considering risk in cooking and food preparation experiences. Note, however, that there are additional elements to be aware of when considering risks when coordinating cooking and food preparation experiences depending on service context, children attending and location.

Factor these into any planning and risk assessment, along with the elements in Table 8 (over page), to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for children and staff.

TABLE 7: *Risk awareness considerations for cooking and food preparation experiences*

Risk awareness	Additional points
⚠ **Risk factors** Risk differs based on various factors relevant to each service and planned experience	Risk factors include: **Food safety** — The safe preparation and storage of food to avoid bacterial growth and cross-contamination. **Food allergy** — Foods to which a child may have an allergic reaction, including anaphylaxis. **Space** — The location of the cooking and food preparation experience, hazard reduction, as well as space for storage of food and equipment. **Harm to children and educators** — Physical harm due to allergen exposure, dangerous use of equipment or inappropriate spaces for these experiences.
⚠ **Risk levels** Consider the risk level of a planned cooking experience and modify the plan to reduce risk and potential harm to children and educators	Risk levels can be defined as follows: **Minor risk:** Unlikely to cause long-term problems.[17] The chance of occurrence is unlikely, and the potential impact is low.[17,18] It can be handled through routine maintenance or normal supervision. **Moderate risk:** Could possibly or be likely to occur, with a moderate to significant impact.[18] These risks require planned mitigation because they could lead to noticeable injuries or minor medical attention.[17] **Significant risk:** If it occurs, it can carry severe consequences, such as serious injury, long-term harm, or death.[18] Will require thorough planning and close supervision by staff.[17] Different recipe elements can impact the risk level of a risk factor. For example: **Risk factor: Food safety** Risk Level: **Minor** A minor risk for food safety would be using a recipe requiring food items with a long shelf life do not need to be cooked or refrigerated, e.g. flour, sugar, dry pasta. **Risk factor: Harm to children** Risk level: **Moderate** A moderate risk for harm to children would be choosing a recipe that requires the use of utensils, such as child-safe cutlery for chopping. **Risk factor: Food allergy** Risk level: **Significant** A significant risk for food allergy would be using a recipe that contains the allergen of a child present at the service on the day of the cooking experience – in this case, it is recommended that a different experience is considered, or the experience is modified so that all children prepare a food that is suitable for the child with food allergy.
Risk needs to be considered from the planning stage onwards and evaluated once the experience is completed	Risk assessment is a circular process, involving planning, evaluating, learn from experience, and improving next time. Risks that come up during the experience should be added into the evaluation at the end.

Risk awareness	Additional points
Always consider what support, tools and resources are available	**Regulations** Specific requirements as outlined in the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012 are relevant and must be considered for cooking and food preparation experiences in ECEC[16]: • **Regulation 77.** Health, hygiene and safe food practices. • **Regulation 78.** Food and beverages. • **Regulation 79.** Service providing food and beverages. The Education and Care Service National Law requires approved providers and nominated supervisors to take reasonable precautions to protect children from harm or hazard likely to cause injury (Section 167 – Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazard). These requirements apply directly when planning and delivering cooking and food preparation experiences with children, alongside any state or territory food safety laws that apply to the service. **EYLF** The EYLF v2.0[19] provides the curriculum planning foundation for food education and cooking experiences, with intentionally planned cooking experiences able to support children's learning across multiple outcomes, particularly Outcome 3 (children have a strong sense of wellbeing), Outcome 4 (children are confident and involved learners), Outcome 5 (children are effective communicators) and others. **NQS** The National Quality Standard (NQS) provides the quality framework for planning and reflecting on food education experiences, with cooking experiences connecting across Quality Area 1 (intentional curriculum planning, Elements 1.1.1 and 1.1.2), Quality Area 2 (health, safety and healthy eating, Elements 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), Quality Area 3 (the physical environment supports exploration and competence, Element 3.2.2) and Quality Area 6 (collaborative partnerships with families and communities through culturally connected food experiences, Element 6.1.2).[20] **Organisation documents** Remember to consult the policies and procedures at the service while planning cooking and food preparation experiences. **Staff expertise** • Centres who provide potentially hazardous food must have a Food Safety Supervisor (FSS). It is recommended that the FSS is included in the planning process. • In WA, FDC educators need a food handler's certificate, but can share a FSS between centres and ask that person for information and support. **Equipment** • Consider what equipment is available for cooking and food preparation experiences at the service. • Consider having a separate cooking experience tub in the kitchen or in each room with some basic ingredients and equipment to make preparation easier when a food preparation experience is coming up, and to support spontaneous experiences. **Support** • Ask for support from the service leaders at the service when planning cooking experiences. • Ask for support and gather permission from parents before undertaking a cooking experience.

