

A16 - use of scissors

Fine motor skills involve the coordination of small muscle movements that occur in fingers, usually in coordination with the eyes. Regarding motor skills of hands and fingers, the term **dexterity** is commonly used in reference to the skill and grace of the physical movement during the manual use of the hands.

The ability to use visual skills with graded action of the upper limbs are separate skills that develop together in a more coordinated manner as the child participates in daily living and play activities.

Most children show an interest in cutting at an early age.

Children progress from snipping randomly, to cutting along a line, to cutting along a curve, to cutting out simple shapes, and then progress to more complex and precise cutting activities.

Cutting can be a complex and difficult skill to learn, because both arms and hands have to move in different directions, movements have to be properly graded and children need to plan where they have to cut next.

The right techniques and instructions should be used from the very early stages of learning how to cut. Initially, they can practice picking items up such as cotton balls with tongs.

Aim: to help with developing use of tools and bilateral hand coordination.

Additional adult support is likely to be required to help:

- with increasing tolerance and acceptance of unfamiliar or new activities for sensory skill development,
- to facilitate **hand skills** by using **hand over hand techniques** to teach the coordinated use of hands in functional grasps
- with greater resistive force and control with tool use.

Additional practice will repeatedly be needed (two to three times a week) to facilitate completion of each task and consolidate learning new strategies or techniques.

Grade the amount of help you provide, to reduce the physical or verbal assistance as skills progress.

Activities

Introduce the activities at a graded level, within the child's individual level of tolerance and achievement.

Materials

start off with thicker paper or card, as it is generally easier to control.

Progress to paper and other things like string, straws or try snipping rolls of theraputty once the child is able to correctly hold the scissors and material.

The size of the material should not be too big when starting off - thin strips (2-3cm) to start with, and increase the size and shape as ability improves.

Scissors

There are a lot of scissors available commercially these days.

The size of the scissors should be determined by the size of the hand or fingers using them. It may be better to get scissors with a wider handle as this will make it easier initially to handle and provide greater strength and control whilst cutting.

Ensure that all scissors have a blunt tip.

Instructions

children can learn quickly when given short simple instructions and guidance. It is important to teach children how to hold the paper and the scissors from the very start. The best way to hold scissors is with a thumb in the top loop and the best way to hold the paper is with a thumb on top.

Simple instructions like 'thumbs on top...where do your thumbs go...that's right, they go on top' will help children to learn where their hands should be.

When cutting, use short simple instructions such as 'snip, snip, snip...what do you do when you get to the corner? Stop, and then turn the paper around! That's right...snip, snip, stop...turn the paper round!'

- First encourage single snips along short lines.
- You can prepare shapes and a child can snip them and glue onto a picture
- If a child is struggling to stay within a ½" line, draw a thicker line.
- Alternatively stick a piece of string along either edge of a cutting line so that a child can feel when they are about to cut over the edge of a line. The bump of the string guides the movement of the scissors forward and encourages awareness of side to side movement.
- Once a child is able to do this, introduce longer, thinner, straight lines.
- Punch holes in a line and encourage the child to cut from one to another.
- Put a sticker at the end as an incentive!
- Once a child is able to cut along straight lines, introduce simple shapes i.e. square, rectangle. Make the lines quite thick to start off with so the child has the reward of seeing themselves stay on the line.
- Make the lines thinner as they gain better control.
- You can also cut thick pieces of cardboard out to make a template for cutting a line or square. The cardboard guides the scissors.
- If a child has difficulty knowing when to change a direction, mark corners of the shapes by either punching holes at these points using a hole punch or by using different colours or by sticking something textured on to draw his/her attention to these points

Lightweight easy grip scissors are ideal for people with decreased hand strength

Mounted table top scissors are fitted with a large T-shaped handle that provides the user with a better grip and increases leverage.

From www.peta-uk.com who also sell a book or cards on 'Developing Scissor Skills - A Guide for Parents & Teachers'

Frequency of use: Complete 10-15 minutes sessions every day to acquire set targets.

Monitor the child's level of response (interest and motivation) in the task and adjust accordingly (to simplify or increase) to obtain the 'just right fit' and grade challenges (less challenging to more challenging).