



# Guide to Starting a School Cooking Club

A Cooking Club Toolkit



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# Introduction

This toolkit is for school staff and community leaders interested in offering a cooking club for children and youth. The planning tools are intended for school or community spaces. Whatever space you have - there is possibility!

## How to use this Toolkit

Review each section:

Planning Session

During Session

After Session

Use the resources at the end of this resource to support your cooking club. See below for a list of resources included.

### Planning Session

- Session Ideas
- Recipe Ideas
- Cooking Equipment Examples
- Program Details Worksheets
- Permission Slip Template
- Sign-Up Sheet Template
- Task List Template
- Grocery List Template

### During Session

- Cooking Terms
- Handwashing Activity
- Three Sink Dishwashing Method

Adapt the ideas and questions throughout this document to suit the specific needs and preferences of your cooking club and its participants. Creating an inclusive, engaging, and educational environment will enhance the overall experience and promote a lifelong love for cooking.







# How Food-Related Workshops Have Impacted Youth

"The kids are all talking about the food they cooked and are quite proud of their accomplishments. It was clear that some of the kids felt some real ownership when in the kitchen and that was great to see. Having the kids decide what they were cooking was great because it was food they were interested in. I think that with your support we have some budding chefs on our hands. It was clear that their confidence grew in the kitchen and I know some of them were learning these skills for the first time."

Testimonial from Program Staff following a March Break Cooking Club supported by Nourish Nova Scotia





# Success Stories

## Memorial High School

At Memorial High school PE teacher Troy Jenkins combines outdoor education, physical activity/movement, and cooking. It is not uncommon to see his classes snowshoeing, learning to build shelters and setting up equipment to cook outdoors. Troy has additional training in outdoor education and follows NS PE Safety Guidelines for outdoor education (fire safety, approved equipment). Students learn about safety and how to work with natural conditions which can vary in NS from windy to wet and so on. Troy visited a middle school leadership team at another school in his region (Rankin School) this June and guided them to make tasty pizzas on a portable hiking burners, using Greek pitas and various toppings. Troy adds in some math, physics, biology and other topics often without students even realizing.



## Baddeck Academy

Sixteen grade 10 O2 students, at Baddeck Academy, applied for grants with the help of their teacher Angie Harvie. They received a Blossom HPS Sprouting Health student microgrant and a grant from Victoria Co. Municipality that supported purchasing healthy ingredients as well a grant from an environmental organization to buy reusable bowls, plates, cups, and cutlery to reduce the ecological footprint. They worked as a team from April to June 2024 to prepare a regular healthy snack (e.g. yogurt, granola and berry parfait bowls, smoothies, crackers and cheese, veggies and dip) for the full P-12 school-community (reaching about 320 people). They completed surveys, took orders, prepared and served the food, and washed the dishes. They checked for food allergies, learned about food handling/safety, nutrition labels, portion sizes and the increased need for food security in their school. Students commented that the snacks were really good and that the group did an excellent job. They received many thanks.



## Valley Elementary School

Valley Elementary is a PP-4 school outside of Truro, NS. In 2022-23, a student leadership team decided to spend some of their UpLift grant on a student cooking club. The cafeteria was rented out to a community partner after school, which meant the kitchen facilities were not available to the students. They decided to host a “No-Cooking” Cooking Club in a classroom.

The school partnered with Ashley Swan from Maggie’s Place, who had extensive experience leading cooking classes with youth. They also received supervision support from a local Community Health Board Coordinator, a Public Health Youth Engagement Coordinator, a teacher, and the Vice Principal. The Club ran for seven weeks, and included twelve students each time from Grades 3 and 4. A team chose recipes in advance, including overnight oats, smoothies, wraps, salads, and granola bites. A permission slip was sent home so that parents/guardians could sign up their child based on which recipe they were most interested in. The Club was a great success!