Risk awareness	Additional points
Consider the publicly available resources that could assist with the risk assessment for any planned cooking experiences	ACECQA Provides guidance on food safety requirements under the NQF, including resources on keeping children's food safe and creating positive food environments. It can be used to inform the risk assessment process for any planned cooking experience. ACECQA also provides guidance and resources for risk assessment. Local Government/Environmental Health Officers can provide service-specific guidance on jurisdictional food safety requirements, including food premises classification and compliance expectations, and are a practical first point of contact when assessing the food safety risk of a planned cooking experience. FoodSafe Online I'm Alert (Environmental Health Australia) DoFoodSafely (Victoria) Each offer accessible food safety training courses that build the skills and knowledge educators need to assess and manage food safety risks during cooking experiences with children. This includes safe food handling, hygiene, temperature control and allergen awareness. See FE Prefacing Statement on Allergies for food allergy training resources. Kidsafe Australia Provides evidence-based resources on preventing burns, scalds and other physical injuries in children, which are directly relevant to assessing and mitigating the physical harm risks, particularly heat and sharp utensils, that arise in cooking experiences with young children.

Common risk factors

It is important to consider that the following risk factors are not necessarily only relevant to the children attending ECEC. Educators, staff and guests involved in food preparation experiences are also susceptible to risks such as cuts, allergic reactions, and stress due to supervising a potentially risky experience, and they too should be considered when a risk assessment is conducted.

TABLE 8: *Common risk factors*

Food safety		
Bacterial growth	Causes food to become unsafe to consume and risks food poisoning.	
Bacterial contamination	Introduces harmful bacteria that increases the risk of food poisoning. Includes contamination via cross-contamination or poor hygiene.	
Physical contamination	Increases risk of choking or physical harm, e.g. string, plastic, band aids in food.	
Cleaning and hygiene	Prevents cross-contamination and the potential for bacterial growth or the spread of allergens.	
Separation of food	Prevents cross-contamination and the potential for bacterial growth or the spread of allergens.	
Temperature control	Prevents bacterial growth and preserves freshness of food.	
Safety Standards	Assist with planning for – and preventing harm during – cooking and food preparation experiences.	
Food allergy		
Food allergies	A food allergy is an immune system reaction to a food. Food allergy reactions can be mild or may be severe and life threatening (anaphylaxis).	
Signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction[21]	Signs of a mild to moderate allergic reaction include: • Swelling of lips, face, eyes • Hives or welts • Tingling mouth • Abdominal pain, vomiting	Signs of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) include any of the following: • Difficult/noisy breathing • Swelling of tongue • Swelling/tightness in throat • Difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice • Wheeze or persistent cough • Persistent dizziness or collapse • Pale and floppy (young children)
Common allergens	• Milk (dairy) • Eggs • Peanuts • Tree nuts (almonds, cashews, etc.) • Soy	• Wheat • Fish • Crustaceans (such as prawns) and molluscs (such as oysters) • Sesame ⚠ **Any food can cause an allergic reaction. All food allergies must be taken seriously.**
Food intolerance	A food intolerance does not involve the immune system and is not life threatening. Most food intolerances are caused when the body cannot digest the sugars in food.	
Space		
Blind spots and hidden areas	Inadequate layout or complex, open spaces can restrict the ability of educators to supervise children at all times.	
Proximity to hazards	Can increase the risk of knocks, spills and breakages. Examples include placing tables for experiences in inappropriate areas like near exits or in front of access ways.	
Movement	Inadequate space for movement can cause children to run into each other.	

