

SCISSOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL HANDOUT

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What are scissor skills?

Scissor skills is the ability to cut, which is an important developmental skill for children.

When using scissors, there are several skills that are necessary, particularly for children who are still developing their motor skills. Here are the skills that are required to effectively use scissors:

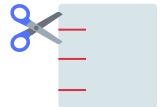
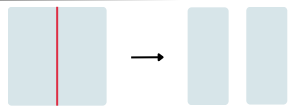
- **Postural Stability:** Hold your body and shoulders stable to allow your hands to be free to cut items, such as paper.
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Isolate, open, and close your fingers.
- **Hand Strength:** Hand muscles are strong enough to hold the scissors and move along the paper when cutting.
- **Hand Coordination/Dexterity:** Smoothly open and close the scissor blades when cutting.
- **Eye-Hand Coordination:** The eyes must be able to follow and direct your hands where to move when cutting.
- **Sensory Processing:** The brain communicates the location of your finger and hand joints in space to know where to move them as you are cutting.
- **Bilateral Coordination:** One hand must use the scissors, while the other hand holds the paper when cutting.

Mastery of scissor skills is important for children's learning and play activities. Scissor skills can be developed through practice.

When do children use scissors safely?

Scissor skills can be developed through consistent practice, which is why it's important to start early. Even as early as 1 year and 6 months old, children can begin learning how to use scissors safely. It's understandable that parents may feel hesitant about giving their child a pair of scissors, but with the right tools, it can be a safe and educational experience. Plastic safety scissors with blunt tips are a great option to introduce children to scissor skills under adult supervision. Encouraging young ones to practice by cutting play dough can help them develop the necessary motor skills.

Progression with Scissor Skills Development

1.5 years old	• Child may use both hands to open and shut scissors.	
2 years old	• Child may snip paper. • Child may hold scissors with 1 hand while holding the paper with the other hand when cutting. Parents may help the child hold the paper.	
2.5 years old	• Cut 1 piece paper into 2 pieces.	
3-3.5 years old	• Cut a 6 inch straight line.	
3.5-4 years old	• Cut out circle. • Child begins to move or turn paper while cutting.	
4-5 years old	• Cut out square.	
6-7 years old	• Cut complex shapes (examples: star, heart).	

How do I teach my child scissor skills?

Begin with pre-scissor skills activities to get my child's little hands ready for cutting tasks. Examples of pre-scissor skills activities are:

- Tear paper into small size pieces
- Scrunch/squeeze tissue paper into small balls
- Play with play dough or modeling clay
- Use clothes pins pick up cotton balls or pom poms
- Tug a war
- Animal walks



Be sure to teach your child how to carry scissors to ensure safety, but how?

- When not using the scissors and needing to transfer/walk with them, the child should learn to hold the scissors pointing inwards in their hands. Always teach the child to walk when holding the scissors.
- When not using the scissors and sitting in their seat, the child should keep the scissors on the table and not play with them.



How do I teach my child to hold scissors?

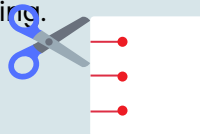
- Thumb in one loop and the index and middle fingers in the other loop.
- Thumb is always facing up.
- Ring and pinky fingers are typically curled into the palm.

**Teaching a child how to hold scissors may vary based on the type of scissors you introduce to them or want them to use. The recommendation above is for regular child-size scissors.*



Where do I begin with teaching my child to cut with scissors?

- Snipping paper. Teaching the child to snip paper is a task that will help them feel successful.
- To prepare the paper and line for the child to snip, the cutting line should be dark and thickened. Draw a thick dot or a picture at the end of the line, so the child is aware they need to snip a line from the bottom of the paper to the dot or picture. These strategies will provide the child with extra visual cues to help them see what they need to cut and when to stop cutting.



What does my child cut after they learn to snip?

- When the child has mastered snipping, they can progress to cutting a straight line, curved line, simple shapes, and complex shapes.

Hand Dominance

- Majority of children show a dominant hand preference by approximately 3 years old and most by 5 years old when in school. However, some children establish their hand dominance as late as 8 years old. Their dominant hand preference is important to help children develop scissor skills, strengthen their hands, and build endurance when cutting.
- It is important that you do **not** choose the dominant hand for your child based on what you think or see which hand the child uses more or is more skillful with.

For more information or concerns about your child's scissor skills development, please consult your child's occupational therapist or contact your pediatrician. You may also refer to www.aota.org for additional information.

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