

# Everyday learning in the



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# Kitchen

Jo Darbyshire

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Jo Darbyshire is currently the kindergarten teacher at Fairholme College in Toowoomba. She has been working in the early childhood sector for over twenty years in three different states of Australia and in Singapore. Positions have included kindergarten and preschool teaching, co-ordinating playgroups for special needs children, supporting families as a visiting preschool officer, and lecturing at TAFE and University.

Jo is passionate about the importance of the early years and the need to support families with young children. Jo has a weekly radio segment on early childhood topics. She is married to Michael and has three sons who have spent many hours in the kitchen with her and have offered much inspiration for this book.

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The *Everyday learning series* has been developed to focus attention on the everyday ways in which children can be supported in their growth and development. It is for all those who are involved in children's development and learning, including early childhood professionals in all children's services, parents, grandparents and others with an ongoing responsibility for young children.

### **The first years of life are the foundation for all later growth, development and learning.**

- Early experiences set the pattern for all later learning.
- Early experiences and relationships affect how children feel about themselves, how they get on with other people and how they join in and enjoy life.
- Every experience has an impact. Babies and young children are learning all the time, regardless of whether we think we are 'teaching' them.

Research has shown that a strong foundation in these years starts children on the pathway to:

- being able to relate confidently and effectively with others;
- mental and emotional health; and
- making the most of each child's abilities in education.

### **Babies and young children are learning all the time.**

This research also shows us what kinds of experiences and relationships babies and young children need, to get the best start for living and learning.

What matters is how they are learning and what they are learning. Learning takes place in relationships. If the earliest relationships are warm and loving, babies and young children have the best chance to make the most of the opportunities in their worlds.

To learn best they need parents and carers (their first teachers) who:

- are warm and caring;
- know each baby or child very well and appreciate what is special about them;
- take time to understand the child's messages (cues) and to respond to them with encouragement, praise, comfort, independence and rest as needed; and
- are able to see, share and celebrate the big and small joys and achievements of the children in their care.

### **There is no set list of things to teach babies and young children.**

Living is learning and children learn through living. These books are a guide to how young children learn and how best to help them at the different stages of early childhood. All children and babies have their own abilities and interests.

Adults watch and listen and provide opportunities and support to build on each child's strengths. Babies and children also come from family and cultural backgrounds that are part of the way they are and need to be included in their experiences.

## Learning in the kitchen

Many of our earliest memories are likely to be about time spent in the kitchen. Licking the bowl, setting the table, doing the dishes, chatting about the day, eating a meal, peeling the vegetables, and experimenting with cooking are experiences familiar to many children.

The kitchen is not only a place to prepare and store food but also can offer an unlimited number of learning opportunities for children. Science, language, maths, chemistry, physics, reading, nutrition and hygiene knowledge are being used and explored every day in the kitchen. Children who spend time with adults in the kitchen are being offered opportunities to explore all these topics. They will also enjoy sharing with the important people in their lives.

Children, from birth, use their senses to find out much about their world. In the kitchen they will:

- **hear** – water running, a beater mixing, a timer buzzing, voices talking, cutlery clattering;
- **smell** – food cooking, detergent dissolving, spices blending, herbs being crushed;
- **touch** – soft and hard, warm and cold, wet and dry, smooth and rough;
- **see** – busy movement, hands working, doors opening, food changing, faces smiling, colours and shapes; and
- **taste** – sweet, sour, salty, cold, crunchy, mushy, or fizzy.



Children need you to:

- encourage them to join you in the kitchen;
- be understanding of mess and spills;
- allow time for them to help;
- share skills and knowledge so they can learn and understand; and
- enjoy time together in this way.

Children who are able to be with adults in the kitchen and share in the busy work there will gain many life skills and a positive feeling about themselves.

Safety should always be kept in mind when caring for children. The kitchen is a home for sharp and breakable items, electrical cords, hot things, detergents and cleaning products, food and drink, water, and sharp edges. With some careful thought and planning, the kitchen can become child-safe so that children can spend time with you here. Store items not suitable for children in high cupboards and place childproof locks on the cupboards or drawers you don't want them to access. Turn saucepan handles towards the back of the cook-top and make sure cords are not dangling in tempting reach. Wipe up any spills and think about using a sturdy step, stool or chair so that your child can stand at the bench at a comfortable height. Supervise children at all times when they are in the kitchen, and use opportunities to educate about safety and hygiene practices.