# Creating Positive Food Environments

All cooking clubs should be positive, welcoming, and inclusive spaces where children and youth can come together to learn, explore, and connect over food. As the facilitator, you play an important role in creating an environment where students can develop positive relationships with food and their bodies. Below, you will find some key concepts and practical tips to help make this happen.

## What is The Division of Responsibility?

Developed by Ellyn Satter, The Division of Responsibility is an evidence-based approach that emphasizes what role adults have during mealtimes and what role children have during mealtimes. The Division of Responsibility can be applied to group and school environments too and can help to foster positive food environments and autonomy for your students.

### Adults Decide

- When to eat
- Where to eat
- What to offer\*

### Students Decide

- How much to eat
- To eat or not eat

\*Although it is ultimately your decision as the planner and facilitator of the cooking club to decide what to offer, students appreciate being engaged in the planning process! We would encourage you to co-design your cooking club menu and plan with your students.

## Nourish Nova Scotia's Statement on Healthy Eating

Healthy eating involves a variety of foods that make us feel good and give us energy to do the things we love. There are no good or bad foods. Healthy eating includes sharing food experiences with others. Healthy foods nourish our body, mind, and spirit.

Read more about our statement on Healthy Eating [here](#).

**For more information on supporting positive food environments see the following resources:**

**Nourish Nova Scotia:**

**Positive Food Environments Toolkit**

**Canada's Food Guide:**

**Creating A Supportive Environment**



# How we Talk About Food and Bodies

How we talk about food & bodies matters. Using neutral language helps students feel safe exploring a variety of foods in an environment that is free of judgement by removing the moral value often placed onto foods and bodies.

## This means...

- Presenting all foods as morally equal and not categorizing them into “good/bad”, “healthy/unhealthy”.
- Creating a space that is free from body shame.
- No body comments, but can also be an opportunity to use neutral descriptors carefully.

### Neutral Food Descriptors

- The food's name
- The food's characteristics (e.g., crunchy, sweet, tangy)
- How the food makes you feel (e.g. energized, warm, full)

### Neutral Body Descriptors

- Terms like larger or smaller body, terms for what a body does (e.g., play, move, digest)

## Practical Examples

- These carrots are orange and crunchy.
- This dip is creamy.
- Some apples have red skin and some have green skin, I wonder if they taste different?
- This smoothie makes me feel energized!

## Learn & Change Together

It's ok to make mistakes! Just correct yourself & move on or use it as an opportunity for discussion.



# Planning

Before jumping into the details, it's important to think about the intention of the program.

## What is the main goal of the Cooking Club?

Schools start Cooking Clubs for lots of different reasons. For example, sometimes the focus is on developing skills, and sometimes the focus is on the social aspect of cooking and eating together. Take some time to reflect on the needs and interests of your students and let your priorities inform the structure of your program!

Here are some possibilities to consider:

- Developing food preparation and culinary skills.
- Fostering teamwork.
- Exploring different food cultures.
- Increasing confidence in the kitchen.
- Introducing local foods.
- Preparing food to be used in school food programs.
- Meeting curriculum outcomes.
- Fostering positive relationships with food.

**Let your goals be informed by engaging with your participants!**

## Who could be involved?

### Program Leader

This is the person in charge of planning the initiative. Consider asking others to help with different parts of the club (grocery shopping, facilitating, etc.) to lighten the workload.

### Intended Participants

Interested children and youth and possibly trusted adults. Shaping the program around what the participants hope to get out of the club is really important! Take time to engage with youth to understand what they want the cooking club to look like.

### School Community Helpers

Teachers, support staff, or family members.

### Community Partners

Local groups or organizations interested in supporting the program financially, or with planning or hosting. Examples could include community health boards, local businesses, food banks, or other non-profit organizations.





## Who will participate in the cooking club?

(i.e., who is your target audience?)

### Things to consider:

- How many students can you accommodate in each session? (space + supervision)
- Do you want the same group of students participating each time, or do you want to switch it up each time?
- Which grades do you want to involve?
- How will students sign-up?

## Where will the cooking club be hosted?

(e.g., kitchen, cafeteria, staff room, classroom, etc.)