Space *(continued)*	
Unclear area boundaries	Lack of clear, defined, and contained play areas can lead to children wandering around with food or utensils in their hands.
Insufficient space	Increases the risk of bumps and spills.
Harm to children	
Physical injuries	**Slips, trips, and falls:** • Wet or greasy floors, or dropped food and spills, increase the risk of falling, which can be particularly dangerous if the child falls against a hot surface or while holding a sharp object. • Trip hazards such as cords, rugs, child chairs, and tables should be moved to avoid injury. **Cuts and lacerations:** Sharp knives, graters, peelers, can openers, and broken glass can cause serious injuries. **Burns and scalds:** • Hot stoves, frypans, ovens, toaster ovens, hot food/liquids, steam or electric frypans can cause serious burns, as can boiling water, hot oil, and hot food containers (like bowls from a microwave) . - Children's skin is thinner and more sensitive than adults', so extra care and supervision is needed for any experiences involving heat.
Cross-contamination	• Increases the risk of spreading bacteria. • Can cause severe reactions in children with food allergies.
Allergic reactions/ anaphylaxis	• Unchecked ingredients or cross-contamination can cause severe reactions in children with food allergies.
Choking	• Ingredients not chopped appropriately or, in the case of younger children, eating raw dough or thick mixtures, can pose a choking risk.
Harm to educator	
Physical injuries	**Slips, trips, and falls:** • Wet or greasy floors, or dropped food, increase the risk of falling, which can be particularly dangerous if the educator falls against a hot surface or while holding a sharp object. • Trip hazards such as cords, rugs, child chairs, tables. **Cuts and lacerations:** Sharp knives, graters, peelers, can openers, and broken glass can cause serious injuries. **Burns and scalds:** Hot stoves, frypans, ovens, toaster ovens, hot food/liquids, steam or electric frypans can cause serious burns, as can boiling water, hot oil, and hot food containers (like bowls from a microwave). **Throwing food:** Child throwing food or equipment at educator can injure the educator.
Cross-contamination	• Increases the risk of spreading bacteria. • Can cause severe reactions in educators with food allergies.
Stress and anxiety	Associated with: • Managing multiple tasks with children. • Lack of emergency guidelines and training if a child has an unexpected reaction to the food prepared. • Educators being unaware of children's dietary requirements and the policies and procedures in place to manage them. • Lack of supervision guidelines for cooking experiences to prevent children ingesting food items they are not supposed to eat or touching hot surfaces. • Rushing a cooking experience if there is a time constraint – this can also increase the risk of accidents occurring.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA2, QA4, QA7

Managing allergies in the ECEC setting

Allergies are common in Australia – it is estimated that around one in ten babies and one in twenty school aged children has a medically confirmed food allergy, and other children may have allergies to insect stings and medications.

While most children have allergies to the common allergy causing foods (cow's milk/dairy, soy, egg, wheat, fish, shellfish, peanut, tree nuts and sesame), it is possible to be allergic to any food, including fruits and vegetables. The only way to manage a food allergy is for the child to completely avoid the food they are allergic to. Even a crumb or drop of food, or a sip of a drink can cause an allergic reaction.

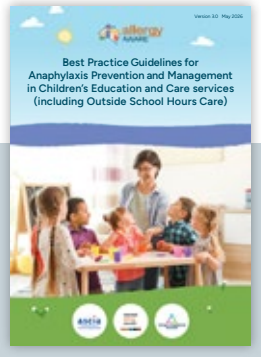
To help care for children and young people with allergies, the National Allergy Council have published *Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management for Children's Education and Care (CEC) (including Outside School Hours Care)*.

The Best Practice Guidelines:

- Outline the **key principles** and recommendations for reducing the risk of anaphylaxis in early childhood education and care settings and outside school hours care services.
- A set of **resources** including templates and sample documents are available as free downloads from the National Allergy Council's website:
  Allergy Aware
- An **implementation guide** supports services to put the recommendations into place.

