



## Supporting Scissor Skills at Home

**Teaching your child how to use scissors correctly can be a daunting task!**

**However, showing your child how to appropriately use scissors and giving them supervised practice will help them to develop not only good fine motor and visual motor skills but an appreciation for how to use tools appropriately.**

Cutting involves a lot more than just picking up a pair of scissors and learning how to hold them or open and close them...

Your child needs to be able to sit up appropriately and have good balance and stability. Slouching while cutting will not work. And when a child feels unbalanced, it will make holding the scissors very difficult. They also need stable shoulders with wrist and finger control, including being able to isolate the thumb and the fingers in order to grasp and release the scissors.

Bilateral coordination, or using both sides of the body together is crucial to cutting. Using both hands together means the dominate hand opens and closes the scissors while the non-dominate hand or “helping hand” hold the paper and rotates it as needed.

This guide will help you to take your child right back to basics so that you can help them to master each step that they will need to be able to cut successfully.



## Mastering The Grasp-Release Motion

The first stage of learning how to use scissors is to master the grasp-release motion to **open and close** the scissors.

The fun activities below will help your child get the hang of this motion without using scissors!

### Using Spray Bottles

Let your child use a spray bottle to water the plants outside or for some bath-time fun. Squeezing and releasing the trigger helps your child get the hang of a **repetitive grasp-release motion** with the whole hand.

#### Ideas you could try at home...

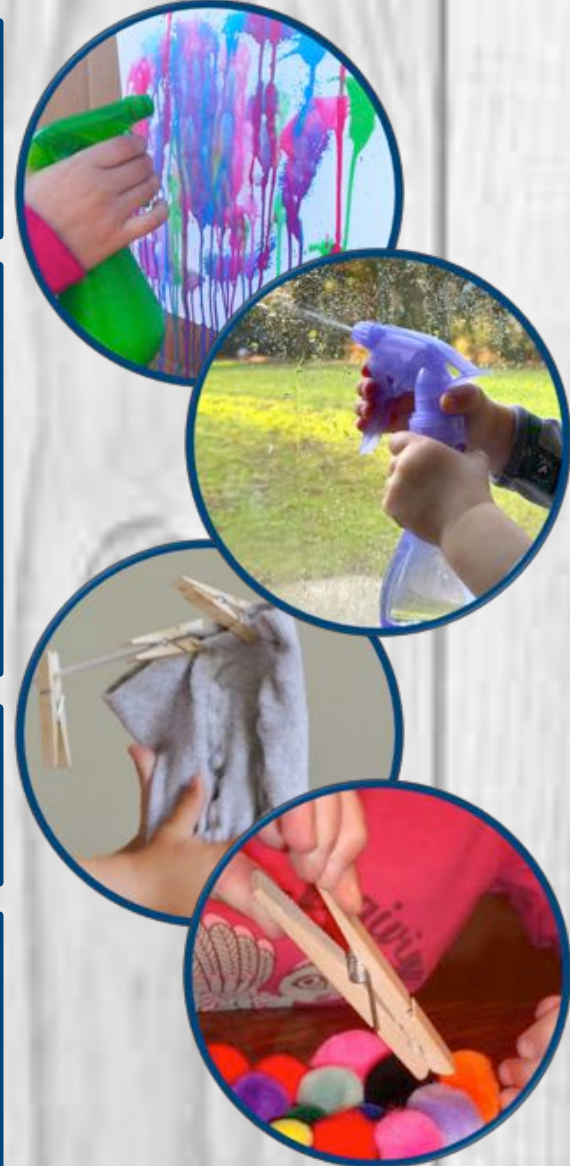
- Window washing
- Mirror washing
- Cleaning counter-tops/tables
- Cleaning bikes or other outdoor toys
- Spray plants to water them or to help clean their leaves
- Fill with liquid watercolor paints to make art
- Spray vinegar mixture on baking soda for art/science
- Spray the pavement outdoors in hot weather, or to wash off chalk used on pavement.
- Use in the bath or water table for water play - could add colours for water colour mixing.

### Clothes Pin Activities

Opening and closing a clothes pin (clothes peg) can help a child feel the **squeeze and release motion** that is needed for scissors.

#### Ideas you could try at home...

- Use a clothes pin to pick up bits of crumpled paper or pom-poms or other small objects and transfer them to a container.
- Let your child hang small items of clothing on a line strung at his or her level.
- Have your child place pegs around an empty egg carton to make a cage for some toy animals.



Once your child has got the hang of the grasp-release motion, you will be ready to teach them how to use scissors!

- Use age appropriate and **blunt-nosed scissors**, for your child's safety.
- Make sure your **left handed child** uses left handed scissors - this is very important!
- Make sure your child uses an **appropriate scissor grasp**.
- **Thumb** in one hole, and **middle finger** through the other.
- The **index finger** can rest on the outside of the scissors, or be in the same hole as the middle finger.



### Top Tip

A smiley face drawn on the thumbnail of your child's cutting hand serves as a reminder to keep the thumb facing upwards while he or she is cutting.

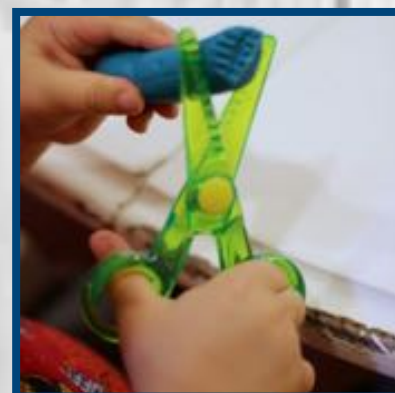
### Ideas you could try at home...

