

Sensory Smoothie Chefs

Materials Needed:

- Blender
- Measuring cups (1 cup, 1/2 cup)
- Cutting board and a child-safe knife (or pre-cut fruit)
- Large bowl for ingredients
- 2-3 clear cups for serving
- Fun straws or spoons
- Cleaning supplies (sponges, towel, soap)
- **Visual Recipe Card:** A simple, picture-based recipe. You can draw this or print pictures. Example steps: 1. Picture of a banana. 2. Picture of strawberries. 3. Picture of milk. 4. Picture of blender.
- **Communication Board/Device:** Programmed with words like "more," "stop," "all done," "help," and names of ingredients. Alternatively, use printed picture cards (PECS).
- **"First-Then" Board:** A simple visual tool with two squares to show "First, we will add fruit," "Then, we will blend."

Smoothie Ingredients:

- 1 ripe banana, peeled
- 5-6 strawberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup of milk (or a non-dairy alternative like almond or oat milk)
- Optional: a handful of spinach (to "hide" a vegetable), a spoonful of yogurt for creaminess.

Lesson Breakdown

Subject Areas Covered:

- **Life Skills:** Following a recipe, kitchen safety, measuring, pouring, cleaning up.
- **Math:** Counting (strawberries, bananas), measuring (1 cup), sequencing (following recipe steps).
- **Reading:** Functional reading through picture-symbol recognition on the recipe card and ingredient labels.
- **Science:** Observing states of matter (solids to liquid), discussing where fruits grow, exploring textures and temperatures.
- **Art:** Presenting the final smoothie in a creative way (e.g., adding a berry on top).

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Follow a 3-step visual recipe sequence with minimal prompting.
- Identify and match 2-3 ingredients to their corresponding pictures on the recipe card.
- Participate in measuring by pouring an ingredient into a cup with hand-over-hand support.
- Count up to 5 items (e.g., strawberries) with physical or verbal prompts.
- Activate a switch-adapted blender or push the button with assistance to observe a change in the ingredients.

Preparation (Before the Lesson):

1. **Set Up the Kitchen:** Wash and lay out all ingredients and materials on a clean, uncluttered surface at the student's height if possible. This makes them accessible and reduces visual

distraction.

2. **Prepare Visuals:** Have the visual recipe card, "First-Then" board, and communication system ready and easily accessible.
3. **Pre-measure/Pre-cut (Optional):** Depending on the student's motor skills, you may want to pre-cut the banana or have the milk already poured into a pitcher for easier pouring. Safety first!
4. **Manage Sensory Input:** Be aware of potential sensory triggers. The sound of the blender can be loud. Consider offering noise-canceling headphones before you turn it on.

Step-by-Step Lesson Activities

1. Introduction: "Getting Ready to Cook" (5-10 minutes)

The goal is to introduce the activity and build excitement. Use a calm and encouraging tone.

1. Show the student the visual recipe card. Point to the final picture (a smoothie) and say, "We are going to make a yummy smoothie!" You can also have a real smoothie available for them to see and touch (the cup).
2. Use the "First-Then" board. Place a picture of "work" or "make smoothie" in the "First" spot, and a picture of "eat" or "drink smoothie" in the "Then" spot. This shows a clear and rewarding sequence.
3. Review the ingredients. Hold up the banana and point to the banana picture on the recipe card. Say "Banana." Encourage the student to touch, smell, or hold the banana. Do this for each ingredient. This is your pre-reading and science connection.

2. Part 1: The Recipe Quest (Reading & Math) (10-15 minutes)

This part focuses on following the visual steps and incorporating basic math concepts.