FIGURE 2: *Key principles for reducing the risk of anaphylaxis in children's education and care*

- Implement an allergy aware approach to preventing and managing anaphylaxis.
- Have an anaphylaxis management policy. Review this policy and associated procedures if an allergic reaction occurs.
- Obtain up-to-date medical information and develop individualised anaphylaxis care plans for each child at risk of anaphylaxis. These plans will include a copy of the child's ASCIA Action Plan.
- Educate and train staff in the prevention, recognition and treatment of allergic reactions including anaphylaxis. Educate and train staff who prepare, serve or supervise meals, in food allergen management.
- Ensure staff know which children are at risk of allergic reactions and understand that unexpected allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, might occur for the first time in children not previously known to have allergy.
- Provide age-appropriate education of children to help raise awareness and manage anaphylaxis risk in CEC services.
- Implement reasonable and effective strategies to reduce the risk of accidental exposure to known allergic triggers and review anaphylaxis risk minimisation strategies if an allergic reaction occurs.
- Have at least one general use adrenaline device in each CEC service.
- Communicate about anaphylaxis management with CEC staff and the CEC community.
- Offer support (including counselling) for CEC staff who manage an anaphylaxis.
- Appropriate reporting if an allergic reaction occurs while the child is in the care of the CEC service.



Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management for Children's Education and Care (CEC) (including Outside School Hours Care)

An allergy aware approach

The *Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management for CEC* recommends that ECEC services have an Allergy Aware approach when caring for children at risk of anaphylaxis. Rather than focusing on avoidance of food allergens (such as nut free or egg free), Allergy Aware services work with families in many ways to lower the risk of a child with allergies having an allergic reaction. If an allergic reaction does happen while a child is at the service, it will be managed well as a range of good practices will have been put in place.

In addition to the minimum legislative requirements and in line with the Best Practice Guidelines for Anaphylaxis Prevention and Management, an Allergy Aware service should include the following:

Documentation

- ECEC services have a policy to reduce the risk of anaphylaxis.
- Services work with children and their families (where appropriate) to develop an individual anaphylaxis care plan. This includes a copy of the child's Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) Action Plan written by their doctor or nurse practitioner.

Training

- All staff are trained to recognise and manage allergic reactions. This includes refresher training and practise with adrenaline device trainers.
- Cooks/chefs and educators are trained in how to prepare, store and serve food safely, and how to read food labels for food allergens. For more details on food allergy training and management visit:

  All about Allergens for CEC

Risk reduction

- A range of measures are used to reduce the risk of a child having an allergic reaction while at the service. These measures may be different depending on the age of the child.

Examples include:

- Systems in place so that children get the right food and drinks for their allergies.
- Washing hands before and after eating.
- Not sharing food and drinks.
- Planning ahead for experiences that involve food such as parties and other special occasions.

Allergy medication

- General use adrenaline devices and an ASCIA First Aid Plan for Anaphylaxis are included in the service's first aid kit.
- Children's individual adrenaline devices and ASCIA Action Plans are stored unlocked and easily accessible to staff.

If an allergic reaction occurs

- ECEC services have processes in place to manage the allergic reaction.
- Afterwards they will review what was done well and what needs changing.
- Reactions will be reported.
- Staff and children involved will be offered support (including counselling).

Communication with the children's education and care community and children

- Communication about allergies raises awareness and encourages the whole community to work together to reduce the chance of a child having an allergic reaction at the ECEC service. See Communication about food allergies below for more details on communicating food allergy information.
- Where there is a child with a severe allergy, all children in the group should learn about allergies, so they can help to keep them safe.

Communication about food allergies

Everyone in the ECEC setting plays a role and needs to communicate about food allergies. For families, this begins from the enrolment process.

The Food Standards Code (FSANZ), states that services must provide the right information about allergens in the food and drinks that are served to the children, when families ask.

Services must follow the advice below:

- Services must not give a child with food allergy any food or drink that contains their food allergen.
- Food must be made in a way that reduces the risk of the food accidentally having the child's allergen in it.
- Food must be served in a way that makes sure the right food is given to the right child.
- Food and drink spills should be cleaned up quickly to reduce the chance that a child with food allergy will have contact with a food they are allergic to.
- Allergic reactions to food or drinks must be reported.
- Educators must know how to provide a safe environment for children with food allergies during all mealtimes, and when planning experiences, they need to ensure these are safe and inclusive for children with food allergy.

