

USING A KNIFE IS AN ESSENTIAL SKILL FOR CHEFS AND KNIFES MUST BE USED AND HELD PROPERLY. HERE ARE SOME BASIC TECHNIQUES AND TIPS.

Holding your knife

Your hand should always go on the handle of the knife. Hold the knife with your fingers wrapped around the handle and your thumb and first finger squeezing the top of the blade.

Knives should be sharp and the correct size for the task. The best knife is an all purpose chef's knife (16 – 20 cm) as this can handle most types of produce with ease. Using a small or blunt knife is actually far more dangerous than using a sharp knife of the correct size properly.



Always use a chopping board

To protect both your knives and your bench surfaces make sure that you always use a chopping board when using a knife. Each student should have their own chopping board – it is not safe to share. Make sure the chopping board is clean and dry, and big enough for the produce you are cutting. Use a damp chux or tea towel under your chopping board to stop it slipping.



Always put the flattest part of the produce on the board

Most produce is not flat and will often roll around on the chopping board unless gripped firmly. Once you have made the first cut, you will end up with a flat surface which should then be placed on your chopping board. This will make the produce more stable and easier to hold. While certain types of cuts (eg. slicing an onion into rounds) do not work for this, it is a great tip for students who are beginners using knives and should be encouraged.



There are a few different ways you can grip the produce you are cutting to protect your fingers and keep them safe. Which grip you use will depend on the produce you are cutting. Make sure you are aware of your fingers and know where they are at all times.

Bridge grip

In this grip, you make a bridge with your thumb and fingers firmly pushing down on the produce. The knife then goes underneath your “bridge” so your hand is completely safe and cannot be cut. This grip may be difficult for younger children due to the size of their hands compared the knife, but is a good one to demonstrate and use for children with bigger hands.



Claw grip

Hold vegetables with the tips of your fingers resting on top of the vegetable and your thumb tucked behind the rest of your fingers. This is called a claw grip as your hand looks like a bear claw with the fingers tucked in so your knuckles are closest to the knife. This grip can be used with most types of produce.



Mincing

When chopping and mincing, your whole hand should rest on the top of the knife. Use the top of the knife to scrape vegetables or herbs back into a pile.



Walking with a knife and passing a knife

Part of using a knife safely is knowing how to walk around the kitchen and pass the knife safely. First, always keep your hand on the handle and make sure the knife is never pointed at anybody – including yourself! When walking around the kitchen carry the knife down by your side with the point facing down to the floor. When passing a knife, make sure the other person can grab the handle and does not need to touch the blade. It may be safer to put the knife down on the bench and let the other person pick it up themselves.



Washing up and drying a knife

Only put a knife into a sink of soapy water when you are able to wash it up immediately yourself. Otherwise, leave the knife on the bench next to the sink in clear sight. A knife can be easily hidden in a sink of soapy water and someone could cut their hand on it if they don't know it is there.

When drying the knife, keep one hand on the handle, and wipe the blade with a tea towel, running your hand along the blunt side of the blade.



Storing knives safely

You will need to ensure you have somewhere safe to store your chef's knives. They should not be kept loose in a drawer. Instead, keep them in a separate box (out of reach of the students) or a knife block. A simple knife stand for a drawer can be made by creating slots in a piece of wood (as shown in the photo)

