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Developing Scissor Skills

Scissors skills typically begin to develop in children around the age of two years. There are significant stages of development a child needs to go through before they have the skills required to learn cutting with scissors. These are the ability to:

- Combine individual movements of the thumb, index and middle fingers in order to open and close the hand in a 'scissor' movement (see activities below to help develop these)
- Co-ordinate the hands, arms and eye movements in order to cut along lines (see 'Fine Motor Skill Development' advice sheet for activities)
- Coordinate both hands to work together in order to stabilise the paper whilst using the scissors (see 'Bilateral Integration' advice sheet for activities)
- Stabilise (keep still) the wrist, elbow and shoulder in order to control the arm and hand movements (see 'Core Stability' advice sheet for activities)

It's very important to ensure a good, stable sitting position – see 'Good Seating' advice sheet

Activities to develop the 'scissor' hand movement

- Use salad and kitchen tongs to pick up objects, move them from one place to another and release them. This can be done as a relay race or incorporated into a game.
- Activities using a hole punch such as punching holes in paper with a hole punch and paste the small circles onto an outline e.g a ladybird or punching holes around the edges of paper/card and then thread string through the holes
- Squirt water through a pipette from one tub to another – mix different colours of water or aim at targets.
- Peg games – hanging out washing or using pegs to pick up cotton wool balls to make a collage.
- Games like 'Operation' and 'Bed Bugs' using tweezers.
- Water guns, eye droppers or water pistols – used with coloured water to make a picture.



Introducing scissors

- Once your child is showing an interest in scissors, and has developed the skills outlined above, introduce safety scissors. However, beginner scissors can be better for some children because they're spring loaded, and the child manipulates them with their whole hand rather than with their fingers. Here are some different types of scissors that you could try:



- To help your child remember how to position his or her hand, draw a smiley face or place a sticker on the thumbnail of their cutting hand, and remind your child that they should always be able to see the smiley face while they're cutting. This prevents the child from turning their hand upside down while cutting - practice "thumbs up cutting"!
- Give multiple opportunities to practice how to hold the scissors by encouraging them to pick up scissors up by having the child put scissors down in between each cutting task.
- Practice opening and closing the scissors by snipping playdough, drinking straws and Styrofoam trays.

- Move on to snipping thicker paper as this is easier to hold. Snip fringe on paper to make grass or a lion's mane or set out long strips of paper (about 1" wide) and snip off small pieces to make confetti



Practicing with scissors

- Place a sticker in the middle of a piece of paper and have your child cut across until they reach it. Using a target helps children develop smooth forward movement of scissors and impulse control to stop when they've reached the target point.
- Place stickers in a line across the page and have your child cut the stickers in half as they move scissors forward.
- Encourage children to move their stabilizing hand along the page as they cut (tell them their hand should move next to their scissors).
- Again, target practice helps here! This time, draw a line on the paper first and then place the stickers along the line for your child to cut in half. This gives exposure to the concept of cutting on a line, but provides mini targets along the way
- Make the cutting lines as thick as they need to be for your child to be successful and gradually make them thinner as your child develops better accuracy.

- Draw a dotted line from the edge of the paper to show your child where to cut into the paper to reach the shape.
- Draw an arrow on the paper indicating which direction your child should go when cutting around the shape. Right-handed children will cut in a counterclockwise direction; left-handed children will cut in a clockwise direction.
- Draw a dot or place a sticker at a point past the corner of the shape, showing your child that they have to cut further than the line in order to turn the corner without snipping it off.
- Once your child has mastered cutting in a straight line, introduce shapes with straight lines (eg squares and triangles) then curved and wavy lines and shapes.
- Continue practice using scissors with fancy edges and making collages and pictures

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call:

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