1. Point to the first picture on the recipe (e.g., banana). Say, "First, we need one banana." Guide the student to pick up the banana. If it needs peeling, do it together using hand-over-hand guidance. Place it in the large bowl or directly in the blender.
2. Move to the next step: strawberries. Say, "Next, we need strawberries. Let's count them!" Place the strawberries on the table and count them out loud together, guiding the student's hand to point to each one. "One... two... three... four... five!" Help the student put the 5 strawberries into the bowl.
3. For the final ingredient, milk, show the student the 1-cup measuring cup. Say, "We need one cup of milk." Help the student pour the milk into the measuring cup. It's okay if it spills! This is about the process, not perfection. Then, help them pour the milk from the cup into the blender.

3. Part 2: The Science of Blending (Science & Life Skills) (5-10 minutes)

This is the fun, transformative part of the activity.

1. Secure the lid on the blender tightly. Emphasize this step: "Lid on, tight, tight, tight! Safety first!"
2. Prepare for the noise. Say, "It's going to be loud now." Offer noise-canceling headphones.
3. With your hand over the student's, guide them to press the "on" or "blend" button. If the button is too small, you can press it while they have their hand on top of yours. Let it blend for 30-45 seconds.
4. While it's blending, talk about what's happening! "Look! It's spinning! All the fruit is mixing together. The solid banana is turning into a liquid drink!" Use simple, descriptive words.
5. Turn off the blender together. Pause and notice the quiet. Point out the change: "Wow, it's a smoothie now! It's all mixed."

4. Part 3: Artistic Presentation and Cleanup (Art & Life Skills) (5-10 minutes)

This phase focuses on the pride of creation and responsibility.

1. Carefully pour the smoothie into two clear glasses—one for you and one for the student. Let the student help hold the blender if they are able.
2. Offer an artistic choice. Hold up a single strawberry or a fun straw. Use the communication system for them to indicate which they'd like for their cup. "Do you want a berry on top or a curly straw?"
3. Celebrate the finished product! "You made a beautiful smoothie!"
4. Involve the student in cleanup. They can help put the empty milk carton in the recycling, or wipe the counter with a sponge using hand-over-hand guidance. This teaches that cleanup is part of the cooking process.

5. Conclusion: Tasting Time! (5 minutes)

The reward! This is the most important step for positive reinforcement.

- Say "Cheers!" and clink your glasses together.
- Enjoy the smoothie you made together. Talk about the taste and temperature. "Mmm, it's sweet and cold!"

Differentiation and Support Strategies

- **For Non-Verbal Communication:** Consistently model using the AAC device or picture cards. If the student points to an ingredient, acknowledge it: "Yes, that's the banana!" Honor all attempts at communication. Use simple yes/no questions that can be answered with a head nod/shake or a designated sign.
- **For Physical/Motor Challenges:** Use hand-over-hand assistance for pouring, scooping, and pressing buttons. This provides support while allowing for participation. Use adaptive tools like scoopers with large handles or non-slip mats under bowls.
- **For Sensory Sensitivities:**
 - **Touch:** If the student is hesitant to touch a wet ingredient, don't force it. You can model it yourself or use utensils.
 - **Sound:** Always pre-warn about the blender noise. Blending in another room while they watch from a distance is also an option.
 - **Taste/Smell:** Start with familiar and preferred fruits. If they don't want to taste it, that's okay. The success is in the process of making it.
- **For Cognitive Support:** Break down every single step. Instead of "Let's add the strawberries," say "Pick up one strawberry." (Pause). "Now, put it in the blender." (Pause). Use the "First-Then" board for every transition if needed.

Assessment (Observational Checklist)

Observe and note the student's participation. This isn't a test, but a way to see what skills are emerging. Did the student:

- Look at the visual recipe when prompted?
- Point to or touch a correct ingredient?
- Maintain engagement for at least two steps of the process?
- Allow hand-over-hand assistance without resistance?
- Show a positive reaction (smile, excitement) at any point during the activity?
- Attempt to use their communication system (e.g., pointing to a picture)?

Every small step is a success! The main goal is a positive, shared experience that builds skills and

confidence in a fun, pressure-free way.