

**There are many benefits to cutting with scissors, including:**

- **Independent movements of each finger**
- **Strengthens hand muscles**
- **Bilateral coordination skills (two-handed coordination)**
- **Visual motor skills (eye-hand coordination)**
- **Visual perceptual tasks (directionality)**
- **Fine motor skills (separation of hand, finger dexterity)**
- **Promotes grasp pattern**
- **Focus and attention**

**Cutting gives young children independent movements of each finger. Cutting with scissors works on the separation of two sides of the hand and strengthens hand muscles.**

**Bilateral coordination is also addressed when they have to hold the scissors in one hand and paper in the other. Often, you will see kids with their elbow all the way out to the side and the scissors upside down when they are cutting. An easy fix for this is to have them hold a piece of paper or a manilla folder between their arm and side to help them to stabilize their arm and bring their shoulder down. Then, they can hold the scissors correctly. The other thing to do is draw eyeballs on the scissors to cue them to the right position.**

**Cutting on a line and switching directions are great visual motor activities. The positioning of the scissors in a child's hand also starts to work on the tripod grasp.**

**It is important as to why scissors are so important in kindergarten and preschool as it is a precursor for handwriting. Cutting, along with coloring, also help with focus and attention.**

### **Scissor Skills**

- **Good sitting balance so they can use their arms and hands freely.**
- **Strong wrist and hand muscles to open and close the scissors.**
- **Development of a preferred and an assistant hand. ...**
- **Good coordination of their eyes and hands for cutting around shape**

# DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION OF SCISSOR SKILLS



## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TIPS

FOR HELPING KIDS LEARN TO USE SCISSORS!



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Proficient scissor use requires foundational components such as postural stability, hand strength and dexterity, hand-eye coordination, bilateral integration, sensory integration, sequencing, rhythm, and attention. These are skills that are also needed for success in play and learning.

### THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION OF SCISSOR SKILLS

#### **By 2 years of age:**

Can make one snip at a time.

### **By 3 years of age:**

Can snip forward along a line (not continuous motions forward).

### **By 4 years of age:**

Can cut 6 inches along a straight line ( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide) after demonstration and without assistance, staying within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the line.

Can cut 6 inches along a curved line ( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide) after demonstration and without assistance, staying within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the line.

Can cut out a circle of at least 6 inches in diameter without assistance, staying within  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of the line.

### **By 5 years of age:**

Can cut out a square at least 3 inches wide without assistance, staying within  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of the line.

Can cut out a triangle at least 3 inches wide without assistance, staying within  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of the line.

Can cut out pictures after demonstration that are at least 6 inches in length and width and whose outlines are no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide, while following the general shape.

## **HOW TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCISSOR SKILLS**

Were you surprised by any of the scissor skill milestones? Didn't think a toddler was capable of using scissors?! Obviously we don't want to simply hand a pair of scissors to a toddler or preschooler and let them go nuts. But with specific, intentional, *supervised* practice, even young kids can develop the skills they need to be scissor superstars!

⇒ **Tips for helping kids learn to snip with scissors:**

**1. Provide opportunities to engage with items that require an open/close motion of the hand.** Think about it — the “open/close” or “squeeze/release” movement pattern is the foundation of operating scissors. This could include playing with items such as [salad/serving tongs](#) (learn [50 fun ways to play with tongs!](#)), [turkey basters](#), [chip clips](#) or clothespins, [squirt bottles](#), or [squeezezy condiment bottles](#) (great for water play or [making cotton balls zoom across the table](#)). There are [many games available that involve tongs](#) (and, bonus points, they also help with [developing kids' pencil grasp!](#)). Here is a great post that goes into more detail about [mastering the grasp/release motion needed for scissor success](#).

**2. Provide opportunities for tearing paper**, either just for fun or as [part of an art project](#). Kids love to [tear up old paper grocery bags](#). This may sound weird, but paper tearing is actually considered an important pre-scissor skill!

**3. Place scissors in a “thumbs up” position from the very beginning.** This means the thumb is in the little hole and is on top when cutting, rather than twisting the forearm inward and snipping with the thumb on the bottom.

**4. Try using a visual cue to help the child understand proper hand positioning.** If the child struggles with placing their thumb up when holding the scissors, you can place a sticker on their thumbnail or draw a little happy face on it. You can also place a little sticker on top of the thumb hole of the scissors, or even wrap the top thumb hole with some electrical tape, masking tape, washi tape, etc. Pre-K Pages has a [helpful picture](#) you might appreciate. Remind the child to make sure they can “see” the sticker, smiley face, or tape so they know their hand is in the correct position (bonus points if the sticker is of their favorite character and you can convince them that the character is watching them while they cut!).

**5. Use hand-over-hand assistance if needed when getting started.** Opening scissors may be more challenging for beginners than closing them, especially if the scissors are too big for their hands or they have weakness. They may need help opening them each time when starting out. If you help kids get their scissors into the open position over the play dough, they can then close the scissors independently and gain a sense of

accomplishment by cutting the play dough “all by themselves”. How exciting for them!