### Things to consider:

- Number and location of outlets (e.g., how many blenders can you plug in?).
- Where will students wash their hands? (e.g., nearby washroom or classroom sink)
- Access to garbage/compost.
- Is the space accessible or will any accommodations be required?

## Don't have a kitchen space?

That's okay! Adjust the cooking club to what is available. Reach out to your local School Health Promoter to discuss other potential kitchen spaces.

### Tip for Success

Once you have your participants, confirm any dietary restrictions you will need to accommodate for. Some equipment requires that a dedicated circuit is available. Before plugging appliances in, check with your RCE's Operation staff for guidance.



## What is the duration and frequency of the club?

(i.e., how long will each session be and how often?)

### Things to consider:

- Based on budget and supervision capacity, how many sessions can you offer?
- When will the club meet? (e.g., during lunch, during class, or after school)
- How often will you meet? (e.g., once a week, twice a month, etc.)
- How long will each session be?

For after school cooking clubs, two hours allows enough time for a welcoming activity (ice-breaker, introductions, etc.), preparation, cooking, and clean-up.

## Budget

How will the program be sourced and funded? (e.g., Healthy Schools Fund, SAC funds, seeking donations, etc.)

## What resources will you need for the session?

(e.g., recipe cards, aprons, food storage containers)

### Things to consider:

- What equipment will you need?
- What food are you supplying?
  - Create an ingredient list including quantities.
  - Ensure you confirm any allergies or dietary restrictions ahead of creating your ingredients list.
- Are there any additional materials or supplies required?

## Finding your local School Health Promoter

To find your local School Health Promoter, visit the Health Promoting Schools page of your Regional Centre for Education's webpage.

You can also contact: [HPS@nshealth.ca](mailto:HPS@nshealth.ca)

## Tip for Success

It may be helpful to offer healthy snacks at the beginning of the session, in case students arrive hungry!

Look at flyers or a price comparison app like Flipp when grocery shopping.



## Session plan

Create a structure for each session.

Example structure:



Things to consider:

- Consider how you can create a safe, welcoming environment for all participants (e.g., culturally-inclusive, accessible, mindful of sensory needs, etc.).
- Select recipes that are age-appropriate, align with the participant's skill level, and matches the space and time available.
- Think about the language to use when talking about food.
- Ensure students are reminded of frequent handwashing and use the handwashing activity as your food safety demonstration.
- Plan for safe cooling/storage of any leftovers.



## Final planning

Now it's time to confirm your details and get ready for your cooking club!

- ☐ Assign tasks to whoever is involved.
- ☐ Schedule dates (e.g., cooking club date, grocery shopping).
- ☐ Gather resources (e.g., materials, equipment, ingredients).





# During: Session Steps



## 1. Handwashing

Now it's time to confirm your details and get ready for your cooking club! Assign tasks to whoever is involved. Schedule dates (e.g., cooking club date, grocery shopping). Gather resources (e.g., materials, equipment, ingredients).



## 2. Create a clean work space

Clear a section of your tables or countertop and clean the area well. Ensure students are using separate cutting boards for raw meat and other ingredients.

Note: Consider purchasing and using coloured cutting boards to prevent cross-contamination.



## 3. Review the recipe

As you read, ensure students have all the ingredients, understand each step, and have enough time to cook the recipe. On the next page are descriptions of some cooking terms found in recipes that you can review with your group.



## 4. Gather your equipment

Get all the tools and ingredients you need to cook the recipe.



## 5. Cook!

Remember: great cooking skills develop with practice over time. Remember that all appliances are different and you may need to adjust the cooking time of a recipe. Ensure your students feel supported throughout this learning process! Preparing food together is also a great way to spend time connecting.



## 6. Serve and enjoy!

Use this time to enjoy the social aspect of your Cooking Club. Encourage students to sit and eat together and engage in conversation and connection over food.