If you are a carer for a Family Day Care program, you may need to modify some of the experiences suggested in this book to allow for a larger number of children, and to fit with your scheme's policies and the relevant regulations.

# Babies

## Development – what to expect

Babies learn through their senses. They are born with the ability to smell, hear, see, taste and feel. As they begin to use these senses, they stimulate pathways in the brain that will be used to help them to understand and begin to learn about their world.

Babies need caring adults to be sensitive to their needs and to support their learning about the world. They need to be held close, gently touched and cared for, quietly spoken to, and sensitively introduced to new experiences.

Babies like to be near the important adults in their lives. A baby sling or pouch can be an ideal way to keep baby close while you move about the kitchen. As baby becomes heavier and more active you might need to consider other ways to keep her nearby. Place the baby so she can watch you work, interact with you and feel a part of the family. This might be on a rug in a safe corner of the room or in a specially-designed baby chair on a wide table or bench (make sure she is secured in the chair and that the chair will not fall). An older baby could be strapped into a high chair so she can see the tops of benches, the sink, the stove and your face more clearly. Babies may not like to be in any one position for too long. Watch her face and listen to her noises, you will soon know when she has had enough.

Babies will enjoy hearing your voice as you move about the kitchen. Talk to him about what you are doing. Sing or hum and encourage his noises and babbles. This is how he learns about language and will feel safe and supported.

Initially his movements will be random and seem uncontrolled. As he becomes older, he will gain more control over his body and what his arms and hands can do. Encourage this development by helping him to reach for things. Watch his face to see where he is looking and take him across for a closer look and a touch.







Try to look at all the objects in your kitchen with different eyes. Although the things you use in the kitchen are for cooking or cleaning, your baby will not know this. Think about how else you could use them. Are they safe? Will they make a noise? Do they feel soft or hard, rough or smooth? Will they roll across the floor? Consider all objects as potential toys.

Keep in mind that babies will explore most things by putting them in their mouths. This is normal and how they learn. Be certain that what you offer is safe for this type of exploration.

A set of measuring cups or a wooden spoon might be ideal for babies to hold and wave around. If they randomly hit another object, it will produce a sound. Once they have done this for a while they will connect the sound with their movement and will begin to understand how their actions can cause a result.

Babies like to repeat experiences many times. They will watch things falling from a high chair and you picking them up as often as you care to play this game. Cupboards that they can open and close will keep them amused for quite a while. As they are doing this you can offer words such as 'Open' and 'Closed'. Making connections with words and actions will help babies to learn to talk.

At times babies will enjoy you joining in their game. Sit on the floor and watch what they are doing. Copy their actions and laugh and clap with them. Joining in your baby's play will build on their experience and help them to feel important and connected to you. It will also give you ideas for other opportunities your baby might enjoy.

Loud or sudden noises can be frightening for young children. If you are going to use a beater, blender, juicer or other noisy kitchen appliance, try to warn your child before you begin. Watch her face, smile and reassure her as the noise is occurring. If you know that your child will be frightened, make sure she is not in the room when you are doing this task. As she gains confidence and begins to understand about machines and noises, she will be able to cope with these sounds and to stay near you while these appliances are operating.

## Experiences – things to do:

- Fill a net bag, such as an orange or onion bag, with plastic shopping bags for your baby to feel, poke and scrunch. She will enjoy the noise she can make and the squishy feel as she squeezes this new toy. (Make sure the net bag is securely fastened and that the holes are small so that the plastic cannot be pulled through.)
- Make a simple posting box out of a plastic ice-cream container. Cut a large hole in the lid and give your baby some large lids, spoons, pegs and other objects to 'post'. As baby becomes more skilled at this you can make more difficult posting boxes with smaller holes.
- Give baby some plastic bottles or containers to bang together. She will enjoy the noises she can make and experiment by hitting the things on the floor. On days when you can cope with the noise, offer a saucepan and a spoon, or two saucepan lids.
- A baby who is becoming more mobile will enjoy cans, apples or oranges that will roll across the floor. As you move about, be careful of these obstacles, as they will trip a busy adult.
- Boxes and small tins can be stacked and knocked down. They can also be shaken to produce sounds and to feel the weight shift in the container.
- Bubbles in the sink can be felt and popped, and will make an interesting sound as they burst. If the water is tepid, babies will enjoy the feel of the water and the splashes they can make.
- As baby begins to try solid food, he will be interested in the things you are cooking. Let him have tastes of food you think he will like. As he develops more control of his movements, he will enjoy holding a spoon and trying to feed himself. This stage will be a very messy one. Some adults prepare for the mess by placing a large plastic or vinyl mat under the baby's chair. It is easy to take this outside to be hosed off when the mealtime is over. Bibs might also help to reduce the stains on clothes but need to be used with close supervision. A baby will often grab hold of a bib and may pull it too tight.

