

## Scissor skills

Using scissors is a complex activity requiring the integration of postural, fine motor, perceptual and organisational skills. It also requires effective motor planning and bimanual skills.

### Skills required

#### Good sitting position:

Ensure the child is sitting with their chair tucked under the table, square to their work, in an upright position and with their bottom back. If the child appears unsteady, he or she can rest his elbows on the table to increase stability while cutting.



#### Holding the scissors:

A normal scissors grasp will require the child to place his thumb in the top handle and middle finger in the lower handle and use their palm to support and stabilise the scissors. An adapted scissors grasp may use more fingers in the lower handle or use the index finger outside this handle to assist with supporting the scissors.

#### Controlling the scissors:

To control the scissors effectively, the child needs to be able to isolate the thumb, index and middle fingers to move independently. They also need to be able to grasp and release in order to open and close the scissors blades accurately to follow the outlines. For some tasks, smooth long cuts are necessary, whereas cutting difficult angles will need shorter snips.

#### Holding and controlling the paper:

Controlling the paper is a crucial part of being able to cut accurately. There needs to be certain degree of tension when holding the paper, in order to maintain a good alignment between the scissors and the page. The scissors should be positioned at a right angle from the paper, to ensure accurate and smooth cutting lines.

#### Cutting:

This requires the ability to co-ordinate bilateral arm movements, integrate visual perception and eye hand co-ordination; eg cutting and turning the paper simultaneously, distinguishing the line to be cut from its background and to orientate the direction of the cut.

#### Developmental sequence of scissors skills:

1. Opening and closing of scissors
2. Snipping a piece of paper
3. Cutting a straight line
4. Cutting curved lines
5. Cutting out bold geometric shapes
6. Cutting out irregular shapes with a thin outline



#### Developing control of scissors:

- Use a variety of textures and thickness of materials for cutting practice, eg aluminium foil, wax paper, thick brown paper bags, sugar paper, cards, fabric, string, etc.

- Start with cutting thinner card paper as this may be easier to cut than normal paper (ie cereal boxes).
- Make collages, as this gives an opportunity for cutting pieces of various materials less accurately.
- For children who find grasping paper difficult, use a large clip (bulldog clip) and attach it to the paper, to give them something easier to hold.
- For children who are left handed, use left handed scissors and teach them to cut out shapes in a clockwise direction.
- For children with movement difficulties, consider scissors mounted on a block (available from PETA).
- For children who have limited or no functional use of one hand, use a paper clamp to hold paper in place.

### Holding and manipulating scissors

- There may be some children who have not yet developed the ability to keep the last two fingers tucked in the palm, while the others open and close the blades. For these children, try scissors that have a larger loop and encourage them to place all the fingers in the lower handle, to increase control of movements (available from PETA).
- Teach the child that the slower the blade closes and opens, the more control he or she will have over his cutting.
- Check that the child has the blade fully open before trying to move the scissors forward.
- When cutting difficult angles, teach the child to use short snips for more accuracy.
- With straight angles, you can ask the child to stop cutting before moving the page to accommodate to the new direction.
- Choose types of scissors that have a larger finger loops or rubber loops (available from PETA or the Early Learning Centre).
- There are many types of scissors on the market (ie right handed, left handed, looped double handles, spring-loaded, non-loop, etc.), so have a range for assessment and observe the child using them throughout the day, to see if they make a difference. It is essential to gather the views of the child as well, and whether he is comfortable and motivated to use a different pair of scissors will ensure compliance.



### Control of the paper

- Demonstrate to the child how to separate their fingers underneath the paper to support it.
- For children who crush the paper, try cutting firmer paper or card. Also, draw their attention to what is happening and get them to practice holding paper at a right angle from the scissors.
- Cut along wide strips of paper/lines, then grade the activity to narrower lines. Start with smaller pieces of paper then increase the length of it.
- Introduce first simple lines and shapes to cut, before moving onto curved shapes; eg large squares, triangles or rectangles.
- Cut in short snips following straight lines, then increase the length.

## Scissors checklist for teachers

Have you checked?	√
Thumbs on top	
Control of paper	
Direction of cutting	
Staying on the line	
Opening/closing of the scissors slowly	
Turning the paper, not scissors	
Fingers in the correct loops	