#### Cutting Play Dough

Roll dough into longer lines or "worms." Your child could help with this – it is a great fine motor activity in itself! Then demonstrate using scissors to cut off little chunks before letting your child have a turn.

#### Cutting Modelling Clay

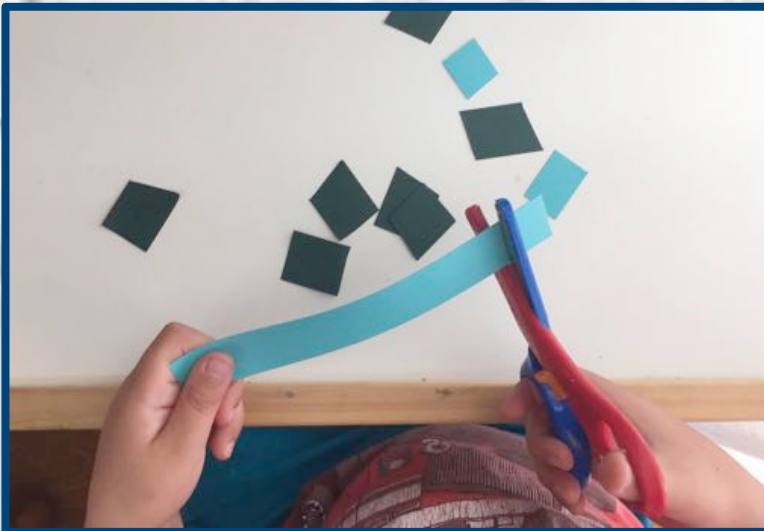
After trying play dough, move on to modelling clay. This is a little firmer and is great for little hands to work on strengthening those muscles.





### Snips Paper

Once your child has mastered opening and closing the scissors, they can move on to making small snips on the paper. They are not moving forward on the paper with scissors, just making snips.



### Ideas you could try at home...

Prepare **narrow strips** (1.5cm) of paper so your child can **snip across the width**. This is easy to do, as the scissors only need to open and close once to be successful.

Once your child has mastered the single snip across a narrow strip, prepare **slightly wider strips** (3-4cm across) that require two snips to cut across.

They could then use the snipped paper in a **collage**.



### Snips Paper Moving Forward

By the time a child hits age 3, they are able to make snips on the paper while moving the scissor forward across the paper (keep the paper size to about 15cm long).

## Learn to use scissors effectively and efficiently

Now that your child has mastered the grasp-release motion and can successfully make snips into paper, there are a few tips that can help your child learn to use scissors **effectively and efficiently**!

These skills should be practised **before** you help your child learn to cut out on lines!

Encourage your child to hold the paper off the table with the assistant hand (the hand not holding the scissors). Thumb on top and fingers underneath is the best position for the assistant hand.

Discourage your child from holding the paper down on the table.



Encourage your child to cut around shapes the correct way. Right-handers should cut to the right of the shape, and left-handers should cut to the left of the shape.

Cutting around shapes in the correct direction will help your child to get the blade of the scissors to stay on the line more effectively and should help your child to cut more smoothly.

Encourage your child to start cutting lines on the line furthest from the holding hand. This will encourage more efficient cutting as they will not need to keep picking up the cut-off piece in order to keep cutting!



## Mastering Scissor Cutting

Children master scissor cutting by starting on straight lines before progressing to simple shapes.

### Ideas you could try at home...

#### Cut Straight Lines

Start with **thick, straight lines** on slightly-thicker-than-normal-paper. Just keep on being creative with lines until your child masters it. By age 3 to 3.5, a child can move the scissors along a straight line that is around 15cm long. Their accuracy will still be a work in progress!

#### Cut Curved Lines

By age 4, a child is able to cut on a thick curved line. Again their accuracy will vary.

#### Cut Circle and Spiral Shapes

Also by age 4, once a child has mastered curved lines, they are able to take on circle shapes. Cutting out lots of circles and spirals will help your child to get the hang of **moving the paper with the assistant hand while cutting**.

It can be helpful to **sit behind** your child and **hand-over-hand help them** to get the feel of the smooth movement of turning the paper around.

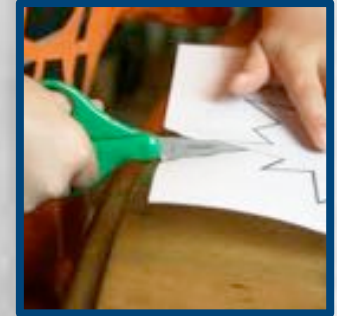
#### Progress To Simple Shapes

Once your child has got the hang of turning the paper while cutting, then progress to simple shapes such as squares. Your child needs to learn to gauge **when to "turn" the corners** with the scissors, and **how to keep the scissors in the corner** while turning. Cut lots and lots of shapes, **be creative** with them!

#### Cut Complex Shapes

Between the ages of 5-6, a child can begin to cut out more complex shapes such as figures.

*It's important to remember that all the recommended ages with each skill are the average age a child can master each skill. Some children may master them earlier, others later.*





Things for your child to remember...

Hold your scissors well.



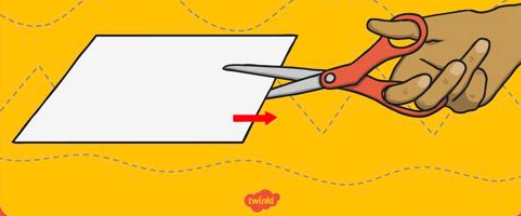
Keep your thumb up.



Keep the scissors moving,  
open and shut.



Move the paper,  
not the scissors.



Hold your paper tightly.



## Important Scissor Safety

Sit down to  
do your cutting.



Pass scissors handle  
first to your friends.



Hold the blade down  
when walking with scissors.



Always walk slowly when  
carrying scissors around.

