

Advice sheet

Scissor skills

A child needs controlled finger and hand movements for cutting skills. A child needs to be able to combine movements of the thumb, index and middle finger to hold the scissors correctly and control the opening and closing of the scissors.

Prior to developing scissor skills, a child needs to be able to;

- Combine individual movements of thumb, index and middle fingers
- Co-ordinate the hands, arms and eye movements
- Stabilise the wrist, elbow and shoulder, to provide a base for the complex finger movements needed for cutting

Activities and games that will help to develop scissor skills

Pick-up games

Using tongs, tweezers and clothes pegs encourage your child to pick up small objects.

Squeezing games

Using water pistols, turkey basters etc. encourage your child to squirt liquid. This can be done by making a game with balloons, patterns on outside walls or soap bubbles in a bowl.

Paper punching games

Using a hole punch, encourage your child to make patterns across pieces of paper.

Hand-eye coordination

In order to develop scissor skills and other fine motor skills, the eyes need to work together in order to follow and concentrate on an object in their line of vision. The eyes must also work with the hands, guiding each other through the cutting activity, to maintain safety and precision.

Activities and games to help develop hand-eye co-ordination

- Pencil Maze activities
- Dot-to-dot, colouring in pictures
- Drawing around stencils
- Target Throwing
- Threading and lacing activities
- Computer games eg mouse control
- Making pictures with stickers
- Flick paper balls into a goal with index finger (finger football).

Activities to stabilise the wrist, elbow and shoulder

- Push-ups
- Activities on all fours such as animal walks, donkey kicks, bunny hops, rocking backwards, forwards and sideways
- Monkey bars or climbing frames in the park
- Play activities on the tummy
- Silly putty or Playdough
- Tug of war
- Another way of helping to stabilise is by working in certain positions such as standing, half kneeling or kneeling up

Learning to use scissors

Once your child has the early skills required for using scissors, they can move on to learning to cut. Begin working through each stage on the next page, only moving on to the next stage when your child has mastered the previous stage.

Please make sure the scissors you use are child friendly and that you supervise your child to ensure their safety.

You may wish to consider easi-grip, spring loaded, trainer scissors or left-handed scissors.

Keep the area clear of items, except scissors and paper especially for those children who are disorganised or distracted.



1. Your child needs to show an interest in scissors. Ask your child to touch their thumb and forefinger together several times, as if they were cutting with a pair of scissors. They can then attempt to bring the scissors and paper together and imitate cutting action.
2. The child will learn to hold and manipulate the scissors correctly.
3. The child will learn to open and close the scissors in a controlled fashion. If they are finding it difficult to cut paper then try just snipping the edges, encourage random or 'free' cutting or snipping.
4. Encourage the child to hold paper in one hand and scissors in the other.
5. Encourage the child to make short random snips with the scissors. Do not ask the child to cut in a forward motion (i.e. moving arm forwards) or in a specific direction as this comes at a later stage of development
6. The child will now learn to cut in a forward motion. Create a mark on the paper, which the child can aim towards with the scissors. Using stiff paper such as card can help with achieving this skill at the early stages

7. The child continues to develop their cutting skills in a forward motion but now staying on a line. Start by asking them to cut within a thick line, e.g. within a 15cm width, gradually reducing the width as they perfect this skill
8. Once the child can cut on a straight line, you can move on to cutting out simple shapes such as a square and triangle. Allow the child plenty of opportunities to practise and provide a lot of encouragement. At this stage it will be easier for the child to start with cutting out squares, triangles and rectangles, as they would have already learnt cutting in a straight line. Once they have mastered cutting out these shapes, move on to circles and semi-circles. These are more complicated as they aren't straight lines.
9. The child will then move on to cutting out figure shapes. At first, they will keep the scissors straight and turn the paper when there is a curve or change of direction. As they become more skilled, they will learn to hold the paper still and turn the scissors instead. Gradually move on to more complex designs and objects.

Useful resources

Easy-grip scissor

Left handed scissors

Spring loaded scissors

All available from good stationery shops or www.specialdirect.com