

## The Development Of Scissor Skills In Young Children.

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Children will generally start to become interested in attempting to open a pair of scissors by 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  years of age but they are unable usually to co-ordinate the action to cut successfully. Usually by 3 to 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  years they show more agility and will be able to cut a piece of paper in two. By 4 years they can cut accurately on a line and by the time they reach year 1 they can cut out shapes and small pictures. So how does this happen and why do some children get the whole idea effortlessly and yet others struggle to show the techniques modelled to them. One thing is definite all children do have a natural desire to operate these rather intriguing tools its often the accuracy and skill that is variable.

### PreRequisites for Scissor Skills.

Before a child is ready to use scissors there are some pre-requisite skills they need. That is their hands need to be able to "do" several things. If you don't take the time to check that the child is able to do these things you may not have success with teaching them how to use scissors well. When a child is ready to learn they are usually able to get the right plan easily with just some set up by the adult and some supervision and verbal prompts. Scissor skill is one of those tasks where practise makes progress!

- ◆ Is able to open and close his hand by himself.
- ◆ Child can make a fist and wiggle their thumbs.
- ◆ Can open and close hand on a verbal plan eg open shut them song? Can the child follow?
- ◆ Child can use a dominator/ assistor pattern. That is one hand is the doing hand or the "bossy" hand and the other is the stabilising hand or the "helper" hand. For example can they tear paper?
- ◆ Child can maintain visual regard to what they are doing. That is they watch carefully when they are doing a tricky activity such as a fine pegboard, building towers with tiny blocks etc.
- ◆ Child shows an interest when you the adult cuts or when their siblings or peers cut. That is; they want a go.

## The Progression Of Skill Level With Scissors.

- Attempts to open and shut scissors with scissors held in both hands. Cutting unsuccessful. (Age 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  years.)
- Able to hold scissors in one hand and open and close.
- Snips paper in two when paper held by an adult. (2  $\frac{1}{2}$  yrs-3yrs)
- Snips paper held by themselves.
- Cuts a 10cm piece of paper in two using consecutive open shut pattern. (3 - 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  years).
- Snips and fringes with one snip attempting to stay on a marked line. (3 - 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  years).
- Cuts along a 10cm straight line staying within 1.7 cm of the line, (4 years).
- Cuts along a curved line staying within a 1 cm distance (4 - 5yrs).
- Cuts out an 8 cm triangle drawn in the middle of a 15 cm square piece of paper. (5 years).
- Cuts out a small picture eg a rabbit staying within the lines approximately 1.7 cm distance. (5 -6 years).

### Grading

When we cut we can grade our movements to match the tasks. That is when the paper is thick we can recruit more muscle power and when the paper is slippery like foil or light like baking paper, we can use less muscle power. We gather the sensory "feeling" and then make adjustments to our power level as a result. This ends with success and the task completed. Children don't innately have this grading and they learn to develop it by first being successful with the action and then learning to grade their movements.

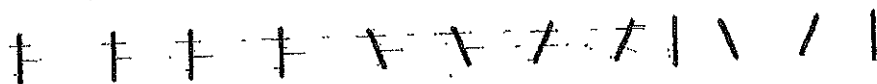
Generally when children first start to cut they find it easier with slightly thicker paper that tends to support itself and not slide. The thickness of old birthday cards is ideal. If the paper is too thick (like cardboard) it offers too much resistance and is difficult. The same occurs if the paper is too thin or shiny like some glossy papers. This tends to slide too much and flop when the child is first attempting to hold the paper independently. When first introducing cutting consider the paper choice and then once the cutting action is established it is important to then expose them to a variety of papers, thicknesses and cutting non-paper items.

Non paper items include straws, ribbons, curling ribbon, grass, leaves, herbs, flowers, playdoh (use old scissors or playdoh scissors), or even old dolls hair.

## Control, Accuracy and Speed.

Obviously like most activities when you start you are not as competent as you will become. First work on control then on the accuracy and finally on the speed. If you work on speed before accuracy then the child wont develop the grading needed.

Control may be worked on at the same time as accuracy eg after the child learns how to open and shut their scissors they then learn how to angle the blades so that they tilt slightly to the left or the right. This enables the cutter to turn corners and to stay on the line. Most right handers will slightly angle their blades to the right, and they do this by a simple wrist movement and not by moving the paper or their stabilising hand. This tilt of the blades is best taught when the child is learning straight-line cutting. So you would teach cut and stop on the line progressing from:



That way the children are taught accuracy and control at the same time.

After middle primary you do not see much developmental progression with scissor accuracy. That is they are as accurate as an adult is. Some speed changes may occur but not with actual cutting ability.

The progression I use is:

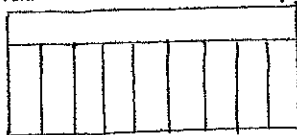
1. Tearing paper and use of tongs.
2. Snipping randomly or "Scribbling" with scissors.
3. Snipping with a line drawn and on 2 - 3 cm strip of paper.



