

Cutting up your Food

DESCRIPTION

Many children find it difficult to use cutlery during meal times to cut up food. Difficulties with posture, core strength, bilateral skills and hand strength all impact on developing the skills required to feed ourselves using cutlery independently.

The following information outlines strategies and adapted strategies to help with this.

HELPFUL HINTS

- At mealtimes, do not expect the child to practise more than two or three cuts.
- Encourage them to slow down and think about each stage of cutting separately (e.g., stab with the fork and then cut with the knife)
- If the child will accept physical help, stand behind them and help the hand with the fork in it to stay still whilst the knife moves back and forth across the food. Expect untidy cutting and some tearing of the food to continue initially.
- Children can find it difficult to monitor the appropriate amount of force to use when cutting. When applying too much force, it may be difficult to cut and press at the same time. The combination of balancing movement and pressure can be difficult. To help, experiment with



different food textures ranging from very hard to soft. Talk about different textures of food and how difficult it is to cut and how hard you need to press. This will increase awareness and hopefully encourage how to exert appropriate pressure and movement relevant to the food.

- To increase the pressure being used, encourage placing the first finger on top of the cutlery, rather than wrapping the whole hand around the handle.
- When cutting food, we adjust the knife with our hands several times. Children tend to hold the knife very tightly and do not adjust it. Encourage movement of the knife with their hand. This will encourage better control and the ability to monitor grip.
- When adults demonstrate cutting, a child will often copy trying to cut in the same direction. We cut food in a diagonal stroke – encourage and emphasise this.



ACTIVITY IDEAS

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Hand strengthening activities:

- Play Dough/Theraputty: pinch it with the thumb and index and middle finger. Hide small objects in the play dough and ask your child to find them.
- Spray Gun: Spray at targets or help with the cleaning!
- Wringing out wet cloths using 2 hands or sponges while in the bath.
- Practise touching the pads of each finger to the thumb of the same hand.

Bilateral Activities:

- Initially, encourage use of hands together in simple movements requiring the same movement pattern in each hand e.g. catching, throwing (2 hands).
- The use of 2 hands together in co-operation, where hands are doing different movements e.g. holding paper and cutting with scissors, holding ball and hitting with racket or holding lace and threading beads.

Core strength and posture:

- Pretending to be “superman or superwoman”! Lift upper body, arms and legs off the ground whilst lying on stomach. As a rule: 4-6 year olds aim to hold for 10 – 20 seconds. 7+ years aim to hold for 20 – 60 seconds.
- ‘Curl into a ball’ Begin by lying on your back. Bring your knees to your chest (you may use your hands to hold your knees in place), now raise your head away from the ground and hold this position for 10 seconds.

EQUIPMENT

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- **Dycem Mat** – mat that can be placed on table or high chair to stop bowl/plate/cup from sliding across surface.
- **Stickers** – Place coloured dots on the top of cutlery to indicate where child should place first finger on cutlery.
- **Caring Cutlery** – specialist cutlery that can be used by children. Shallow groove on each handle prompts child to place first finger on top of cutlery.

