

# **SELF-RAISING FAMILIES**

**A Report on the psychological, social and practical benefits of  
'Family Baking and Bonding'**

**Commissioned by Betty Crocker©**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Research<sup>(1)</sup> shows that baking a cake is ‘one of those things’ that adults remember doing as a child. Yet the same study also reveals<sup>1</sup> that a staggering one in five of the same British adults currently never or rarely do any family activities, including baking, with their offspring.

Aware of these statistics and the additional knowledge that nearly half of adults <sup>(1)</sup> believe cooking to be the ideal activity to engage with their children, Betty Crocker has commissioned this report to inject renewed interest into the importance of the family baking tradition.

As the champion of family ‘baking and bonding’, Betty Crocker understands that the family baking tradition is highly regarded as an activity which can help parent and child to bond as well as provide the child with an armoury of skills required in later life.

The content of this report explores the psychological, social and practical benefits of parent and child baking together by drawing on the expertise of leading practitioners in the field of child nutrition and parenting. It attempts to define why baking is so important in the bonding process between parent and child as well as explore the skills that children take away from the experience of sharing the baking task with their parent as a friend.

One of the key findings of the report is for the child to believe that they are baking with their parent as an equal rather than ‘parent as teacher’ and this is discussed in sections 3 and 4.

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<sup>1</sup> Research conducted by OnePoll among 3,403 parents between 7 – 16 November, 2007

## REPORT CONTRIBUTORS



**Dr Pat Spungin** is the founder of the UK's leading parenting website [www.raisingkids.co.uk](http://www.raisingkids.co.uk). With over 170,000 visitors every month, Raisingkids offers information and advice on all aspects of bringing up children. Previously a university lecturer in Child Psychology, Pat has broadcast and written extensively on parenting issues, including most *The Haynes Teenage Manual* and *The Parentalk Guide to Brothers and Sisters*.



**Annabel Karmel MBE** is the author of fourteen best-selling books on nutrition and cooking for babies, children and families. Hugely influential in her imaginative approach to creating healthy food, she is helping transform diets of babies and children. Her philosophy is that the one element you can control which can determine your child's future health is what they eat.

## **1. PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS FOR THE CHILD**

### **1.1. Childhood Memories**

Given people's emotional relationship with food, it's not surprising that research (2) shows that the smell of baking is the scent they most associate with their mother as a child. Baking gives parents the opportunity to spend time with their children and create a moment in time that forms the basis of childhood memories. Memories are formed from the experiences that the child has with the parent baking (3). These experiences strike a chord with the child so that they live with them through to adulthood. Annabel Karmel says: "When my children were little, I was just starting a career and so I was spending a lot of time writing new recipes for my books. It soon became clear that one of the things my children loved was helping me in the kitchen and so from the age of three I involved them, and I realised that real life activities were more pleasurable than any toys you could buy. The delight they showed in baking something by themselves and offering their cakes to others, whilst beaming with pride at their creation, clearly indicated that it had struck a chord."

Remembering childhood experiences whether baking, Sunday lunch, or the fun of a TV programme the whole family watched together make up a sense of what and who the family is – and many of the rituals are passed on from generation to generation (4). Baking with mum falls into the category of making memories, especially if the result was enjoyed by the whole family (4).

### **1.2 Self-Esteem**

When mums encourage their children to take part in shared activities such as baking, they send a message which tells their children that their efforts are valued and their company is sought (5). We are inviting them to spend time with us doing something we both enjoy while making something for the family to appreciate.

Baking provides a strong bond between parent and child. It offers an opportunity for children to do something which builds their sense of competence and accomplishment (6). At play, children copy adults. They play in the Wendy House, pour make-believe tea for their toys, pretend to be car or train drivers, all a pale imitation of the 'real' things that adults do. Baking is different. Over time children can learn to bake simple things with a minimum of supervision and eventually they can do it by themselves. They can cook something that everyone in the family can eat, something 'real' and it tastes as good as an adult's. They are doing something considered as well as and sometimes better, than a grown-up. There are few things that fall into this category, so baking can be embraced as a way of helping to build up a child's self-esteem (7).

## **2. SOCIOLOGICAL IMPACT FOR THE CHILD**

Increasingly children spend time alone on a computer instead of developing social skills by interacting with family members (8). So many children spend time alone in sedentary activities like this that they don't develop social skills as well as those who interact with others through joint activities.

### **2.1 Job Well Done**

Baking has been identified as an ideal social learning tool. A key element of education is to teach a child that any activity is only finished when everything that has been used has been cleaned and put away (9). Baking is a task that can be seen through from start to finish. When mother and child work together, the child can do everything the adult does, from breaking the eggs to washing up afterwards. Within the space of thirty minutes or so, your child can see how ingredients mixed together can be transformed into something delicious. Add to this the joint effort of cleaning up afterwards and you can show your child the joy of a job well done.

