

CookEasy: Visual Cooking Lesson Plan (Caregiver Edition)

For Non-Verbal Learners | PECS-Inspired | Research-Backed | Parent-Powered

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Welcome, Caregiver! Here's How to Use This Book

- ♦ *What's Inside:* 4 fun lessons + flashcard prompts
- ♦ *Your Role:* Say it. Show it. Celebrate it.
- ♦ *Flashcard Usage:* Point > Pause > Support > Celebrate
- ♦ *Visual Cues:* Always use the same gesture + words
- ♦ *Repeat is key!* Kids learn from repetition.
- ♦ *Not every child will respond right away — and that's okay.*



caregiver tips

Use real utensils your learner already sees daily — recognition will click faster.



watch out!

Avoid introducing too many tools at once. It can overwhelm or confuse the learner.

Caregiver Guide

It's time to redeem all those moments we lost, the ones where life got too loud, too fast. Right now, you're the closest anchor your learner has. And believe it or not, *you* might be the reason they start looking forward to doing this again tomorrow. That's why it matters to give this your best shot.

Visuals are your secret weapon. Repetition might feel boring to us, but to them? It's structure. It's safety. Over time, they won't just mimic, they'll own it. That's when autonomy kicks in, and you'll see them light up like they finally *belong*.

Here's what works:

- **Model exactly how it's done.** From holding the spoon to cracking an egg — they're watching your every move.
- **Celebrate small wins.** A point, a smile, a stir? That's a win. Make it feel big.
- **Stay patient.** Frustration? Yeah, it happens. But don't let it spill over. They're learners — and learners *make mistakes*. That's part of growth.
- **Never rush. Never skip visuals.** If you skip, they lose their compass.

Build a routine they can rely on:

- Use the *same cards* each session
- Build a *predictable visual strip*
- Combine *gesture + card + voice* every time
- And if you can? Use photos of the *real stuff* in *your* kitchen. That spoon they eat with, that pan they see daily — it helps lock in recognition faster.

This journey isn't about making them perfect. It's about helping them participate, at their pace, in *their way*. And you? You're the one making that possible.

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).

Lesson 2: Kitchen Tools Exploration

Learning Focus:

Tool interaction builds functional object recognition — learners not only see what a spatula looks like, they begin to understand *what it does*. According to Banerjee et al. (2021), multi-sensory exposure to tools strengthens cognitive linking between object and purpose, which is key for everyday problem-solving and later independence.

Duration: 15 minutes

Group: You + 1–2 Learners

Materials Needed:

- Real tools: Spatula, Whisk, Bowl, Pot, Ladle
- Laminated matching cards
- Sorting trays or labeled boxes
- Toy versions (optiona



caregiver tips

Let your learner explore tools with all senses — tapping, holding, even shaking it. Sensory engagement boosts memory.



watch out!

Avoid introducing too many tools at once. Start with 2 or 3 to avoid visual overload or confusion.

What To Do

♦ Step 1: Show & Tell (5 minutes)

Place 3 tools in front. Pick one:

“This is a spatula. We flip pancakes with it.”

Let them tap, shake, hold.

Try metal vs. plastic: “Feel how heavy!”

♦ Step 2: Match Game (5 minutes)

Hold card: “Can you find this?”

If unsure, guide gently: “Let’s do it together.”

Repeat with different tools 2–3 times.

♦ Step 3: Action Demo (5 minutes)

Act out the tool’s job:

Stir with a spoon. Pretend to flip the egg with spatula.

Then:

“Your turn!”

Use a toy kitchen if safety’s a concern.

Communication Support:

- “Spoon” (say it + hold it up + tap card)
- “Spatula or Spoon?” (Let them choose)
- Visual yes/no cards for feedback

What They’re Learning:

Goal	How You’ll See It
Tool recognition	Points to 3+ tools on request
Visual matching	Matches 2 real tools to the cards
Action mimic	Acts out at least one tool function

Why It Matters:

Recognizing and using kitchen tools supports cognitive development by helping learners connect objects with function. Tool exposure helps build context, object identification, and sensory familiarity which are crucial for cooking autonomy (Karungaru, 2019)

Lesson 3: Food Safety Routine

Learning Focus:

Learning basic kitchen safety reduces risk and reinforces the concept of personal care. Visual warnings and hygiene sequences build internal alert systems and support rule-following without relying on verbal instruction. Studies emphasize that structured visual safety routines directly support behavior regulation in neurodiverse learners (Borrusso et al., 2015; Banerjee et al., 2021).