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NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA2, QA6, QA7

All About Allergens for CEC online training and support resources

Allergy Aware website

Allergy Aware website

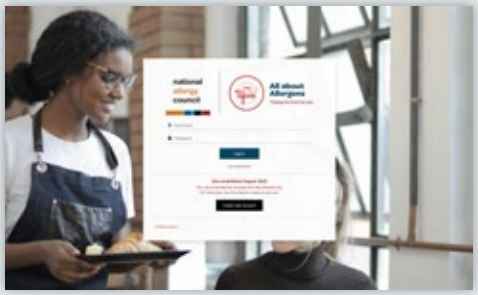
The Allergy Aware website is a resource hub that includes links to evidence-based resources and training for education and care services to help manage anaphylaxis. The website also contains links to state and territory specific information and resources. Note that the Allergy Aware website is separate from the All About Allergens Resource Hub which provides free training about managing food allergies when providing food. Further details on the All about Allergens Resource Hub can be found in the upcoming pages.



All About Allergens for CEC online training

All about Allergens for CEC

It is recommended that all staff involved in planning, ordering, making, serving and supervising meals complete the National Allergy Council's free All about Allergens for CEC food allergen management online training.



All About Allergens Kitchen Handbook

All about Allergens Kitchen Handbook

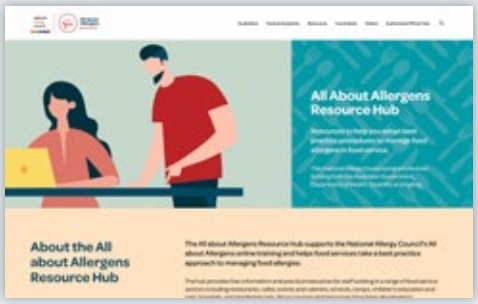
The National Allergy Council's All about Allergens Kitchen Handbook is the companion to the All about Allergens training. The Kitchen Handbook clearly outlines considerations when planning, ordering, making, serving and supervising meals for children with food allergies in Early Education and Care settings.



All about Allergens Resource Hub

All about Allergens Resource Hub

The All about Allergens Resource Hub supports the National Allergy Council's All about Allergens online training and helps food services take a best practice approach to managing food allergies. The hub provides free information and practical resources for staff working in a range of food service sectors including children's education and care.



Managing food allergies in ECEC settings is everyone's responsibility

Managing food allergies is everyone's responsibility

Everyone plays a role and needs to communicate about food allergies.

Service Manager

- Make sure all staff are aware of the risk of food allergies. This includes managers, educators, cooks, chefs and other kitchen staff.
- Make sure that only staff who are trained in food allergen management plan, order, make, serve and supervise children eating the food.
- Make sure you have a food allergy policy, and procedures for food allergen management. Audit your service to make sure the policy and procedures are followed.



Parent/Carer

When they enrol, ask parents about their child's allergies and any other dietary needs.

Parents should:

- Tell the service if their child's allergies change.
- Provide a copy of their child's ASCIA Action Plan and allergy medication.



Educator

- Know how to recognise and respond to allergic reactions.
- Know how to provide a safe environment for children with food allergies during meal and snack times.
- Plan safe and inclusive activities for children with food allergy.



Cook/Chef

- Know how to make and serve suitable food for children with food allergies.
- Know what is in the food they make and serve.
- Know which children in their childcare service have food allergies.
- Be able to answer questions from parents of children with food allergies about the ingredients of the food they make and serve. Other CEC staff should know how to find this information if they are asked for it.



All food allergies must be taken seriously

Use the same approach for all types of food allergies, regardless of the type of ASCIA Action Plan they have.

Parents should not be asked to sign disclaimers or waivers about possible exposure to food allergens while their child is at a CEC service.

Poster supplied with permission from the National Allergy Council All about Allergens Kitchen Handbook.

Prompts for planning

This section contains prompts to help ECEC staff think about diversity and inclusion in food and cooking experiences. Prompts include considerations around connection and relationships, family traditions and culture, creating rich rather than tokenistic experiences, and thinking about when to consult health professionals and educational experts for support.

