

Can use scissors and other tools

Cutting skills take time for children to develop. Being able to use scissors to cut well is important for many preschool and school activities including art and craft. Children may have the skills to use small scissors by three to four years of age, but scissor skills are not fully developed until 6 years of age.

To use scissors and other tools children need:

- Good core strength so their arms and hands can be used freely
- Strong wrist and hand muscles to open and close the scissors
- Development of a preferred and an assistant hand. Cutting involves each hand doing different tasks that require practice. The preferred hand uses the scissors, and the other hand turns the paper
- Good coordination of their eyes and hands for cutting around shapes
- An ability to use the thumb, index, and middle fingers whilst the other fingers remain still
- A pair of suitable scissors and an interest in using them.

Practitioners can support children by:

- Considering the child's seating position e.g. feet flat on the floor, bottoms back against the chair.
- Considering the order in which children typically develop cutting skills: Holds scissors > Makes single snips > Holds paper whilst snipping > Cuts across paper > Cuts along a straight line > Cuts along a curved line > Cuts around simple shapes > Cuts around simple shapes with corners and curves
- Modelling the use of tools for children, for example, so they can see how to hold scissors and cut. Introduce children to scissors using a "crocodile" opening and closing of the hand.
- Reminding children how to hold the tools and giving them plenty of opportunities to practice. When using scissors, reinforce children's hand position by getting them to do the 'thumbs up' sign. You could mark the thumb hole with a piece of coloured tape or place a sticker or small highlighter mark on children's thumbs.
- Encouraging children to follow agreed safety rules.
- Always ensuring children have access to the appropriate scissors, for example, providing left-handed scissors for left-handed children.
- Encouraging children to hold a beanbag between their elbow and side whilst they are practicing cutting to ensure that their hand and arm position remain correct whilst cutting.

Activities, ideas, resources, or strategies:

- Cutting trays with an assortment of materials for art projects
- Cutting straws into small pieces
- Playdough; squeezing, rolling and snipping with plastic scissors
- Nature cutting such as grass and leaves
- Cutting fruit during snack preparation
- Hammer and nail activities in the construction area to develop hand strength and control
- Have a range of different scissors; Easy-grip scissors, adapted scissors, Spring-loaded scissors etc.
- Visual prompts and cutting lines
- Smaller, achievable cutting task
- Tearing paper
- Pulling apart and pushing together activities, for example, building blocks, Velcro fruit and jigsaw puzzles
- Holding a book and turning the individual pages
- Pegging washing onto a line, tweezers and pom-pom activities
- Threading beads
- Bubble wrap popping