

the school years toolkit

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Scissor skills

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet for guidance on helping children develop the ability to use scissors.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and have not seen improvement after four months, please contact CYPIT.

Scissors skills begin to develop in children around the age of two years. Pre-school children will learn to use scissors quickly and pass from unrefined movement to precise skills. There are significant stages of development a child needs to go through before they have the skills required to learn cutting with scissors. These skills are called pre-requisites.

Pre-requisites

The pre-requisites are to have the ability to:

- combine individual movements of the thumb, index and middle fingers
- co-ordinate the hands, arms and eye movements
- stabilise (keep still) the wrist, elbow and shoulder. This will provide a base for more refined finger movements.

Opening and closing the hand and scissor grip

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

Activities and games that will help to develop these skills are:

Pick-up games

- Using a variety of tongs and tweezers, encourage the 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, soap bubbles in a bowl or squirting paint across a tray of water.

Section 5 advice sheets

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 effectively 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 accuracy.

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

- 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).

Stabilising the wrist, elbow and shoulder

Stabilising (keeping still) the wrist, elbow and shoulder provides a base for refined finger/hand movements required for using scissors. A hand capable of grasping is of little use if there isn't a stable base from which it moves. A stable shoulder supports effective use of the hand. This stability can be achieved by improving the use of the muscles around the shoulder and elbow.

The following activities can promote this:

- Push-ups
- Wall push-offs
- Activities on all fours such as animal walks, donkey kicks, bunny hops, rocking backwards, forwards and sideways
- Body wrestling
- Monkey bars or climbing frames in the park
- Pushing around large toys
- Crab walking
- Play activities on the tummy
- Silly putty or Playdough
- Tug of war
- Rough and tumble play.

Another way of helping to stabilise is by working in certain positions such as standing, half kneeling, kneeling up and kneeling on hands and knees.

Section 5 advice sheets

Learning to use scissors

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

Please make sure the scissors you use are child friendly and that you supervise the child to ensure safety whilst they are learning.

Stage One

The child needs to show an interest in scissors. They will attempt to bring the scissors and paper together and imitate cutting action.

Stage Two

The child will learn to hold and manipulate the scissors correctly.

Stage Three

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 snipping Playdough sausages. You do not need to introduce paper at this stage. However, if you do use paper, encourage random or 'free' cutting or snipping.

Stage Four

Encourage the child to hold paper in one hand and scissors in the other. 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.

Stage Five

The child will now learn to cut in a forward motion. Create a mark or a goal 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.

Stage Six

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/6inch width, gradually reducing the width as they perfect this skill.

Stage Seven

Once the child can cut on a straight line, you can move on to cutting out simple geometric 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.

Section 5 **advice** sheets

Stage Eight

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.