



Fun with food!

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Set up a scenario. Together with a child, gather stuffed toys, dolls or friends, dishes, pots, pans, and pretend or real food. Get a child-sized table or large blanket and sit down. Prepare for fun! As child pretends to cook food nearby, engage in a narrative. Ask, *Hello, may I please have a burger?* Once the child offers a burger, ask for condiments. Continue adding items. Then when it seems right, ask the child to join you. Initiate a conversation about the food, the pretend restaurant, or a completely different topic of interest to the child. Eventually ask for dessert.

More ideas:

- Be silly. Ask for 'an elephant' to eat. Play along as the child problem solves. Try to thwart their efforts when it feels comfortable, but don't frustrate. That breaks the fun.
- Categorize foods. As the customer, ask for only green, sweet, or chewy food.
- Change roles, I.e., the adult becomes the waitstaff. Bring the child wrong items for their requests. Encourage them to problem solve.
- Initiate this play silently. See how far you get using only gestures.
- With the child as the cook, ask them to bake a cake for you. Ask them to describe the steps as they create. Ask, *What are you doing now?*
- Pretend you're in another country. What foods would you order?
- Pretend to go to the grocery store to buy items. Together create a list of needs. Let the child write or draw the items - an early literacy skill.
- Use actual, empty, clean containers from food. Look at the labels and find recognized letters or pictures. Count letters in the words – early literacy skill.
- Describe similarities and differences in the foods available in this kitchen or restaurant.

***Children love to pretend...
and adults can have fun joining them in this interest.***