**6. Try [spring-loaded scissors](#) if opening regular scissors creates too great a challenge or too much frustration.** It can be nice to have some springy assistance when starting out (you can sometimes find them at the dollar store if you’re lucky!). There are also other adapted versions of scissors for kids who are new to cutting or struggle with fine motor skills such as [spring action scissors](#), [loop scissors](#), and [dual control training scissors for righties](#) and [for lefties](#).

**7. Start out by snipping play dough** (you can find [more tips on that here](#), plus [10 awesome play dough activities for toddlers](#) and [12 simple play dough activities for preschoolers](#)).



**8. Use play dough scissors or touch-free scissors when snipping play dough** (We really like [these Crayola safety scissors](#) for snipping play dough, but not paper...they don’t really work for paper).

**9. Hold the cutting material (play dough, paper, etc.) for the child if needed when first starting out so they can solely focus on opening and closing the scissors.** Lift the material up a bit (like to the child’s shoulder level) so they don’t try to nose dive with the scissors down into the table, as kids often do when first starting out.

**10. Ensure the “thumbs up” position is being used for both hands once the child is ready to hold the scissors AND cutting material.** This means both hand cutting hand and “helper” hand” are positioned with thumb on top.

**11. Snip straws.** Cherish the giggles as the straw bits fly, then collect them and lace 'em up to make a necklace.

**12. Snip thin strips of paper (1-inch across).** This will allow your kiddo the satisfaction of fully cutting off a piece with each snip.

**13. Snip the edge of paper grocery bags, index cards, junk mail, or paint samples from the hardware store.** Use old paper grocery bags in our house, so much of our cutting is done with brown paper bags! Firmer paper is easier to hold and handle when starting out. It doesn't flop around as much as regular "thin" paper, thus reducing frustration for newbies.

**14. Place a sticker on the edge of the paper and "chomp" the sticker in half with the scissors.** Nothing like a little target practice. And it is way more fun when you actually make the scissors say, "CHOMP!" As the child becomes more accurate, start drawing a straight line at the edge of the paper, about 1-2 inches long, and then place the sticker at the end of the line. This is the beginning of learning to cut on a line!

**15. Use scissors to snip soft food into pieces.** Examples might include bananas or thin pieces of squash, zucchini, melon, or even licorice. How awesome is it to be able to work AND eat at the same time?! Just make sure the scissors are clean if you plan to actually allow your kiddo eat their work.

**Additional Resource:** Free handout on [developing the coordination needed for scissor skills](#), from Super Duper Inc.

⇒ **Tips for helping kids learn to cut forward with scissors:**

**16. Encourage optimal finger positioning.** You might notice that most kids place their thumb in the top hole and as many fingers as possible in the larger bottom hole. From an OT perspective, this is not considered "optimal" finger positioning. The ultimate gold-standard of finger positioning when cutting with scissors is when the thumb is placed in the top hole, the *middle finger* is placed in the bottom hole, and the index finger is actually placed on the *outside* of the bottom hole to provide increased stability and steering when cutting forward and around. The remaining two fingers (ring and pinky fingers)

can be tucked into the palm, which also provides added stability to the arches of the hand.

Additionally, scissors are more easily operated when the scissor handles rest on the middle knuckle of the finger (closer to the fingertip), rather than being shoved all the way down to the bottom knuckle. It's really hard to open and close scissors when they are placed down at that last knuckle.

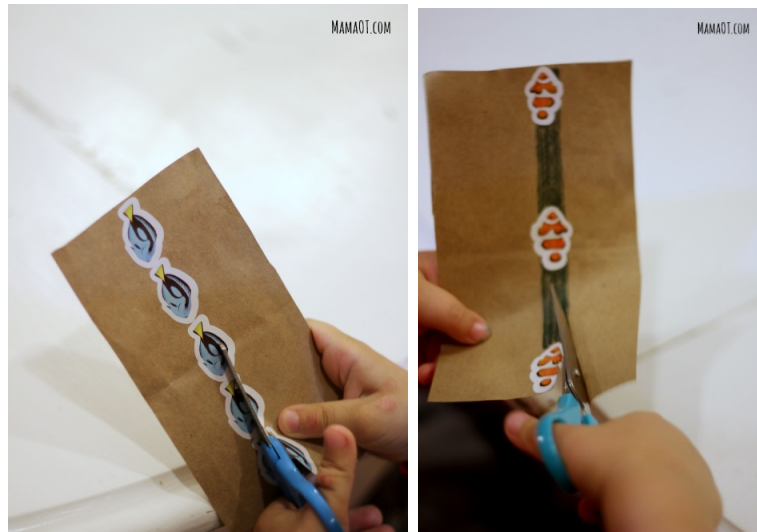
Now, is it the end of the world if your child places their index and middle fingers in the bottom hole of the scissors? No. And will they permanently damage their fingers or cutting skills if they hold the scissors at their bottom knuckle? No. Have kids at home mastered optimal finger positioning yet? No. But try it out (with both yourself and your kiddo) and see if it helps!

