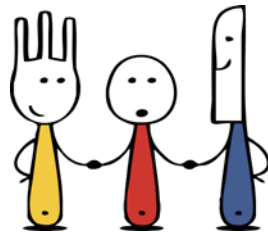


Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Cutlery Skills



It is important to encourage a child to use a knife with their fork when they are developmentally ready for this. Learning cutlery skills requires lots of practice.

Pre skills

- Use a fork to stab food, able to lift fork with food and place into mouth with minimal mess.
- Spread butter (soft) or jam on toast, then untoasted bread – encourage child to hold the bread with the other hand (if this is not possible, give assistance to stabilise the bread whilst your child spreads butter).
- As children develop, they learn how to move their fingers individually. Make sure your child can isolate their index fingers. This means that your child can move their index fingers one at a time.
- Complete any OT programme you may have been given, these are usually skills to strengthen hands or develop muscles.



Set up

- Ensure your child is sitting well at the table in a chair that fits them. Remember the **90, 90, 90 rule**- 90° at the hip, 90° at the knees, 90° at the ankles.
- Give support by using footrest, cushions behind them. If you are unsure of your child's positioning or seating needs, please discuss with your occupational therapist.
- Seating options for young children, who don't have postural needs but are just too small for the kitchen table are the Ikea junior chairs- for seating your child at an elevated height.
- Lay the table with the knife at the dominant side and the fork on the non-dominant side.
- Use cutlery that is suitable for your child's hands in size and weight. Specialised cutlery is available, e.g. *Junior caring cutlery* where fingers are encouraged to point on the cutlery into grooves. Speak to your Occupational Therapist for advice.

90 ° hip, 90 ° knees, 90 ° ankles



Ikea Junior Dining Chair
Available on www.ikea.com



Junior Caring Cutlery
Available on Amazon.co.uk

Learning to use a spoon:

- Children should be given opportunities to play with a spoon during feeding. Allow children to practice using spoon during play time e.g. with sand, scooping dried food like pasta and raisins into pots and pans. Using a spoon can also be introduced by feeding teddies and dolls.

- When learning, children should use bowls with high sides to assist with loading the spoon.
- Encourage your child to hold the bowl with the non-feeding hand.
- Using hand over hand techniques (guiding your child's hand to mouth with the spoon) encourages smooth movements. Model how to use to your child.

Learning to use a fork:

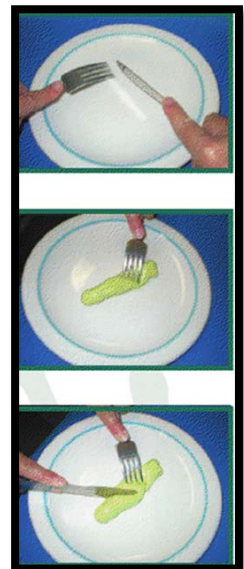
- Initially use a plastic bowl, and then progress to using a plate. The bowl is useful to assist children to load food onto fork using the sides.
- When the child is learning to use a fork, use foods that are easier to hold on the fork e.g. chicken and cooked carrots and avoid foods that will fall apart easily e.g. mashed potato and hamburgers.

Learning to use a knife:

- During play give opportunities e.g. Practice chopping and cutting skills using playdough, putty, or slime.
- Introduce knife for spreading butter and jam and when this is mastered progress to slicing.
- Initially begin with soft foods e.g. bananas, mushrooms or pancakes that are easier to cut and gradually introduce a sawing action to cut soft meats e.g. chicken. Encourage children to practice this by allowing them help with food preparations.

Using Knife and Fork Together

- Using a knife and fork together is a complex task; demonstrate using the fork to hold the food down and the knife to saw food separately.
- Encourage the child to hold knife and fork in correct hands with index finger pointing out towards the front of the utensil (shown in pictures) 'pointer fingers'.
- Children often hold the knife very tightly and do not adjust it at first, encourage movement of the knife within the hand as this will assist with control and ability to monitor grip.
- **Stab with the fork and keep it still.** It is ok for the fork to be held vertical initially to stabilise the food, but once your child has the concept of cutting, encourage them to hold the fork correctly too. The correct hold is to hold the fork pointing down with the index finger extended along the back.
- **Cut by sawing the food back and forth.** Start off with soft easily cut food, e.g. boiled potatoes. Then progress to more tough foods.
- It is ok that your child initially changes the fork into the dominant hand to place food in mouth.
- **Teach one thing at a time!!** See YouTube Online Link of Learning to Use Knife & Fork <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cau5cevLg2U>



Using Knife & Fork Together using 'Pointer Fingers'