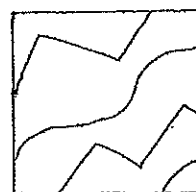
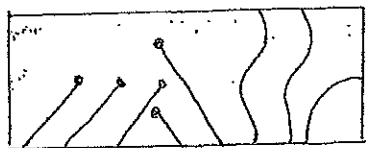
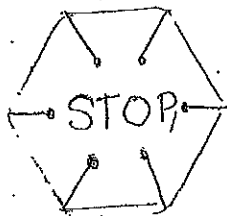
4. Cutting paper in half using consecutive cuts along a 10 - 15cm length.



5. Continuous straight line cutting to a stop point to make grass or the sea. The child has to cut an a4 size paper with approx 8 - 12 line cuts.



6. Cutting on angles to work on direction of scissor blades.



So what happens when a child doesn't progress like this and what can we do to support them. How are children meant to cut and how can we make it easier for them?

Firstly scissor skills are about tool use and in order for anyone to use tools well, they need to be shown how to hold them and how to carry them. The tools also need to be the best they can be.

Holding scissors is made far easier if the scissors are designed so that one handle is smaller and the other handle is bigger. This helps the child work out that the little hole is for the thumb and the bigger holes are for my fingers. There are two different ideas on how it is best to hold scissors. One practice is that the index finger is not in the holes but is the guide and the other practice is that the index finger and middle finger are in the hole. What do you do?

**With both methods, it is always the rule that the thumbs are up on top!**

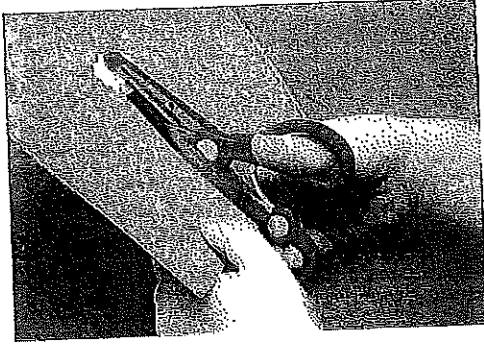
#### Considerations.

- Left handers need left-handed scissors.
- Every class should have a variety of scissors and tools for the child to use.
- Once scissors are stiff or blunt throw them out. (Or use them as playdoh scissors).
- Doesn't matter how long you work on snipping if you give a visual target. It is great practice.
- Children with low muscle tone often tire easily and adopt a very flattened palm when cutting. We need to address this positioning otherwise they won't build the muscle strength they need. They need more flexion. Think about how your hand is shaped when catching a tennis ball. They need that shape in their palm.
- Children who tend to "chomp" very quickly with their scissors need to be taught to take little "nibble bites". Use an analogy of a shark and a fish. We use both big and small cuts when we cut and some children need to be specifically taught this. Use a sheet like this example and ask them will it be a shark chomping or a nibble. Hint we use chomps for when we close the scissor blades completely and nibbles where we only close part of the blade. We use chomps at the beginning of the long cut and then nibbles as we get to the end stop point!

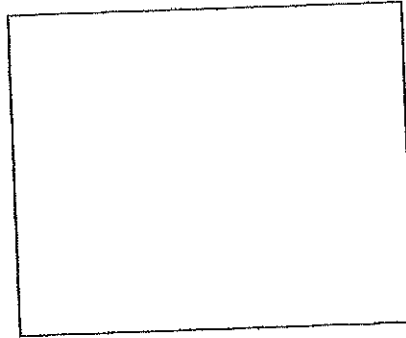
- If children don't seem to be able to direct their scissor blades use ~~wikki sticks either side of the line to give extra feedback.~~ Try a thicker line or even draw a road and their 'car' is stuck to the scissors. This is often necessary when the child loses visual focus.
- Children who have difficulty coordinating the open shut aspect or who have very poor grasp will benefit from spring loaded scissors that assist with the open part of the action.
- Most children who learn to cut automatically place their fingers on the top of the paper when holding it. Simply by encouraging thumbs up will help to align their arms and keep their arm from "winging" out like an airplane. It will also add to their accuracy as it helps to keep BOTH wrists in slight extension.
- It may be necessary to use double-loop scissors with some children who can't get the timing and the rhythm of the open shut phase.
- Singing whilst they cut helps with the motor action eg open shut open shut then give a little snip!
- Always teach and show the parents so that the same prompts are used and reinforced.
- For children who have a lot of hand strength problems, dexterity issues and handwriting issues as well as some challenges with scissors recommend that they see an Occupational Therapist.

