



Developing Cutlery Skills

Cutlery skills can take time to develop for lots of children, it's a complex skill which requires you to use both your hands together but with each hand doing something different! Each item of cutlery also has a different job to do and so has to be used in a slightly different way; it's no wonder that children can find this a tricky skill to master. Below are some top tips to help your child succeed.

Getting prepared

- Reduce any distractions at the table, switch off the TV.
- Make sure the chair and table are at a good height for your child. Ensure their elbows are able to rest comfortably, allowing easy forearm movement across the table and their feet are supported (try a box or a step). Children can use their hands much more effectively when they are in this good supportive position.
- Use a non-slip mat under their bowl/plate (e.g. Dycem) to prevent it slipping.
- Try using child size cutlery or cutlery with chunky handles - this will assist your child's grip (e.g. Caring Cutlery, Kura Care Cutlery, Nanna's Manners Cutlery).
- Practise using cutlery outside of mealtimes, try making food with playdough, you could use bananas or even a soft chocolate bar (e.g. milky way).

Practising the skill

- Children need to have this skill modelled to them. Show them how to do it and try to eat your dinner at the table with your child; use your own cutlery how you want your child to use theirs.
- Encourage your child to hold their cutlery with pointy fingers, try and remind them to keep their pointy fingers on top of the cutlery.
- Encourage your child to practise using the fork to stab their food, remind them to keep the fork in the same hand each time.
- Practise using the knife to push the food off the fork.
- Encourage your child to bring the food they want to cut up closer to them - to the front of the plate.
- To practise cutting, encourage your child to use their fork to stab and stabilise the food and use their knife in a sawing motion with some downward pressure. Saw at least 5 times.
- Remember to keep the flat sides of the cutlery next to each other when cutting, the knife must be in front of the fork.
- It will help if your child keeps their elbows tucked into their body.
- Don't forget to encourage your child with positive prompts and praise, e.g. "Well done, remember to keep your fingers on top of your cutlery".



What to do if your child gets frustrated?

- Spend 5-10 minutes at the start of the meal cutting up the food together.
- Try cutting up their food with your hands over their hands – stand behind them, it will be easier.
- If the task seems overwhelming, reduce the amount they need to cut up by helping your child but leave something (that you know they succeed with) to cut up and finish the job. By finishing the job they will get a greater sense of satisfaction. You can gradually increase the amount they need to cut up over time.

If you have a younger child who is finger feeding, your child may revert back to using their hands. Encourage them gently to use their cutlery by suggesting that they show their sibling their great skills.