## 7. Clean up

Aim to include your students in the clean-up process. Properly dispose of all organic (food) waste, recycling, and garbage. Wash surfaces and kitchen equipment. Wash dishes. Always turn off the oven or stove when finished.

### Things to consider:

- Ensure participants or guardians have signed a Media Release Form if you will be taking photos.
- Ensure you have budgeted enough time for set-up and clean-up following the cooking session.



# After the Cooking Club

## Reflection

Taking time for reflection and evaluation after your session is an important step that should not be skipped. This will allow you to make adjustments where needed to improve future sessions and to evaluate the impact you are making. Here are some things to consider:

- **Student Feedback:** Ask your students how they felt about the session! Consider what students liked and what they did not like and try to incorporate these changes into your next session, make this feedback and reflection session take place when sitting and enjoying your meal you've just created together. Consider what the goals of your Cooking Club were, did you meet these goals? If no, what do you need to adjust?
- **Your reflection on results vs. expectations:** Were your expectations met through the session? What went well and why? What could be improved for next time?

## Share your success!

- Celebrate your success by capturing photos, videos, or stories. The photos are great to share for future promotion and supporting the impact you are making!
- Remember, consent is needed for students if images are being shared.
- Tag Nourish Nova Scotia (@nourishns) and other partners and helpers!



# Workshop Resources

The following pages include resources to support the planning and implementation of your cooking club, including planning worksheets, suggested session ideas, recipe ideas, and more. You may want to print some or all of these pages for the workshop.





# Session Ideas

## Smoothie Lab

What better way to encourage exploration around new foods than by running a smoothie lab!

Check out this guide to get started:

**Smoothie Lab Facilitation Guide**

## Dips and Spreads

Students dip into their creativity with this workshop that explores some tasty homemade dips and spreads with local vegetables and sides.

Check out this guide to get started:

**Dips and Spreads Facilitation Guide**

## Baking Together

Supporting a school breakfast or snack program with your Cooking Club? Consider doing a baking session with your group!

Check out this recipe to get started:

**Sheet Pan Pancakes**

## Warm-Up Activities

Ice-breakers can be a great way to create connections in your group. Check out these warm-up activities to begin your sessions with.

**Warm-Up Activities**

# Recipe Ideas

## No-Bake / No-Cook Recipes

- [Acadian snack-in-a-cup](#)
- [Tabbouleh](#)
- [No-bake energy bites](#)
- [Green monster smoothie](#)
- [Open-faced applewhiches](#)

## Slow Cooker and Sheet Pan Recipes

- [Literally Nutritious 1.0 \(slow cooker recipes\)](#)
- [Literally Nutritious 2.0 \(sheet pan recipes\)](#)
- [Literally Nutritious 3.0 \(sheet pan recipes\)](#)

## Recipes with Limited Appliance Use

- [Fresh spring rolls](#)
- [Hummus in a bag](#)
- [No-roll sushi bites](#)
- [Salad in a jar](#)
- [Three-bean salad](#)
- [Roasted red pepper and hummus wrap](#)

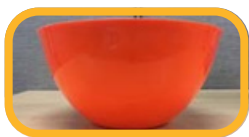
## Tips for Success

Ask students or staff to share their favourite recipe!



# Cooking Equipment

Below is a basic list of some of the cooking equipment you may want to have available in your learning environment. Equipment list is based on a class size of 25-30 students.