## NOTES.

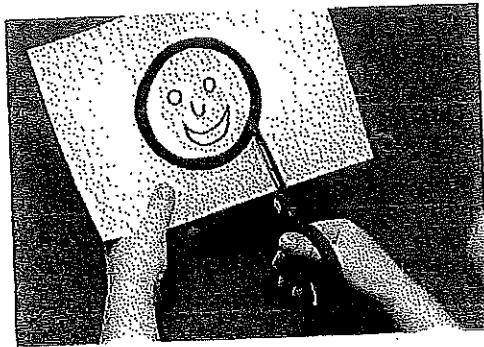
## Tips for Cutting



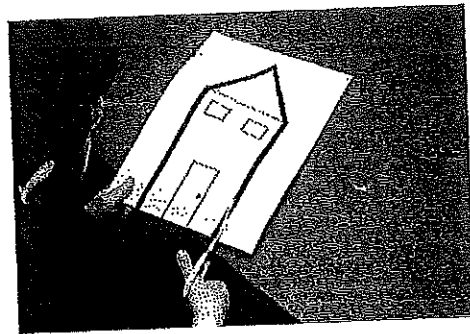
Use spring scissors initially



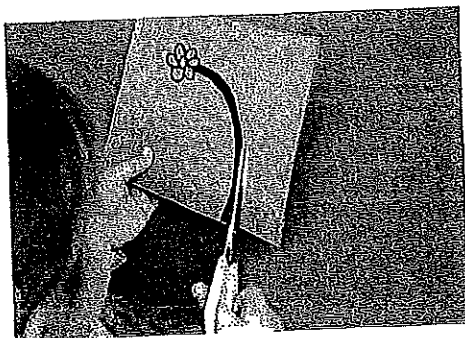
Cut without spring when able to open and shut scissors



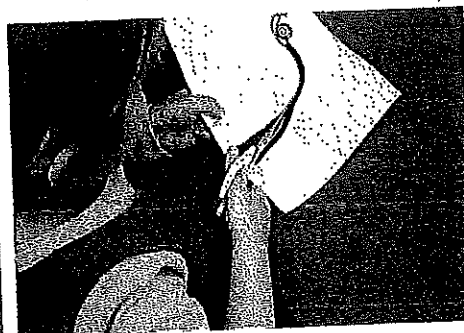
Keep thumbs on top  
(scissors and paper)



Cut along thick lines for success

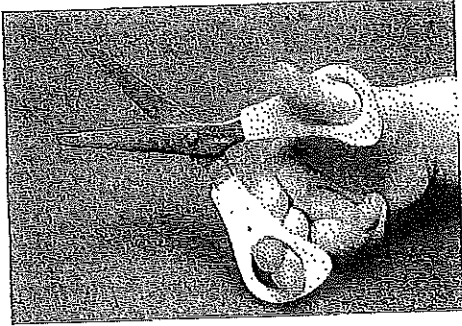


Begin by cutting card

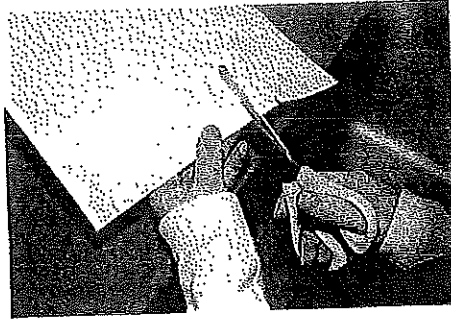


Later progress to cutting paper

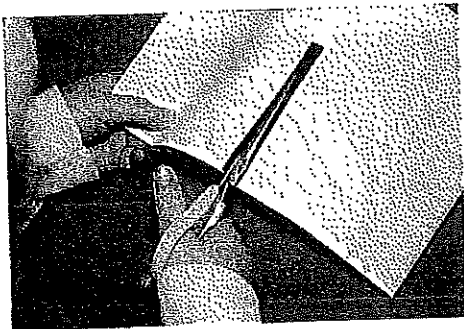
## Stages of Cutting



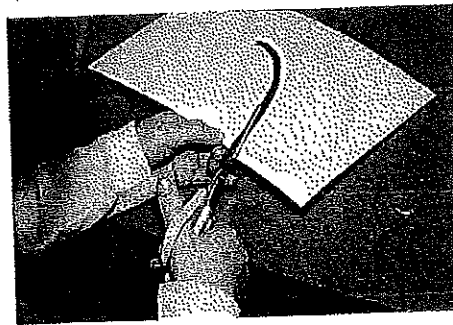
Open and shut scissors



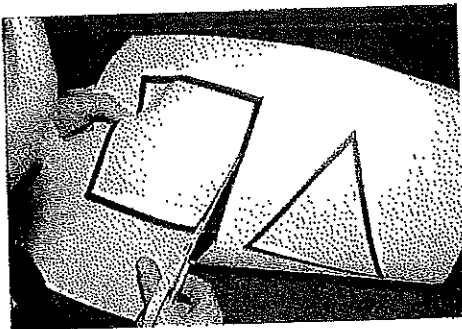
Snip paper



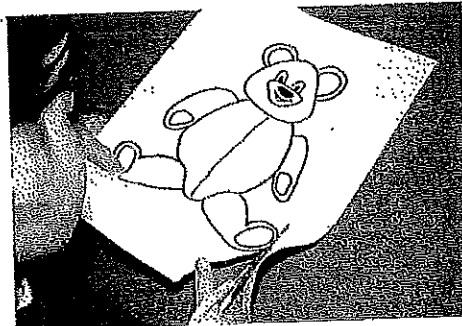
Cut along a straight line



Cut along a curved line



Cut out shapes



Cut out pictures