# Toddlers

## Development – what to expect

Toddlers are busy and active explorers of their world. Their newly-developed ability to walk gives them access to areas they may not have been in before and freedom to make their own way there. Being mobile on two legs also changes their perspective on the world. They can reach the tops of tables and benches, stand on tiptoe to reach further, and may climb to get 'right up there'. Items that were once safely out of the way may no longer be so. Adults will find life easier if they move these to a safe space rather than continually trying to protect them.

Toddlers may be more confident to be out of your sight for a while but will still need to be close to a supportive adult. They will often call out to check that you are still nearby or they may keep popping back to the room you are in to reassure themselves of your presence.

Toddlers can be strongly independent and want to do things for themselves on one day, yet need lots of your help on others. Many tasks will be too difficult for toddlers but may be broken down into smaller, manageable parts. For example, hanging a tea towel over a rack might become frustrating unless you can show them the corner and help them to pull it over the rail. Once successful, they will be proud of what they have done and may enjoy repeating a task over and over again.

Toddlers love to help, and learn a lot by working beside an adult. This will often make a job take longer as you allow the time for their input. If adults have the time for them to help, and welcome their involvement, they will learn many skills and feel important and valued. For those times when you are in a hurry, have some playdough or interesting utensils for them to explore so they can be distracted and kept busy with these items.





Attention spans of toddlers will be short. They will not be able to play with one thing for very long and will often become distracted by a noise or some activity very easily. It is not unusual for toddlers to spend some time on one game, move to a different activity, and then return to the previous one, all in the space of 10 minutes or less.

Toddlers love to cart and carry things with them, and adults will find items spread throughout the house. Baskets and bags will be popular with toddlers as they are enjoying their ability to both walk and move things at the same time. A small, strong box or carton with some plastic tubing for a handle can make a simple basket.

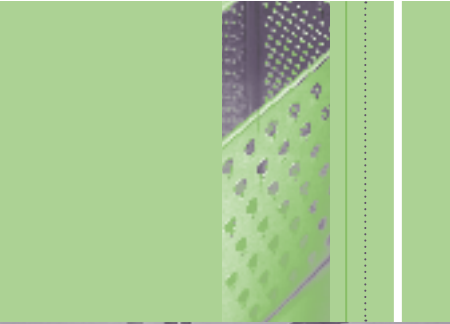
Toddlers will enjoy unpacking groceries, clearing out cupboards, and emptying a pantry shelf. They are finding out about full and empty, size, space, and weight in this type of exploration. Adults can support their understandings by talking about what the toddler is doing and helping them to repack or refill when the game seems to be over.

Language is new and exciting for toddlers. They are learning new words every day and enjoying exploring their new language skills. Words will not always be clear or correct, nor sentences complete. Adults can increase their understanding of what toddlers are trying to tell them by looking for clues in their actions and gestures or by watching what they are doing.

Adults can converse with the toddler about their play and show they understand what they are saying by building on the sentence or commenting on the meaning. For example, if a toddler hears the microwave beep and says 'Din Din', an adult could respond with 'Yes, your dinner is ready now.' Incorrect pronunciations can be overlooked at times, or the correct word can be used in response so the toddler hears the right speech model. Much of a toddler's language will involve exploring sounds and words and it will not always be meaningful. Toddlers often talk to themselves while they play.

