

Does not need help when using a fork or spoon

Children begin to develop self-feeding skills from birth however self-feeding is a very complex task and it is common for children to have difficulty using cutlery to feed themselves. It usually takes until a child is 7 years old before they can successfully use cutlery to feed themselves without being too messy!

Typical development

3 to 4 year olds will be learning to:	use one-handed tools. Children will further develop their spoon-feeding skills as well as learning to use a fork to stab food.
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How can practitioners support children to begin to use cutlery?

- Encourage children to be sat in a well-supported position at a table, with their feet positioned on the floor to ensure stability and the ability to use their hands freely.
- Be consistent in setting out equipment in the same way each session to ensure children can locate the items.
- Consider your equipment - Use spoons and forks with a short handle to make them easier to control. Weighted cutlery can be easier to control. Plates and bowls with lipped edges can be used to provide an area to 'scoop' against. A non-slip matting could be used on the table to prevent sliding.
- Consider the food that you are using. Will it stick easily to cutlery or is it likely to slide around the plate.
- Provide plenty of opportunity and time daily for practice.
- Talk to children about each step of the process. Some children may need the task broken down into smaller steps and/or be taught the last step first (backward chaining) e.g. adult to load cutlery with food but leave rested on plate for child to move from plate to mouth.
- Assist children by modelling the task alongside them.
- Physically assist the child by using a hand under hand technique where required, gradually reducing your support over time. E.g. guide child's hand by supporting under their wrist whilst lifting cutlery to child's mouth.
- Encourage a good grasp of cutlery, e.g. child's index finger should point down the back of a fork towards the prongs.

Activity ideas

- Offer play activities involving the use of cutlery e.g. whilst playing with dough/ craft activities.
- Offer real cutlery as a resource for children to play with.

Useful resources

NHS OT Cutlery information sheet - [Using Cutlery Information Sheet | NHS GGC](#)

Cutlery teaching resources - [117 Top Cutlery Teaching Resources \(twinkl.co.uk\)](#)

Booktrust website - [BookTrust: Getting children reading | BookTrust](#)