### **2.2 Standing on Their Own Two Feet**

Annabel Karmel explains that the social functions of baking teaches children independence. She says "A fun activity for your child and a few friends is to choose a menu together, get the ingredients organised and then have the children cook the menu themselves with a little adult supervision. Children will take pride in making this and give them a sense of independence. When I was a child we used to create a restaurant and cook the food; one of us would be the chef serving it up in the kitchen and the other the waiter who would take orders. The result was learning that we are capable of doing adult things ourselves and giving us confidence to stand on our own two feet."

### **3. PARTY EQUALITY**

When parent and child bake together, especially on a regular basis, it creates strong bonds and a sense of security and stability for the child (10). One of the reasons why this occurs is because parent and child are taking part in a shared activity. Dr Pat Spungin says: “Once the assembling of ingredients begins – there’s a good chunk of time where parents can spend time chatting with their child. This face to face communication is key to building a good relationship between parent and child.”

To take this one step further, Betty Crocker realises that not only should the activity be shared, but to reap full psychological and social benefits from the baking experience, both parent and child should be on ‘equal terms’ – parent is not teacher but instead a confidante and friend.

Annabel Karmel also acknowledges the importance of equality. She says: “If you want to bond with your child, then do it as equals rather than parent/teacher and child. Choose recipes that are simple enough for your child to make without too much help from you. Children love to be part of the adult world. They see mummy or daddy in the kitchen – so baking something themselves and mimicking their parents makes them feel proud of their achievements. Spending time together being creative and having fun will bring you closer to your child.”

#### **4. THE CROCKER EFFECT**

Consumer research <sup>(11)</sup> has revealed that baking mixes provide the only activity that both parents and children are able to undertake as equals – in all other activities either the parent or child dominates.

Annabel Karmel says: “Spending time in the kitchen with your child is great but remember children have short attention spans.”

Baking mixes make the baking process simple with no over complicated measurements and at the same time teach children the social skills mentioned in section two of this report. Where baking mixes become even more invaluable is the fact that they allow the child to become equal with the parent in their baking skills <sup>(11)</sup>. The psychological impact of this, labelled here as ‘The Crocker Effect’, helps to boost a child’s confidence and strengthen the bonding process between child and parent to an even greater level. Betty Crocker offers the highest quality ingredients with the simplest methods which ensure that both parent and child are able to work as a team and enjoy the delicious results.

## **5. PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF BAKING**

### **5.1 Development of skills**

Children learn many skills from baking and cooking – some relevant to the subjects they are studying at school whilst others assist in their development towards adulthood.

Weighing and measuring as well as understanding time can help with maths; explaining where ingredients come from can assist with geography; reading the instructions and recipes can develop reading and writing skills; cracking eggs or understanding what food does upon contact with heat can help with understanding of science; as cooking is full of unfamiliar words, it builds vocabulary; showing them how to use basic utensils and assisting with their co-ordination helps to improve dexterity (12).

### **5.2 Impact on Nutrition**

Practical benefits of baking are central but it is also important to focus on the nutritional benefits that this can provide (13). Research has shown that when families sit down to eat together they eat better (14). Children learn to eat more healthily, and the conversation that takes place over the dinner table helps to build their vocabulary, perform better at school and they are less likely to go on to develop eating disorders or addictions (15). It's not a great leap to make from this to imagine that in showing our children how we make meals or bake cakes; we introduce them to a world of better nutrition. Viewers of *Jamie's School Dinners* will remember that the most stubborn children, who refused anything new, did try out a variety of new recipes when they themselves were involved in the preparation.

### **5.3 Collaboration**

Both Annabel Karmel and Pat Spungin stress the importance of baking as a useful learning tool for developing social and practical skills. Pat says: "There is one other element that arises when parent and child bake together that will prove very useful in school. Baking together is a collaborative activity; a case of team working and following instructions to produce something together. When a child is in school, it is essential that they know how to cooperate with other children and follow instructions from the teacher. Where better to start learning these important skills than at the kitchen table? The

process can start very early with a two year old following very simple instructions like stirring a mix or putting cake mix into the baking tray. Older children can bake with very little help, producing cakes and biscuits for family and friends.”

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Baking forms the basis of an ideal activity for parents to enjoy with their children. It is accessible to all as it is affordable and easy to achieve in the comfort of their own home. Betty Crocker is the Not only does the process of baking between parent and child provide a bonding opportunity but it also equips children with psychological, social and practical skills that will take them into adulthood.

Whilst current research indicates a time pressured society spending little time on family activities, it is clear that there is willingness to participate in cooking in the kitchen (16). Baking a cake with children can be a simple and economical activity with enormous benefits.

It is understood that cake mixes enable the parent to form even stronger bonds with their children as these make the baking process simple enough for the child to be an equal with the adult. This allows a relationship of friend and confidante rather than teacher and pupil.

## **6. REPORT METHODOLOGY**

The contents of this report were compiled on behalf of Betty Crocker with the help of Pat Spungin and Annabel Karmel.

National research was also undertaken with 3,403 adults by OnePoll to find out more about their time spent with their children.

## **7. REFERENCES**

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