Duration: 10 minutes

Group: You + 1 Learner

Materials Needed:

- Soap, towel, water
- Red = Danger, Blue = Safe cue cards
- PECS-style hygiene visuals
- Laminated images: wash hands, danger, hot stove



caregiver tips

Turn hygiene steps into a fun ritual — same gestures, same words, same order. It becomes automatic over time.



watch out!

Don't assume "they know this already." Even if it feels repetitive, visuals must stay consistent every session.

What To Do

♦ Step 1: Handwashing Ritual (4 minutes)

Show card: “Wash Hands”

Say it while miming:

“Wet hands. Soap. Rub! Rinse. Dry.”

Sing a short song or count to 20. Use gestures.

♦ Step 2: Danger Zones (3 minutes)

Show stove or picture.

Hold up **red card**:

“HOT. No touch.”

Show spoon + **blue card**:

“Safe. We use this.”

Let learner point: Hot or Safe?

♦ Step 3: Hygiene Reminder (3 minutes)

Point to “Wipe Mouth” or “Clean Table”

Do the action → Hand them the cloth → Let them copy

Communication Support:

- Use cards: “Safe” vs. “Unsafe”
- Show faces: 😊 vs ⚠️
- Repeat same visual cues for every session

What They’re Learning:

Goal	How You’ll See It
Hygiene response	Washes or mimics handwashing
Risk awareness	Points to “hot” when shown
Visual prompt use	Reacts to safety symbols correctly

Why It Matters:

Kitchen are hazard zones, and safety skills are survival tools. From burns to foodborne illness, teaching hygiene and cautious behaviour early is critical. Embedding safety into routines can reduce physical risk and increase overall kitchen confidence (Borrusso et al., 2015; Banerjee et al., 2021).

Lesson 4: Cleaning Up Like a Chef

Learning Focus:

Cleaning routines aren't just chores — they're signals that the task is complete. This helps learners develop task closure, responsibility, and environmental awareness. According to Møretro et al. (2020), teaching tidy-up routines with visual reinforcement improves executive functioning and daily habit formation.

Duration: 10 minutes

Group: You + 1 Learner

Materials Needed:

- Cloth, sponge, towel
- Labeled bins (e.g. “Spoon Here”)
- “Cleaning Checklist” visual: wipe, wash, put away



caregiver tips

Celebrate every small act — wiping, rinsing, putting away. It's not just clean-up, it's independence practice.



watch out!

Avoid doing it all yourself. Give them the tools, show the move, and wait. Don't rush — this is their task to try.

What To Do

♦ Step 1: Wipe Surfaces (3 minutes)

Show the visual of table and sponge:

“Time to wipe!”

Hand them the sponge. Use big, exaggerated motions together.

♦ Step 2: Wash Tools (4 minutes)

Use a single spoon or bowl.

Show rinsing under water → Dry with towel together.

Option: use toy sink setup.

♦ Step 3: Put Away (3 minutes)

Point to bin with label:

“Spoon goes here.”

Let them place item in correct bin.

End with:

“You cleaned like a chef!”

Communication Support:

- Check items off a simple checklist
- End with stars, claps, a “thumbs-up” dance
- Keep the routine predictable — same order every time

What They’re Learning:

Goal	How You’ll See It
Participates in clean-up	Touches or uses cleaning tools
Puts away items	Places in correct labeled spot
Routine engagement	Completes 2+ steps of checklist

Why It Matters:

Cleaning isn’t just about sparkle, it teaches closure, responsibility and hygiene. By learning how to tidy after cooking, learners begin to see tasks as sequences and understand consequences of contamination (Møretrø et al., 2020).

Final Note for You, Caregiver Extraordinaire:

Every tap, every gesture, every small moment of connection matters. You’re not just teaching how to cook — you’re helping your learner build confidence, choice-making skills, and independence. You got this.

Kitchen Tools Lesson Card**Food Items Lesson Card**

Hygiene Safety Lesson Card



Sequencing Visual Lesson Card



Emotions Lesson Card



Actions Lesson Card

