

## Cutting skills in Kindergarten and Pre-Primary

Cutting with scissors is fun for many children. When a child starts to show an interest in learning to cut with scissors, (usually around 2 ½ yrs -3yrs), it is possible that the developmental progression of skills needed for scissor use has already begun. The steps of scissor skill development usually happen through play and exposure, but for some children they do need to be carefully supported early on to master cutting. All children in kindergarten should be taught to use scissors correctly as it not only helps their skill for this task, it helps strengthen fine motor skills and hand movements that are used throughout the lifespan.

Cutting involves a very predictable progression of skill development so hence it can be easily taught and supported by parents at home and teachers. Most children will move through the stages with increasing control given ample opportunity to practice and repeat the task. We always try to follow the sequence as it works from basic hand skills to more advanced. If a child has weak hand muscles, tremor, spasticity, sensory disturbances, visual difficulty, co-ordination problems or attentional difficulty they will need support. The ability to cut with scissors requires:

1. **Motor control** – to hold and manipulate the scissors and the paper.
2. **Motor planning**- to work out how to cut.
3. **Eye Hand control**- to work out where to cut.

When children start to become interested in scissors at 2 ½ - 3 years they often lack the coordination to use one hand to cut successfully so they activate two hands. Usually by 3 – 3½ years they show more agility and are able to cut a piece of paper in two. By 4 years they can cut accurately on a line and by the time they reach year 1 they can cut out shapes and small pictures with control. So how does this happen and why do some children get the whole idea effortlessly and yet others struggle to replicate the techniques modelled to them? One thing is definite, **all children** have a natural desire to operate these rather intriguing tools, its just the accuracy and skill level that is variable.

### **Pre-requisites for scissor skills.**

Before a child can master cutting their hands need to be able to “do several things.” It is worth checking that your child can do these so they have success in learning to cut and can get the right plan easily.

Scissor skills are one of those tasks where practice makes progress!

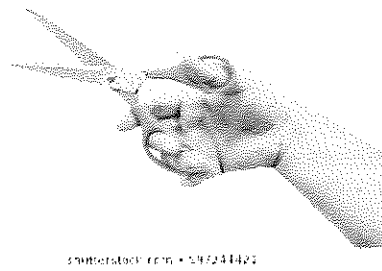
- Child is able to open and close their hand by themselves.
- Child can make a fist and wiggle their thumbs
- Can open and close hand on a verbal cue for example the open shut them song. Can the child follow?
- The child can use a dominator /assistor pattern. That is, one hand is the doing or “bossy” hand and the other is the stabilising hand or the “helper” hand. For example, can they tear paper not pull paper.?
- Can the child maintain visual regard/ attention to what they are doing/ That is they watch carefully when they are doing a tricky activity such as a fine pegboard or stacking tiny blocks?
- Child shows an interest when the adult/ siblings use scissors and wants to have a go.

*If you are concerned about safety with young child and scissors try using plastic playdoh scissors to cut playdoh as a start.*

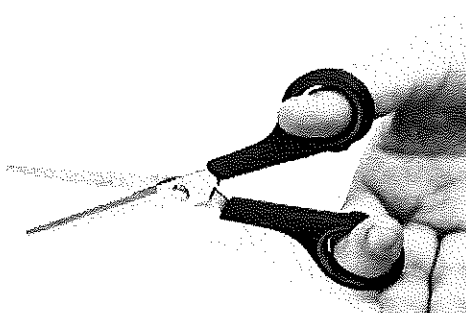


Scissor skills are about **tool use** and in order for anyone to use tools well, they need to be shown how to hold them and how to carry them. The tools also need to be the best they can be. Luckily scissors are very cheap. Holding scissors correctly is vital so they need to have one small loop for the thumb and a larger loop for **two fingers** to go in. Some people like to put the index and middle finger in the larger loop and others prefer the middle and ring finger in with the index finger as a guide. Both are correct.

### Correct



### Incorrect



## Scissor Considerations – choosing scissors

Many children automatically hold the paper they are about to cut with all their fingers on the top. This can lead to children having difficulty maintaining good control in their scissor hand, as young children have many associated overflow movements. If the helper hand has the thumb up, then the cutting hand will also have the thumb up. So, we teach the thumbs up rule.

**It is always a rule that the thumbs are up when we cut!!**

- Left handers *need* left -handed scissors.
- Always have scissors that have one small loop and one larger loop. Never give scissors with two equal size loops to children.
- Every class should have a variety of scissors and tools for the children to use.
- Once scissors are stiff or blunt throw them out.
- Have some spring- loaded scissors for children who are struggling or just starting out. It really helps children who have difficulty with coordinating the open shut aspect of cutting. It's a great support to learn.
- It doesn't matter how long you work on snipping for if you give a visual target.
- Prekindy scissors have safety ends to reduce the chance of cutting self.
- Kindy scissors have rounded blades on the tip of the blades.
- Preprimary scissors and above have pointed tips for more accurate precise cutting.