**6**  
Large  
Bowls



**12** Small  
Mixing  
Bowls



**6**  
Strainers



**6** Liquid  
measuring  
cups



**12** Dry  
measuring  
cup sets



**6**  
Measuring  
spoon sets



**12**  
Wooden  
spoons



**6** Large  
serving  
spoons



**6** Small  
serving  
spoons



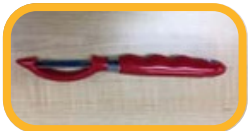
**6**  
Spatulas



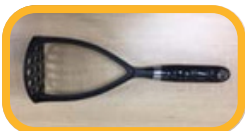
**6**  
Whisks



**6**  
Tongs



**6**  
Peelers



**6**  
Potato  
Mashers



**6**  
Graters



**6**  
Kitchen  
Scissors



**6** Can  
Openers



**6** Kid-safe  
knives (made  
from plastic or  
nylon)



**6**  
Cutting  
boards



**6** Baking  
sheets



**12** Take-home  
containers of  
your choice

## Other Materials to Consider:

- Blender
- Electric griddle
- Toaster oven
- Hand mixer
- Parchment paper
- Aluminum foil
- Skewers/toothpicks
- Napkins
- Kitchen towels
- Plates, Cups, and Cutlery
- Thermometer
- Storage cart

Be sure to check with your regional procurement policies before purchasing food or supplies. Clubs held in school need to follow the NS School Food and Nutrition Policy.



# Cooking Terms

Consider printing this page to have at each cooking station or review as a group with all participants.



## Chop

Cutting food into medium-sized squares. Chopped items do not have to be even, but aim for about 1 inch (2.5 cm).



## Roughly Chop

Cutting food into large-sized chunks that are roughly the same size.



## Dice

Cutting food into small similar sized pieces. Aim for about ½ inch (about 1 cm).



## Mince

Cutting food into the smallest pieces you can, usually ⅛ inch (about 0.5 cm).



## Peel

Using a vegetable peeler or a knife to remove enough of the outer skin of a vegetable or fruit to reveal the inside.



## Sear/Brown

Cooking the surface of meat at medium to high heat for a short amount of time until browned on the outside.



## Seed

Cutting a vegetable or fruit in half and scooping out all the seeds inside.



## Slice

Cutting food into long thin strips.

# Program Details

Cooking Club Program Lead(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cooking Club Program Helper(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cooking Club Goals:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the program for and how many participants can attend?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When will the program run and for how long?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Program Details

Where will the club be hosted?

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---

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Are there similar programs in your community? Is there a way to connect with them?

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---

---

What is needed to make the program safe and accessible?

---

---

---

What recipes will be used? Are there any dietary restrictions and/or allergies to consider?

---

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# Grocery List

Grocery Store:

Shopping Date:

Recipe(s):

Total Participants:

Ingredient	Quantity

# Session Task List Template

Use this template to plan your Cooking Club sessions and assign tasks. For example, who is buying the ingredients, who is booking the space, who will lead the session? And so on.

Session 1	Menu Item:
Session 2	Menu Item:
Session 3	Menu Item:
Session 4	Menu Item:
Session 5	Menu Item:

# Cooking Club Sign-up Sheet

	Name	Grade
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

# Cooking Club Permission Slip

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are pleased to let you know that because of the hard work of our team we are going to begin hosting a Cooking Club: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ students will have the opportunity to participate in our club each week. The dates and items being prepared are listed below.

If you are interested in any of these choices you are invited to put a 1 beside your first choice and a 2 beside your second choice, and return the bottom portion to:

\_\_\_\_\_

We will let you know what week you have been selected to participate in. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the Cooking Club lead:

\_\_\_\_\_

---

I understand that if my child, \_\_\_\_\_, is chosen for the club that I will pick them up at \_\_\_\_\_

☐ My child does not have any dietary restrictions or food allergies.

☐ My child does have dietary restrictions or food allergies Please list:

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Media Release (leave blank if no permission is given)

☐ I grant permission for photos of \_\_\_\_\_ to be taken during program hours. I understand that photos can be used for publicity use, illustration, advertising, web content, and youth program social medias.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Cooking Club Sessions:

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

# Appendix

## Additional resources

### Food Safety

[Food Safety Education: Safe Recipe Style Guide](#)

[Food Handlers Courses in Nova Scotia](#)

Holding your knife properly is an important cooking skill. This video about [Basic Knife Skills](#) is a great introduction to proper knife use and can help with teaching participants safe and effective ways to chop, mince, and more!

### Cooking Tips

This [Cooking with Kids](#) document gives ideas for food skills to develop by age and sample recipes.

