

## SCISSOR SKILLS

Using scissors is a complex activity requiring the integration of postural, motor, perceptual and organisational skills.

### Skills Needed ✂ ✂ ✂

- **Sitting, Balance and Posture**  
Feet flat, bottom back and thighs parallel to the floor.  
Furniture should be the correct height for the child.
- **Stable Shoulders**  
Allow the accurate placement and isolation of the hands to use tools.
- **Arm and Wrist Control**  
To turn the forearms to move the scissors and paper.
- **Fine Motor Skills**  
To hold scissors and isolate the thumb, index and middle fingers, and to move them independently and to grasp and release to open/close the scissors and to co-ordinate hand and eye.
- **Visual Perception**  
To distinguish the line to be cut from its background and to orientate the direction of the cut.
- **Visual Motor Integration**  
The ability to co-ordinate (integrate) visual perception and hand-eye co-ordination.
- **Bilateral Integration**  
Two sided co-ordination needed to do different actions with each arm e.g. cutting and turning the paper simultaneously.

### Equipment Needed ✂ ✂ ✂

1. Correct height furniture.
2. Correct scissors – right/left/adapted.

**Pre-requisite skills needed for cutting** ✂ ✂ ✂

The activities listed below aim to develop the pre-requisite skills needed for cutting:

- Crawling activities through a tunnel or home made obstacle course.
- Balloon play: Using a rolled up paper or tube from inside silver foil in each hand, try to pick up and carry a balloon.
- Balloon Volleyball: Hit a balloon or light beach ball with your hands and see how long you can keep it up in the air.
- Walking on hands, pretending to be different animals e.g. bear, lion, frog, rabbit.
- Ladders, ropes and other outdoor climbing equipment in playgrounds.
- Buzz Wire.
- Wing-up toys.
- Games that involve turning knobs and handles e.g. Pop-Up Pirates, Downfall, Etch-A-Sketch.
- Clapping Games: Alternate so that the child and then the adult claps with palms up then palms down.
- Finger or glove puppets.
- Hand and finger rhymes e.g. Incey Wincey Spider, Two Little Dickey Birds etc.
- Arm Wrestles: Sit opposite the child with elbows on the table. Hold hands and encourage the child to push against the resistance.
- Tearing and scrunching paper for paper Mache.
- Using a single or double hole punch to make holes for lacing activities.
- Squeezing empty plastic bottles to make bubbles in water or to blow feathers or ping-pong balls across a table.
- Stringing beads.
- Lacing boards or cards.
- Pegboards.
- Use tweezers, barbeque or sugar tongs to pick up different sized objects and put them in a container as quickly as possible.
- Construction games e.g. Lego, Stickle Bricks, Meccano.

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- Playdough/Plasticine/Clay: Encourage the child to pull pieces apart, roll with rolling pin, squeeze and pinch. Making biscuits or cookies could also achieve the same goals.
- Musical instruments: Trumpets, castanets, finger cymbals.
- Card games e.g. Snap and Pairs.
- Mazes.
- Dot-to-Dots.
- Jigsaws.

### How to Hold Conventional Scissors ✂ ✂ ✂

Thumb on top 'thumbs-up' with thumb and middle finger through the loops and the index finger in front of the bottom loop to provide support and help direction of the scissors.

### Warm Up Activity for Scissor Skills ✂ ✂ ✂

It is suggested that the child completes the following exercises (to stimulate sensation and finger mobility) and then one Pre-cutting Activity (to promote integration of the two hands) before beginning to cut.

#### **Exercises**

- Rub hand together vigorously for a slow count of three.
- Clench and unclench the hands five times.
- Shake the hands for a slow count of three.

### GENERAL ADVICE FOR SCISSOR SKILL ACTIVITIES ✂ ✂

- Identify current skill level and areas of difficulty.
- Link the activity with the child's interests and make it fun.
- Approach the tasks in a sequential order.
- Ensure the child has mastered each stage before moving on.
- Progress from stiff paper e.g. Thin card or sugar paper, to thinner papers. Mount standard paper projects onto sugar paper. Reduce the size of the project to be cut by removing the excess.
- Provide opportunities to practice staying on lines by getting the child to cut between string, dried PVA glue lines and craft sticks. This gives the child a physical and visual prompt to guide the scissors.

## Strategies for Coping with Cutting Difficulties ✂ ✂ ✂

### ***Difficulty starting off***

Acquire an old “mouse mat” or thick place mat and put this on the table in front of the child. Put the paper on the mat so that it extends over the front of the mat. Ask the child to gently place their non-dominant hand on the paper where it is resting on the mat. The child should now slide the lower blade of the scissors into the gap between the table and the paper and make a cut. Once the first cut had been made the child can pick up the paper and continue cutting.

### ***Child turns the cutting hand rather than the paper***

- Verbally remind the child to always cut away from the body.
- Physically prompt the child to keep the elbow of the non-dominant arm in to the side.
- Practise cutting around a corner: the child should stop cutting at the end of the first line, turn the paper with the non-dominant hand and continue to cut along the second line, keeping the scissors pointing away from the body.

### ***Child has difficulty cutting along a line***

- Encourage the child to keep looking at the blades of the scissors by putting a blob of paint or a sticker on the end.
- Make a series of holes along the line to be cut, so that the child can feel when he/she is cutting accurately.
- Copy the shape to be cut onto a black background.
- Enlarge the shape outline.

### ***Child has difficulty holding the paper***

- Copy the shape onto stiff paper or card.

### ***Child has difficulty managing ordinary scissors***

Different types of scissors are available. Make sure that a child who is left hand dominant uses left handed scissors. Children who have difficulty managing the open/close hand movement may find Stirex scissors helpful: these are available from Taskmaster and NES Arnold and have a plastic loop attached to the ends of the scissors (rather than finger holes) so that they spring open with no

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effort. Scissors that cut interesting patterns are often more motivating to children than ordinary blades.

### ***If frustration really set in...***

- Provide the child with pre-cut shapes to stick and arrange so that he/she successfully completes a task. Practise the skills needed to manipulate scissors at another time.

### **Working with Left Handers** ✂ ✂ ✂

Provide the child with left handed scissors for all cutting activities. These should be clearly marked and identifiable for left handed uses.

### **Suppliers:**

PETA (U.K.) LTD  
Mark's Hall Lane,  
Margaret Roding,  
Dunmow,  
Essez  
CM6 1QT  
[www.peta-uk.com](http://www.peta-uk.com)

Anything left handed:  
ASterling House,  
18, Avenue Road, Belmont,  
Surrey  
SM2 6JD  
Tel: 020 8770 3722  
[www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk](http://www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk)

### **Reference:**

Developing Scissor Skills: A guide for Parents and Teachers.  
Revised Edition.

Sue Mahoney and Alison Markwell.  
PETA (U.K.) LTD  
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