**17. Start with cutting on a wide line (around ½ inch thick) that's just 2-3 inches long.** [“The Cutting Program”](#) from Real OT Solutions, Inc. does a great job of providing cutting practice for kids by providing very thick lines for beginners and thinner lines for more advanced cutters, all within the same shapes/figures.

**18. For kids who need or benefit from concrete directions, tell them exactly how many cuts or “chomps” they will make with their scissors.** Count with them as they cut forward (“1...2...3...4...stop”).

**19. Teach kids that they need to “push” their scissors forward after each snip.** For kids who really struggle with the sequencing, rhythm and motor planning involved with cutting forward across paper, I may provide very specific verbal cues such as “chomp, open, push; chomp, open, push”. You may even model it alongside them with your hand as they cut. This can help them slow down a little and execute the motion more accurately, rather than quickly or repetitively snipping at whatever edge of paper they can catch.

**20. Place stickers along the path to provide additional visual guidance for where the scissors should go.** Starting out, it may be helpful to completely cover the path with stickers. As they grasp the concept of following the path, you can then begin to space out the stickers until there is only one at the start and one at the finish. Bonus points if you have the child help you peel and place the stickers on the paper. It gives them even more fine motor and bilateral practice without even realizing it!



**21. Cut in between a path made by Wikki Stix.** They are a super versatile tool and [can be found online here.](#)

**22. Cut in between a path made by play dough.** You can read more about this in the post about [using play dough as boundaries for cutting.](#)

**23. Cut in between a path made by puffy paint.** This requires more prep in advance but can actually be more effective than Wikki Stix or play dough option.

**24. Cut in between a path on those [bumpy cardboard borders](#) teachers use to decorate their bulletin boards.**

**25. Pretend their scissors are a choo-choo train that needs to stay on the track.** You can draw two parallel lines with horizontal lines all the way down the middle for them to “drive” on.

**26. Pretend their scissors are a car that needs to stay on the road.** You can even draw a road with dotted lines in the middle to try and stay on

**27. Pretend their scissors are a rocket ship zooming to outer space.** You can do a countdown of “3-2-1-Blastoff!” and then have them follow a straight, pre-drawn path from the edge of the paper to a simple drawing or sticker of a



moon, planet, or outer space creature just a few inches away! Up the challenge later on by adding curves or angles in order to reach outer space!

**28. Pretend their scissors are a monkey climbing a banana tree.** Draw a banana at the end of every path and see how many they can collect!

**29. Pretend their scissors are a dog going into their dog house, or going to get their bone.** Draw a basic dog house or bone so they can get what they need!

**30. Pretend their scissors are a fish or other sea creature swimming in the ocean.** Can you sense the theme of using a lot of pretending while working on cutting skills? Its way more fun that way! Plus, it gives them the chance to *pretend* they are an artist, even though they totally are not...stay on the thinnest track possible!

**31. Make sure they are starting on the correct side of the shape.** Righties need to start cutting on the right side of the shape (moving counterclockwise). Lefties need to start on the left side of the shape (moving clockwise). This gives them the best opportunity to see the line in relation to their scissor blade. It also prevents the paper from bending and tearing while they cut.

**32. Cut spirals.** This gives them the chance to really practice moving those scissors forward and around while working it with the helper hand. An example is a "spiral snake".

**33. Place stickers along the curving path, just like you did with the straight lines.** These can be place continuously along the path, or spread apart a little farther. You can even take a marker and make little dots where the stickers need to go, then have the child peel and place the stickers on the targeted spots for added fine motor, bilateral, and hand-eye coordination practice.

**34. Place stickers at the corners when cutting shapes with angles, and teach the child how to "STOP!" when their scissors chomp the sticker.** Many kids tend to turn the paper way too early when cutting angles. The sticker (or just a dot you drew at each corner) gives them a more

concrete visual cue to tell them when to turn the paper. You can start with just right angles instead of full squares to practice turning at one corner at first.

**35. Use [cool number trick](#) for helping kids know when and where to move their helper hand so they can turn the paper while cutting.**

[Developmental Progression of Scissor Skills: 35 Best Tips for Teaching Kids to Use Scissors](#) | Mama OT

[Fine Motor Considerations for Learning to Use Scissors](#) | Miss Jaime, O.T.

[Gross Motor Skills and Scissor Use](#) | Your Therapy Source

[Sensory Processing and Scissor Skills – A Surprising Link](#) | Kids Play Space

[Teach Kids How to Slow Down to Cut on Lines](#) | Sugar Aunts

[5 Tips for Difficulties with Scissor Skills](#) | Growing Hands-On Kids

[Creative Cutting Practice for Kids](#) | The Inspired Treehouse

[Visual Motor Skills and Cutting With Scissors](#) | Therapy Fun Zone

[Animal Puppets! Cut. Create. Play.](#) | Your Kids OT