



Liverpool  
City Council

# Occupational Therapy Strategies

## Developing Cutlery Skills

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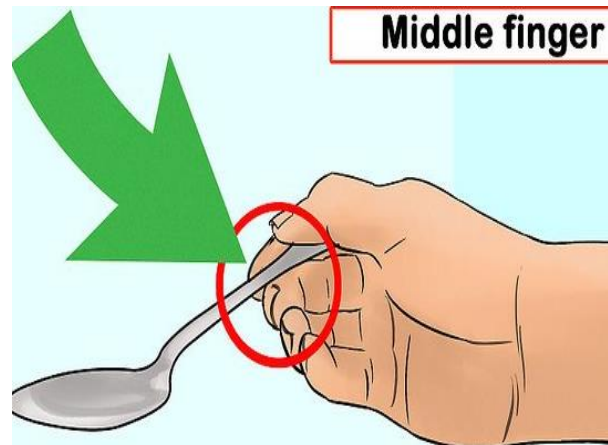
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Name: .....

## **TIPS FOR DEVELOPING CUTLERY SKILLS**

- When teaching a young person how to use cutlery, ensure that they are sat at a table with their feet on the floor or supported by a box or step.
- Ask the young person to hold the cutlery by resting their index fingers along the top of the cutlery, as shown below.
- Some young people may require hand over hand support to get this bit right.



- Small, chunky cutlery is easier for young people to hold.
- Young people who have difficulty holding their cutlery in the correct way, may benefit from using adapted cutlery such as Caring Cutlery. This can be particularly useful if they forget to place their index finger on top of their knife or fork to stabilise it. Caring Cutlery comes in both adult and junior sizes. The adult size is generally suitable for young people 5 and over. It is available to purchase in most mobility shops and sites including:
  - The Complete Care Shop: [www.completecareshop.co.uk](http://www.completecareshop.co.uk)
  - Ability Super Store: [www.abilitysuperstore.com](http://www.abilitysuperstore.com)
  - Essential Aids: [www.essentialaids.com](http://www.essentialaids.com)
  - Amazon
- Teach the young person to stab the food with the fork to hold it still on the plate. Place the knife in front of the fork and with a sawing action cut the food “STAB, SLIDE, SAW”. The young person may require more hand over hand support to help coordinate both their hands.
- Some young people may find using both their hands together a bit tricky, especially as their right and left hands are doing two different things. If this is the case it may be helpful for them to do some Bi-lateral games and activities. This is explained further on the next page.
- To get food loaded on to the fork, either stab the cut food or place the fork near the food and use your knife to squash the food on the fork.
- Using cutlery is a skill which will require regular practice. The young person may benefit from being reminded about how to carry out the activity. It can take a few months of regular practice to develop a good habit.
- Meal times can be busy and stressful and may not be the best time to teach and develop this new skill. Practice outside of meal times using play dough or putty instead of food, before introducing the method at meal times.

## **BILATERAL ACTIVITIES TO HELP WITH CUTLERY SKILLS**

Bilateral arm and hand use is the ability to use the two arms together, in an effective manner, to do an activity. Difficulty with bilateral coordination can be seen in any activity that requires the use of both hands. This may include activities such as cutting with scissors, stabilising paper when writing, using cutlery or more complex activities that require reciprocal movement patterns such as 'freestyle' swimming. Working on bilateral activities can help the brain integrate information from both sides of the body and improve coordination in this area.

### **Activities to encourage use of both hands**

These activities will encourage coordinated use of both hands to complete tasks. Some activities require the non-dominant hand to act as a stabiliser not as a worker.

#### **Symmetrical use of both hands**

1. Percussion instruments such as cymbals and drums.
2. Medium or large balls that require both hands for holding, throwing and catching e.g. basketball, Velcro ball and catch mitt.
3. Pop-beads, Lego and other interlocking toys.
4. Rolling pin on dough or clay.
5. Rolling 'snakes' with clay or putty.
6. Paper ripping to make collages or paper mache.
7. Kneading dough in a cooking activity.
8. Catching, rolling, and bouncing a large ball.
9. Bursting bubbles by clapping hands together.
10. Star jumps.

#### **Differentiation of function**

The idea is that the dominant hand carries out the major manipulations with the other hand as the assistant.

1. Opening jars/containers with lids and picking up small objects (i.e. beads, buttons, dried peas, sultanas, marbles), putting into jars held in other hand.
2. Cutting with scissor activities.
3. Trace around or colour over plastic template. This encourages stabilisation with the left hand so the design will come out clearly.
4. Use a ruler to make a calendar or design so one hand has to stabilise the ruler while the other draws the lines.
5. Cooking activities that require stirring and mixing. Use a manual eggbeater, mix dough or batter in a bowl. Increase resistance as coordination improves.
6. Construction Toys - e.g. Lego, nuts and bolts of different weights and sizes.
7. Threading - beads, cotton reels, pasta shapes.
8. Cleaning up, using dustpan and brush after messy activities.
9. Linking things together - paper chains.
10. Hanging out washing using pegs.
11. Sharpening pencils, using a pencil and ruler to make pictures.
12. Cutting or tearing through stiff cardboard or other material.