These questions act as prompts for reflective practice and are particularly important when planning and reflecting on cooking and food preparation experiences. They are also relevant to consider across the MEP and Menu and Meal Quality (MMQ) modules. Use these prompts, in conjunction with the standard operating procedure template, to ensure a holistic experience is created for all children involved.

Diversity, inclusion and partnerships in practice

1. Connecting with children and families through food and cooking experiences

- How do we learn about the foods children eat at home?
- Have we asked families about cultural, religious, or personal food practices?
- Do we invite families to share recipes, cooking traditions, or food stories?
- How do food and cooking experiences support relationship-building between educators, children, and families?
- Do families see their food culture represented in our menu and/or cooking experiences?

2. Food experiences and children's relationships

- How do cooking experiences promote cooperation and shared responsibility?
- Are children encouraged to prepare, serve, and eat food together respectfully?
- Do we support children to understand that different families eat different foods – and that all are valued?
- How do we manage conversations about unfamiliar foods to promote respect rather than judgement?

3. Understanding family rhythms and food practices

- Have we asked about home mealtime routines (e.g. shared meals, prayer, eating styles)?
- Do we consider fasting periods, celebrations, or religious observances?
- How do we accommodate different meal patterns (e.g. main meal at lunch vs dinner)?
- Are we flexible where possible to reflect children's home experiences?

4. Honouring traditions, preferences and identity

- How do we incorporate children's favourite home foods into cooking experiences?
- Do children have opportunities to talk about foods that are special to their family?
  - the service?
- Are we celebrating everyday food diversity – not just during "cultural days"?
- How do we ensure children feel proud of their food traditions?

5. Avoiding assumptions in food planning

- Are we assuming all families from a particular culture eat the same foods?
- Have we checked dietary practices directly with each family?
- Do we avoid labelling foods as "normal" vs "different"?
- Are we careful not to present certain foods as exotic or unusual?

In practice:
Instead of: "All children from X culture eat this."
Ask: "Are there any foods that are important in your family?"

6. Tokenistic vs rich cultural food experiences

- Is this cooking experience part of ongoing learning, or a one-off event?
- Have we explored the meaning behind the food (history, celebrations, family significance)?
- Have families or community members contributed to planning?
- Do children revisit and reflect on the experience afterwards?

7. Building cultural knowledge and educator skills

- What do we know about the cultural significance of the foods we prepare?
- Have we engaged in professional learning about culturally responsive food practices?
- Are we open to learning alongside children and families?
- How do we model curiosity and respect when exploring unfamiliar foods?

8. Community groups and partnerships

- Can we invite local community members to share cooking traditions?
- Do we connect with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to respectfully explore bush foods?
- Are we partnering with local gardens, markets, or cultural organisations?
- Is the partnership reciprocal and respectful?

9. Food as citizenship and participation

- Are children involved in menu planning discussions?
- Do children vote on cooking experiences?
- Do we talk about fairness (e.g. sharing, sustainability, food waste)?
- Are children learning about where food comes from and community responsibility?

10. Feedback and ongoing consultation

- How often do we seek family feedback about food and cooking experiences?
- Do we provide surveys, suggestion boxes, or informal discussions?
- Can families easily suggest recipes or cultural dishes?
- Do children have opportunities to express preferences and dislikes respectfully?
- How do we communicate food and cooking experience changes based on feedback?

11. Health professionals and educational experts

- When do we consult dietitians or health professionals (e.g. food allergies or other dietary needs, concerns about growth or eating ability, sensory needs)?
- How do we involve families in decisions about specialised diets?
- Do we seek guidance on inclusive food and cooking experiences for children with diverse needs?
- Are our practices health-promoting while remaining culturally respectful?

12. Deep reflection for team meetings

- Do all children see their home experiences reflected in our cooking program?
- Whose food culture is most visible in our food and cooking experiences?
- How do we know families feel respected in relation to food and cooking experiences?
- Are food and cooking experiences relationship-rich learning opportunities, or just routine transitions?

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK	NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4	**QA1, QA2, QA5, QA6**