[Cultural Foods - BC School Food Toolkit](#)

[Safety and Inclusion - BC School Food Toolkit](#)

### School Food

[School Food and Nutrition Policy](#)

[School Food and Beverage Standards](#)

Ensure all staff and volunteers involved in the cooking club have a completed [criminal record check/vulnerable sector check](#) (if required).

### Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Space

Take a look at some of these resources for learning about neutral food language and positive food environments.

- [Positive Food Environments Toolkit](#)
- [Teaching Canada's Food Guide: Toolkit for Educators](#)
- [Dietitians for Teachers: What is a Food Neutral Classroom?](#)
- [Teens Healthy Relationship with Food](#)
- [Celebrate Feeding](#)

### Nourish Nova Scotia Website

Check out the [Nourish Nova Scotia Learning Hub](#) for further resources about food literacy, cooking, and more!





# Handwashing

## Activity for Kids

### How Do Germs Spread?

1

Put a small amount of cooking oil or lotion on hands and shake on cinnamon. Explain how cinnamon spreads like germs.



2

Touch some items before washing hands like the wall, door knob and the taps to see the cinnamon being transferred from hands to surfaces.



3

Wash your hands. but try without soap first. Does the cinnamon come off? How about with soap? What are some parts of the hands that can be easily missed?



Here's a fun way to learn proper hand washing with the [Wash Your hands, Brother John!](https://youtu.be/GAP8HZdV5Qo) video (<https://youtu.be/GAP8HZdV5Qo>) developed by Dr. Nisha Thampi and CHEO.

For more tips on handwashing, watch this [video](https://youtu.be/cyScX5IVU_0) ([https://youtu.be/cyScX5IVU\\_0](https://youtu.be/cyScX5IVU_0))

**Note:** At least one Cooking Club facilitator should have their food safety certification.

For additional food safety resources, please contact your regional Health Promoting Schools and Healthy School Communities team about food safety training and resources available.



# Three Sink

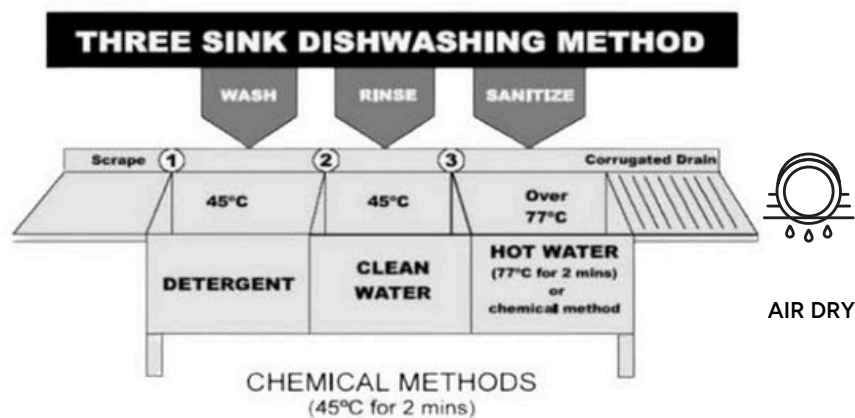
## Dishwashing Method

### Tip:

Bring a large basin to transport dirty dishes around your cooking space.

To clean re-useable dishes, follow the three sink method: **wash, rinse, sanitize, and air dry.**

- Buy three large basins.
- Label each: Wash, Rinse, and Sanitize
- Follow the three sink method as outlined below.



### Sanitizing Solution Options - Choose 1 of the Following Options:

- **Option 1:** Hot Water: Dishes must be immersed in hot water 77°C for 45 seconds.

**Chemical Methods:** If using a chemical sanitization method use only 1, chemicals should never be mixed.

- **Option 2:** Chlorine: 100ppm Dilution of 5% bleach (chlorine) - Approximately 2ml or ½ tsp bleach in 1L water.

OR

- **Option 3:** Quaternary Ammonium: 200 ppm - Dilution of Quats: Follow manufacturer's instructions.