## Experiences – things to do:

- A cupboard or drawer in the kitchen can be set up with plastic containers, wooden spoons and other safe items for the toddler to explore and handle. A set of measuring cups will fit together and can be stacked, similar to a set of nesting beakers. If the items in this cupboard are changed occasionally, the toddler will enjoy making new discoveries and exploring what these new things can do.
- A stable chair or step will help the toddler to see over the bench tops and perhaps mean they can help with what is happening up there. Toddlers who love 'helping' can enjoy washing vegetables or plastic dishes, wiping benches, rolling dough, and other simple tasks. Adults who are baking can put aside some dough or biscuit batter for the toddler to play with.
- Toddlers may become easily frustrated if they need to concentrate on balancing on adult chairs or reaching up to high tables. They may also find it too difficult to try other tasks such as using cutlery or stirring a bowl. If there is space in or near the kitchen for a child-sized table and chair, this will allow him to focus on the task in front of him. Some kitchen benches allow for the attachment of a portable high chair that will help the toddler to feel secure and allow him to use his hands to explore and manipulate things.
- Pretend play is beginning to be a part of a toddler's life. They will use simple props for making cups of tea, feeding teddy, talking on the phone, or shopping. This imaginary play will be based on familiar experiences and may involve adults pretending to drink the tea or answer the phone. Toddlers love cosy spaces and will enjoy cubbies and hidey-holes. A cloth, sheet or old curtain over the kitchen table will make such a space. Add a few cushions, a soft toy and some books, and they may be happy to play here on and off throughout the day. Older toddlers may enjoy a strong carton with some small pots and pans to use as a pretend oven. There are many child-sized cooking and crockery sets available for purchase, but discards from kitchens will do just as well.



- Kitchen utensils such as a garlic crush or egg slice will be fascinating for toddlers. She will enjoy exploring items that open and close or have interesting shapes or patterns. She will also enjoy matching lids to containers, although she may not have the ability to fit them on properly. Lemon-juicers, whisks, pestles, sieves, scoops, rolling pins, ladles, tongs and many other kitchen items will offer an endless source of entertainment for a toddler. By manipulating these items, toddlers are learning about cause and effect, soft and hard, metal and plastic, and rough and smooth.
- A variety of fridge magnets will be enjoyed by toddlers as they take them off, try to stick them to other surfaces, work out how to put them back, and move them around the fridge door.
- Many toddlers are still exploring objects with their mouths. It is important that lids, magnets and other items used for posting, sticking and matching are large and cannot be swallowed.

### Books your toddler might enjoy include:

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle

*Going Shopping* by Sarah Garland

*Spot Bakes a Cake* by Eric Hill

*How do I eat it?* By Shigeo Watanabe





# Preschoolers

## Development – what to expect

Preschool children are still practising and further developing control over their body and what it can do. They will enjoy using new skills to help you in the kitchen and will be proud of the results of their 'work'. Adults can support this enthusiasm by asking their preschooler to complete manageable tasks. Setting the table, finding a mixing bowl, passing the sugar, sorting the cutlery are all small jobs that preschool children can do independently. Praise their efforts and talk about what they are doing.

Preschoolers love a chat and will enjoy the time spent with an adult in the kitchen to have a conversation. Tell them stories about when you were young and what you used to do in the kitchen. Encourage them to make up stories, or play 'What if...' games together.

Preschoolers are learning a lot about their world. Much of this learning will occur through watching what others do, as well as trying things themselves. Adults are important role models for children and can teach a lot by example. Hygiene practices such as washing hands, wiping benches, cleaning dishes, covering a mouth when coughing or sneezing (and then washing hands again) are all common practices in a kitchen area. Let your child see you doing these things and talk about why they are important. Gently remind your child about being clean when they are helping in the kitchen.

There are many other safety habits that children can learn while working in the kitchen. Wiping up spills, using knives carefully, and holding hot items with oven mitts are all examples of working safely that can be discussed with your preschooler and modelled by the adults working in this area.

The kitchen offers many opportunities to learn about food and food preparation. Food preferences for preschoolers will be many and varied. If preschoolers are with adults in the kitchen they will have opportunities to try many different tastes. When children are involved in meal preparation, they are more likely to eat the end result. Talking with adults about food will help them to learn to make better choices and to understand the importance of healthy food and a balanced diet. By helping with the shopping, or picking fresh herbs or vegetables from the garden, they will increase their knowledge of where food comes from and how it grows. Different fruits and vegetables will be interesting for your preschooler to feel, name and taste.