## Steps of scissor skills.

- Attempts to open and shut scissors with scissors held in both hands. Cutting unsuccessful. ( 2 ½ years)
- Able to hold scissors in one hand and open and close the scissors.
- Snips paper in two when paper is held by an adult (2 ½ - 3 yrs)
- Snips paper held by themselves.
- Cuts a 10cm paper in two using consecutive open shut pattern. ( 3 – 3 1/2 yrs)
- Snips and fringes with one snip attempting to stay on a marked line. ( 3- 3 1/2 yrs).
- Cuts along a straight line staying within 1.7cm of the line.(4 yrs)
- Cuts along a curved line staying within 1 cm of the line (4-5 yrs)
- Cuts out a 8cm triangle drawn in the middle of 15 cm piece of paper (5 years).
- Cuts out a small picture e.g. of a rabbit staying within the lines approximately 1.7 cm ( 5 – 6 years).

There is a gradual progression from a complete open shut of the whole scissor blade when the child first starts cutting to a far more precise only partial closure of the scissor blades as the child develops control. We call these

\* chomps when the whole blade closes as the whole hand shuts, and  
\* nibbles as the blade only partially shuts. Children who tend to chomp very quickly with their scissors need to be taught to take little nibble bites. Hint we use chomps when we close the scissor blades completely at the beginning of a cut and nibbles when we close only part of the blade and when we get close to the stop end point.

Of course, it goes without saying that learning to cut requires hand dominance and one lead hand doing the cutting. Children who have delayed laterality, mixed hand use or late to develop dominance in kindy would be best to see an Occupational Therapist

## **Grading**

When we cut, we can grade our movements to match the task. That is when the paper is thick, we can recruit more muscle power, and when the paper is slippery, like foil or baking paper, we can use a lighter pressure and less force. We register the sensory feeling of the paper and then make adjustments to our power level as a result. This ends with success and the task completed. Children don't inherently have this grading and they need to practise and play around with many different things to cut in order to develop it and learn to grade their movements.

Generally, when children first start cutting, they find it easier with slightly thicker paper that tends to support itself and not slide. The thickness of old birthday cards is ideal. If the paper is too thick ( like cardboard) it offers too much resistance and is difficult to learn on. The same if the paper is too thin or shiny like glossy papers, they tend to slide around and is too tricky for the child to master the skill and in particular manage the holding of the paper.

Paper choice initially should be firm and easy to use and then once the cutting action is established then try to introduce a variety of materials and paper choices including non-paper choices to fully develop their skill.

Non paper items include straws, ribbons, curling ribbon, grass, leaves, herbs, flowers, playdoh or even old dolls hair.

## **Control, accuracy and speed**

Like most activities, when you start learning to use scissors you will not be as competent as you become. Once you have established the correct grasp then work and focus on the control. This means lining your scissors up on a line and working to develop the smooth full close cut and the small nibbles. After the control is underway then focus on the accuracy and finally on the speed. If you focus on the speed before the accuracy the child will not develop the grading as well.

## Control, accuracy and speed

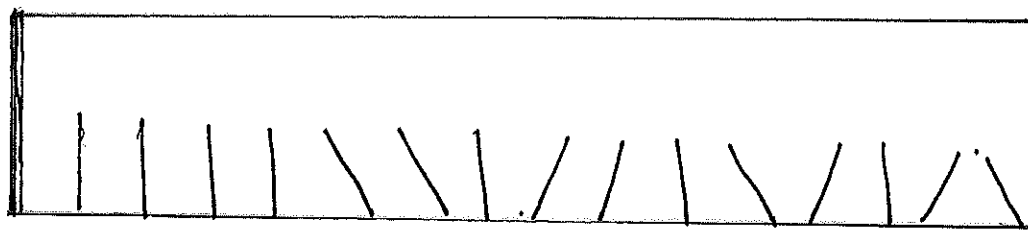
Cutting is a rhythmical coordinated movement and for some it can be quite calming. When children are first learning to cut, singing or humming can help them to get the rhythm and action going. Even singing open shut them, open shut them give a little snip ... can work wonders.

You can work on the control and accuracy at the same time as they are closely aligned. When the child is fairly accurate at straight line cutting, we can progress to how to cut on an angle. When the blades can angle slightly to the left or right the cutter is able to turn the corners and stay on the line at the same time.

One of the best ways to do this is to work on a slight angle of the blade. Most right handers will slightly angle their blades to the right and most left handers to the left.

The angle is done by a simple wrist movement and is not done by moving the paper or their stabilising hand. An effective way to teach this is by progressing a straight line cut and introducing slight angles where the child needs to line up the scissor blade on the line.

E.G.



***This teaches the accuracy and control at the same time.***

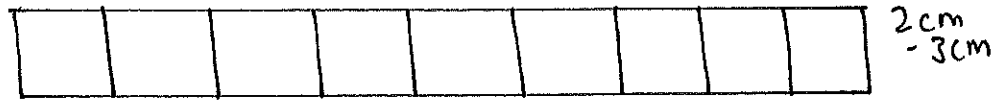
In middle primary a child will generally have all the skill progression and precision they need and are basically on par with the ability of an adult.

