**Guidelines to Help You – and your child with blindness or low vision – Feel Comfortable in the Kitchen**

1. Children who are blind or have low vision must do things 100 times more than their sighted peers. They have to learn by DOING. Every time you do something **for** your child with a vision problem robs them of the opportunity to learn to do it for themselves
2. We’re all busy! Children who cannot see well are SLOW! Have patience – we know it’s really hard!
3. Expect the best – always! Describe everything – always! Believe your child CAN – always! Maybe not now, or even next week, but they CAN!
4. These are GUIDELINES ONLY – you know your child best – adapt away!

In the kitchen:

1. Do things that require no chopping or measuring first, like putting together fruit salad with berries, or whisking together ingredients that you measure for them.
2. Work up to measuring using hands as tools – take a measuring spoon, put it in the palm of their hand, and then have them fill that much of their palm with an ingredient. Practice with flour and salt – two ingredients that are cheap and feel very different.
3. Use small bowls of liquid ingredients and measuring spoons bent into a ladle shape – dip into liquids, but work on keeping them level. Make sure the ingredient bowl is as close as possible to the mixing bowl.
4. Don’t worry about totally exacting measurements. Food is much more forgiving than some TV chefs would have you believe.
5. Use the Oxo-style measuring cups that have the measuring lines on a slope in the INSIDE of the cup. Use puffy paint to mark some of the lines so you can feel where the ¼ cup, ½ cup and 1 cup point is, etc.
6. Talk about the science and math of cooking!

The grater:

1. Graters (box graters) are a great way to introduce cutting food into small pieces easily. Microplanes are much sharper and should be tried after most other tasks in the kitchen have been mastered.
   1. Check out all sides and use the side that makes the most sense for the food you are grating.
   2. Use a lot of shoulder strength and hand strength to hold onto your grater and the food you are grating and PUSH it into the grater as you grate – otherwise, you will just ‘wear’ the food out without actually grating it!
   3. Check frequently to see that you are not about to grate your fingers into your food! Also check on the amount of food you have grated to be sure you are actually getting the job done but not too much!

Cutting with a sharp kitchen knife:

1. Go right to a sharp kitchen knife once your hands are strong enough to hold it properly and you are old enough to follow directions. Plastic knives are not my favorite!. Explore the knife’s edges very carefully with a soft touch. Find the way the handle fits into your hand.
2. Choose a knife that fits your hand well and you feel comfortable with. I prefer a utility knife rather than a paring knife for teaching. Get a cutting board and the food you want to cut.
3. Practice the “tunnel method” with soft veggies and fruit, such as strawberries, mushrooms and bananas. Make sure you learn how to peel the banana and wash the strawberries and mushrooms (with a damp paper towel, please!)

The Tunnel Method:

1. pretend to hold a ball in non-dominant hand
2. place hand on cutting board with all fingers touching the board and thumb opposite (may need modification for kids with really long central fingers)
3. Place washed food to be cut in the tunnel between the fingers and the thumb
4. Know where your fingers are at all times. Don’t let your little finger curl under or your other fingers collapse the tunnel. If the food is too big for your hand, cut it or ask a parent to help you.
5. ALL FINGER TIPS must be in contact with the cutting board! This is the only way to be sure there is no curling of little fingers!
6. Holding the knife properly in dominant hand, bring the knife POINT DOWN TOWARDS YOUR CUTTING BOARD horizontally toward your hand in the tunnel position.
7. Once the back of the knife touches the arch of the tunnel, slide the point of the knife under the tunnel and cut the food under your hand. Slide the knife slightly away from you and parallel to your first cut to keep slicing.
8. This is NOT the only way to cut food, and not all things work with this method, but by using the tunnel, confidence can be built to the point where other larger and harder things can be cut with ease – just ALWAYS be sure where your fingers are at all times!
9. DO NOT FREAK OUT when you cut yourself – every good cook has cut themselves or burned themselves. You’ll heal, and hopefully have learned what not to do next time! BE BRAVE!

The oven:

1. Removing hot things from the oven
   1. Check out the construction of the inside of the oven before heating it!
   2. Check for enough space on the counter or table for the hot item to be placed, adding pot holders if needed. THIS IS AN ESSENTIAL STEP!
   3. Practice moving from the oven to the space where the hot item will be placed to cool or to serve.
   4. Use full oven mitts. Ove-gloves are a favorite. Burns can happen when a child, searching for the oven rack, moves their hand too high and hits the element in the top of the oven instead.
   5. Locate the racks wearing gloves or mitts and the object to be removed from the oven. Pull rack out.
   6. Using TWO HANDS, pick up the hot item and place it on the pot holder or pre-arranged heat-proof surface.

The stove:

1. Putting pasta or other food into a hot pot
   1. Check out the stove before heating – find the location of the controls (hopefully with raised dots on them) and the location of the burner to be used.
   2. Put the pot of cold water on the stove – check its location before heating.
   3. Listen for boiling.
   4. Using fingernails only, run fingernails up the side of the pot to locate the top of the pot.
   5. With the other hand put the food in the pot.
2. Stirring
   1. Use an overly large bowl or pan
   2. Be patient with messes!
   3. Pay attention to what is happening to the food you are stirring – where is it going? How is it moving? Practice with just flour and water to see what happens.
   4. Use hand over hand with the person demonstrating the skills hands under your hands
3. Flipping
   1. Flipping food in a pan is one of the most difficult tasks to learn, so be patient
   2. Explore the location of the pieces of food in the pan carefully with a spatula. A lot of very small pieces that can be stirred or one or two large things, like burgers, are better than say, 4 or 5 small pancakes.
   3. Practice with things that won’t matter so much – like pancakes – and won’t make a terrible greasy mess, like burgers.
   4. Turn AWAY from you – this is harder, but saves a potential grease burn.
   5. Practice!
4. Spreading
   1. Also really difficult
   2. Don’t be a perfectionist!
   3. Use a more dense material to practice on, such as a heavier, whole grain bread, rather than a soft fluffy bread that tears easily.
   4. Practice on firm crackers or firm bread. Fruit is fun, but because it is wet, many spreads don’t stick.
5. In general
   1. Don’t get sucked in by infomercials. Most weird looking cutting tools really don’t work. Exception: Choppers like those made by Pampered Chef (don’t get a little cheap one!)
   2. Ask other blind people if a tool works for them before purchasing something that looks cool, but takes too much work to assemble, clean or takes up too much space.

As Jacque Pepin says: Happy Cooking!