### Things to do:

- Preschool children are beginning to understand that written words have meaning and convey a message. Let her see you using recipe books, and look at these together. Read them out loud so she can connect the instruction with what you are doing.
- Let your child see you writing shopping lists. She might like to add her own items to the list by drawing or pretend writing.
- Encourage your preschooler to help with certain tasks in the kitchen. When he unpacks the dishwasher, he is sorting and classifying. When he is setting the table, he is matching and counting. Talk about how many people will be eating together. Discuss the meal with him so that he can decide which cutlery he may need and whether he will need bread-and-butter plates. Show him how to place these correctly on the table. Your preschooler may enjoy other 'aesthetic' touches such as a vase of flowers. Perhaps he can pick these from the garden himself.
- Find simple recipes that preschoolers can manage. Packet cakes or muffins may be a good start. A fruit salad is a healthy choice and the preparation of it will further develop hand muscles and control. Soft fruit such as bananas and pears will cut with a plastic knife. Pizzas can be quick and simple to make on pita bread bases or prepared pizza bases. Preschoolers will enjoy making their own individual pizza on the smaller bases. If making sandwiches, preschoolers may find spreading a difficult task at first but will improve with practice. When they are helping you, they will be able to pour in the ingredients, break the eggs, mix or stir the mixture, roll into balls or knead the dough.



- Make up songs about what you are doing. The tune to *Here we go round the mulberry bush* can be used with *This is the way we wash the dishes* or *This is the way we sweep the floor*. Rhymes such as *Five fat sausages sizzling in the pan; sizzle, sizzle, sizzle; one went bang!* are fun and begin to explore number concepts.
- Fill old plastic containers, such as cream bottles, with a range of different items to make shakers. Preschoolers can help you to do this and might like to decorate their shakers. Sounds will vary depending on the fillings. Stones, pegs, soup mix, rice or pasta could be used to vary the sound. Preschoolers will also enjoy guessing what is producing the sound, or matching shakers that sound the same.
- Preschoolers love to create things. Old boxes, packets, cardboard tubes, paper bags, egg cartons, lids, bottle tops, foil containers and other recyclable materials can be collected and stored. When these are combined with materials – fabric, paper, crayons, paints, ribbons, bark, feathers, shells, flowers, glue and tape – many 3D collages can be constructed. These might be as simple as a tunnel for cars or something as complex as a city or a dinosaur.
- Collect catalogues from the mailbox and let your preschooler cut them up. She might like to look for different types of food; for example, fruit and vegetables or red food items. Catalogue pictures could be used to create shopping lists or to make matching games. Match the pictures with items from your cupboard. Perhaps you could create simple memory cards or a Bingo game. Use the pictures to make up stories or play *I went shopping and bought a...* together. As you are looking at the catalogues together you could be planning meals or thinking about healthy food.
- Use items from your pantry to set up a simple shop. Plastic lids or small scraps of paper can be used for pretend money. Preschoolers might also enjoy the addition of a small bag or purse. Join in this play as a customer and challenge your child's problem-solving skills by asking for specific items.



Build on his language skills by using descriptive words. Concepts of shape, colour and number are developing. Use this new knowledge when making simple requests, for example 'Can you pass me four red cups, please?' or 'Please find the sauce with the green lid.'

- Let your preschooler discover and observe how things can change in the kitchen. Ice melts; butter will become liquid when heated; jelly crystals and sugar will dissolve in water; corn kernels expand and explode into popcorn when heated; and batter will turn into a cake when cooked.

### Books your preschooler might enjoy include:

*Alex and Roy* by Mary Dickinson

*Happy Birthday Sam* by Pat Hutchins

*Noisy* by Shirley Hughes

*Alfie Gets in First* by Shirley Hughes

*The Tiger who came to tea* by Judith Kerr

*Bamboozled* by David Legge

*Sunshine* by Jan Ormerod

*It's My Birthday* by Helen Oxenbury

*The Cake That Mack Ate* by Rose Robert

Whether you are a competent chef or simply prepare food to survive, the time you spend with children in the kitchen will offer many happy memories and endless learning opportunities.

## Some useful recipes:

### Playdough

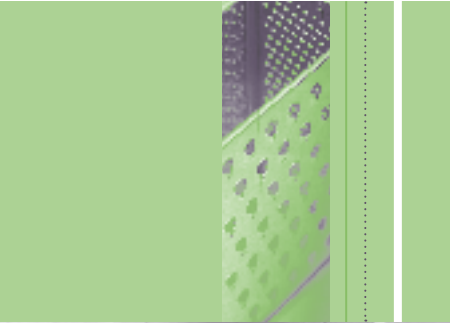
Some homemade playdough has a lot of salt in it. Even small amounts, such as two teaspoons of this playdough, could, if eaten, make an average two-year-old child very ill. Commercial playdoughs will be safe if they are labelled as safe.