### Steps to teaching cutting:

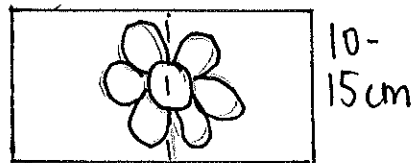
1. Tearing paper and using tongs to help consolidate the open close mechanism of the hand.
2. Snipping randomly or "scribbling" with scissors.
3. Snipping a long thin piece of paper so each cut snips a bit off to make it shorter. You can also try this with long strands of spaghetti.



4. Snipping along a strip of paper but with a line drawn on it to focus the child and start the idea of lining scissor blade to a line.



5. Cutting a piece of paper in half using consecutive cuts along a 10-15 cm length.



6. Continuous straight line cutting to a stop point to make grass or the sea. The child to cut on an A5 size and stop at a specific point. This is excellent for attention and impulse control.



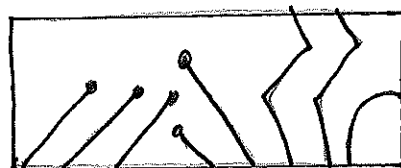
7. Turning corners and cutting a square



8. Cutting on a curved line

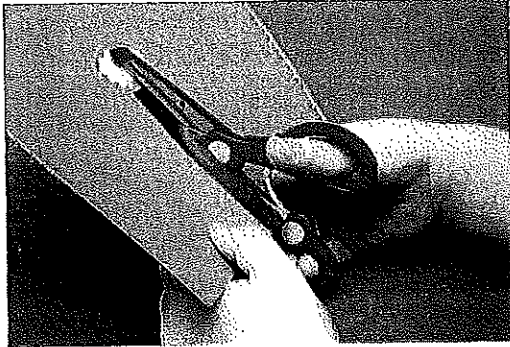


9. Cutting on angles to work on direction of scissor blades.

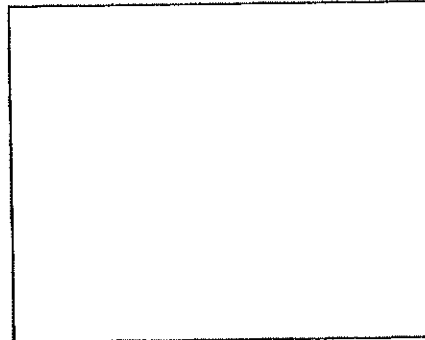




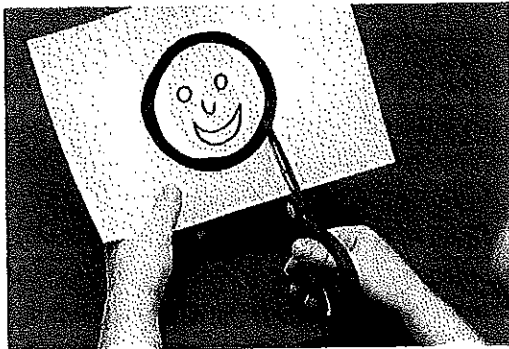
## Tips for Cutting



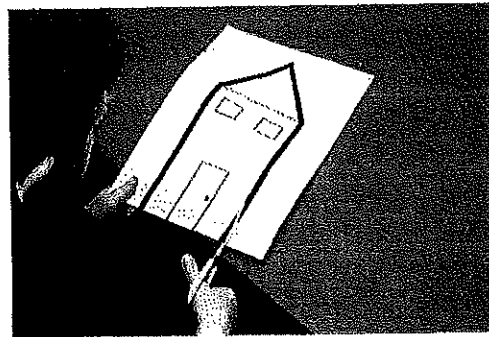
Use spring scissors initially



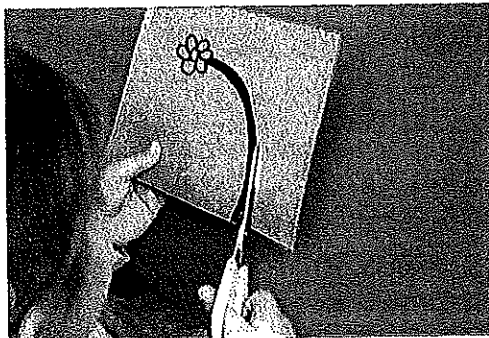
Cut without spring when able to open and shut scissors



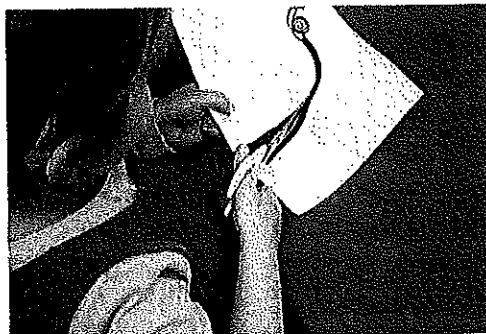
Keep thumbs on top  
(scissors and paper)



Cut along thick lines for success



Begin by cutting card



Later progress to cutting paper