

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.

Practitioners can support children by:

- Encouraging them 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.
- Being consistent in setting out equipment in the same way each session to ensure they can locate the items.
- Considering the equipment available - Use spoons and forks with a short handle to make them easier to control (weighted cutlery will also help to support this). Plates and bowls with lipped edges can be used to provide an area to 'scoop' against. Non-slip matting could be used on the table to prevent sliding.
- Considering the food that you are using. Will it stick easily to cutlery or is it likely to slide around the plate.
- Providing plenty of opportunities and time for daily practice.
- Talking to them 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.
- Assisting children by modelling the task alongside them.
- Encouraging a good grasp of cutlery, e.g. child's index finger should point down the back of a fork towards the prongs.

Activities, ideas, resources or strategies:

- Crossing the midline activities – play games such as pass the parcel or bean bag games
- Provide scooping and pouring activities. Use malleable materials such as water/sand
- Create games where children have to pick objects up with tongs, this will help develop muscles necessary for grasping.
- Provide play activities at different levels e.g. standing to do big scale drawing and painting.
- 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.