Young Children and Barbeque

Children are curious and love to be involved with grownup things, barbeque is no exception. Barbeque is a great opportunity to share some wonderful parent-child time, and bring them up appreciating a wonderful sport and culinary discipline. My daughter has been involved in barbeque since she was 2, holding the tools at first, and now prepping and cooking her own meats on her own grill.

**Safety** - Barbeques and knives are dangerous to children, use caution and keep them away from hot barbeques and sharp instruments including knives, injector, forks and rotisserie forks. The barbeque center in my back yard was built primarily to keep children away from the hot barbeques. Naturally when I have a gathering in the back yard, children are present and it is difficult to supervise them all. Always assign a fire watch when children are in the vicinity of the pits.

**How can small children be involved** - I bought my daughter an apron and that that she wears when we barbeque, it makes her feel important, involved and knowledgeable. Buy them their own little outfit, jazz it up for them and ask them to wear it when they help. When they are very young, two and three they can hold tools, help mix and apply rubs, apply mop sauce with a long handled mop, and read the temperature gages during the smoking process just to name a few. They can always be involved in the tasting and judging process to learn what was done correctly or incorrectly. I have a step ladder with a safety rail to keep her from falling on the pit that she can climb to see into pit. With a long handle mop she can stand on the ladder and apply the mop sauce safely without risking a burn. Let them organize the spices, and mix the rubs. As they get older it teaches them to read, measure ingredients and become familiar with flavor profiles. Because they have little control and coordination, don’t let them apply ingredients directly to the meat, you may end up with a cup of salt on your chicken. Rather, have them measure the spices into a stainless mixing bowl, mix them up and apply the spices to the meat from the mixing bowl and let them rub it in-their favorite part! If they mess up the recipe in the mixing bowl, throw it out and let them start over. They can prepare the injection sauces, and hold the bowl during the injection process until they are old enough to operate the injector. This also helps them understand and learn about flavor profiles.

My daughter constantly wants to help trim the fat off of the meat; I discourage this for the most part because we are using sharp knives that are unforgiving. It is best to let them observe this part of the process and avoid a cut and a very angry spouse. Be advised, children are especially curious about thing they cannot do, so don’t turn your back on them when the knives are out. I let my daughter prepare the fire pit in the smoker, stack and organize the starting wood and the briquettes, and of course let her light the fire. Once the fire is lit, they are not allowed near the pit without adult supervision.

When my daughter was six, I bought her own little indirect smoker. Now she prepares her meat, mixes and applies rubs, applies mop sauce, prepares her fire and cooks her meat. As I am smoking on mine, she is smoking on hers, she loves it. She also loves to do the taste test to see whose meat came out better. This allows them a chance to express their opinion and gives them a sense of power, remember, they are kids and will be brutally honest so have think skin and be prepared to hear the truth.