The following recipe for **Stretchy Dough** does not include salt and can be used for children who might still be putting things in their mouths.

- Use any measure which will make as much as you want, such as a cup, lid, spoon, container.
- 2 measures of self-raising flour.
- 1 measure of cold water.
- Mix this together until it is stretchy dough. Add more flour if needed.
- This can be coloured with commercial food colours; spices can be added for smell.

(Recipe from the Playgroup Association of South Australia)

The following playdough recipe does contain salt and should not be used with children if you think they will eat it. If you are confident that they are past this stage, you will find that this dough feels quite different from both the Stretchy Dough and commercial playdoughs.



### Gingerbread Men

Combine 3 cups flour

1/2 teaspoon ginger

1 teaspoon cinnamon

Melt 125g butter

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup golden syrup

Add 1 teaspoon bicarb of soda

Pour butter mixture into flour

Add 1 egg

2 teaspoons vanilla

Mix into a soft dough and knead lightly.

Roll out. Cut and decorate.

Bake in moderately slow oven (160 deg C) for 10-15 minutes.

### Cooked Playdough

4 cups plain flour

1 cup salt

1 small packet cream of tartar

1 tablespoon oil

4 cups water

Food colouring if required

Mix flour, salt and cream of tartar. Add oil and water and stir. Cook slowly in a saucepan until mixture thickens, stirring continuously. Store in an airtight container. This playdough will last for several months.







## Useful reference books and websites

Bull, J. (2002). *The Cooking Book*. London: Dorling Kindersley.

Hay, D. (2000). *Cool Kids Cook*. Sydney: Murdoch.

Hay, D. (2004). *Donna Hay Magazine*, Kids Issue. Surry Hills: News Magazine.

Maynard, C. (2001). *Kitchen Science*. London: Dorling Kindersley.

Fathersworld.com. (2004). <http://www.fathersworld.com/recipes/dadscookin/>

KidsFood.com. (2004). <http://www.kidsfood.com/>

Torrisi, Y. (2004). *Cooking with the kids*. <http://www.abc.net.au/westernplains/stories/s1142542.htm>

Van Horn, J. E., & Horning, L. (Eds.) (1996). *Cooking with children: Kids in the kitchen*. [http://www.nccc.org/Curriculum/fc46\\_cook.kids.html](http://www.nccc.org/Curriculum/fc46_cook.kids.html)

Welcome to RecipeDoctor.com. (2004). <http://www.recipedoctor.com/kids.html>

## Recommended children's books

Carle, E. (1974). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Middlesex, England: Puffin.

Dickinson, M. (1973). *Alex and Roy*. London: Scholastic.

Garland, S. (1985). *Going Shopping*. Middlesex, England: Puffin.

- Hill, E. (1994). *Spot Bakes a Cake*. London: Penguin.
- Hughes, S. (1981). *Alfie Gets in First*. London: Bodley Head.
- Hughes, S. (1985). *Noisy*. London: Walker.
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- Legge, D. (1994). *Bamboozled*. Gosford, Australia: Ashton Scholastic.
- Ormerod, J. (1981). *Sunshine*. Middlesex, England: Penguin.
- Oxenbury, H. (1994) *It's My Birthday*. London: Walker.
- Robert, R. (1990). *The Cake That Mack Ate*. London: Penguin.
- Watanabe, S. (1982). *How do I eat it?* Middlesex, England: Puffin.



The *Everyday learning series* has been developed to focus attention on the everyday ways in which children can be supported in their growth and development. It is for all those who are involved in children's development and learning, including early childhood professionals in all children's services, parents, grandparents and others with an ongoing responsibility for young children.



The kitchen can be a place where young children experience many learning opportunities, through activities such as sorting, mixing, tasting and baking.

In *Everyday learning in the kitchen*, author Jo Darbyshire outlines a range of ways in which babies, toddlers and preschoolers can be involved in the kitchen, stimulating their senses, their thinking and co-ordination skills.

This book gives parents, grandparents and caregivers ideas that they can share with young children to enhance their developing capacities and make everyday activities fun!

*These books are ideal for carers: always positive, very reader-friendly, giving a brief explanation of child development and activities that use readily-available resources. The layout is beautiful and the photos show everyday situations.*

Debbie Tuckey, Co-ordinator, Camden Family Day Care.

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