

## Lesson 1: “What Is Cooking?”

### Learning Focus:

Introducing cooking early gives non-verbal learners a *mental model* of daily routines, builds recognition of key symbols and tools, and begins linking visual cues to real-world function. Research shows that symbolic modeling through visuals can significantly boost independence and life-skill acquisition (Lappa & Mantzikos, 2023).

**Duration:** 10 minutes

**Group:** You + Your Learner (1-on-1 time!)

### Materials Needed:

- Picture Flashcards: Egg, Toast, Milk
- Tool Flashcards: Spoon, Bowl, Frying Pan
- Visual Schedule Chart: “Today We’re Cooking!”
- Optional: Real or toy versions of items
- PECS-style board (if you use one)



#### **caregiver tips**

*Use real food items if possible — the more familiar and sensory, the faster your learner connects visual to real-world meaning.*



#### **watch out!**

*Don't skip the “show the card + say the word” step. It's not optional — it's their anchor for understanding.*

## What To Do

### ♦ Step 1: Visual Warm-Up (3 minutes)

**Say the word + Show the card + Wait.**

“Look — this is an egg. EGG.”

Let your learner point, tap, or just look. Support with hand-over-hand if needed.

#### **Bonus Trick:**

Place the flashcard next to the real thing.

“Egg → Real egg!” Let them smell, tap, or explore.

### ♦ Step 2: Gesture Modeling (3 minutes)

You act, they copy — no pressure.

**Stir** – big circular motion with a spoon

**Crack** – mime cracking an egg

**Eat** – spoon to mouth

Then say:

“Your turn!”

Hand them a spoon + bowl (or oats, or water) and let the magic happen.

### ♦ Step 3: Visual Routine Walkthrough (4 minutes)

Show 3-step picture chart:

 Egg →  Pan →  Plate

Tap and say each:

“Step one: Crack the egg.”

“Step two: Cook in pan.”

“Step three: Put on plate!”

Let your learner rearrange the steps with cards or magnets.

**Communication Support:**

- **Choice Time:** “What are we cooking?” (Hold up picture of egg and toast)
- **Yes/No cards:** Use visuals to check for understanding
- **Celebrate gestures:** Thumbs-up, high-five, even a dance

**What They’re Learning:**

Goal	How You’ll See It
Food recognition	Points/taps at 2+ food cards
Gesture imitation	Copies at least 1 cooking action
Visual sequencing	Orders the picture steps correctly

**Why This Lesson Matters:**

Cooking isn’t just about feeding yourself, it opens the door to independence, choice-making, and work-readiness. Studies highlight that cooking builds both academic and functional life skills essential for adulthood, like self-determination and employability (Lappa & Mantzikos, 2023).