

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.

Typical development

3 to 4 year olds will be learning to:	use one-handed tools and equipment, for example, making snips in paper with scissors.
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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.

How can practitioners support children to use one-handed tools and equipment?

- If seated, consider the child's seating position e.g. feet flat on the floor, bottoms back against the chair.
- Consider 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
- Model 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.
- Remind children each time the correct way to hold the tools and give them plenty opportunities to practice.
- Encourage children to follow agreed safety rules.
- Always provide left-handed scissors for left-handed children.
- 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.
- Encourage 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.
- Have a range of different scissors [Scissor Types | NHS GGC](#)

Activity ideas

- Cutting play dough sausages with plastic scissors
- Cutting trays with an assortment of materials for art projects
- Encourage them to paste their pictures onto larger sheets of paper.
- Cutting straws
- Provide a collection of old flyers, catalogues, and magazines.
- Nature cutting (grass/leaves)
- Snip around paper plates/cups
- Hammer and nails within construction area
- Cutting fruit at snack time

Useful resources

NHS GGC advice for building scissor skills - [Scissor Skills | NHS GGC](#)

Activity ideas for pre-schoolers - [25 Activities to Help Preschool Kids Build Scissor Skills - Early Learning Ideas](#)

Scissor skills for pre-schoolers - [Ready, Steady, Cut: Scissor Skills for Preschoolers - Educa \(geteduca.com\)](#)