

# Using Cutlery

Practical ideas and  
advice to help  
children use  
cutlery



EAST AYRSHIRE

**Health & Social Care  
Partnership**



**south ayrshire**  
health & social care  
partnership



Follow us on Twitter @CYP\_OT\_NHSAA



Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nhsaaa](http://www.facebook.com/nhsaaa)



Visit our website: [www.nhsaaa.net/services-a-to-z/children-and-young-peoples-occupational-therapy-service/](http://www.nhsaaa.net/services-a-to-z/children-and-young-peoples-occupational-therapy-service/)



All our publications are available in other formats



A child with co-ordination difficulties may have to practice and put in more effort than their peers to master how to use cutlery well. The child may have ways of avoiding tasks that they find difficult.

It is important to praise your child's effort at every opportunity. Building a child's confidence is the first step towards helping them do things on their own. This also builds their social skills and independence. The following actions can help a child use cutlery.

\* All references to child / children means either a child or young person.

## Things to consider:

- If you don't have a dining room table, consider buying a child sized table and chair. This helps good sitting positions and makes using cutlery easier.
- If you sit at a dining table, think about your child's position. They should be able to sit comfortably with elbows resting on the table top. Their feet should be flat on the floor or on a stool, if required.
- Practice with a child safe serrated knife (lined with small teeth similar to a saw) which is easier for

cutting meat and other tough textures, while a non-serrated knife is easier for spreading butter.

- A non slip mat may be helpful under the plate to prevent it from moving.
- Ensure the cutlery is the correct size for your child. Child-sized or cutlery with chunky plastic handles is easier to hold and use. Junior Caring Cutlery (available from online retailers) has shaped handles to help children hold them correctly.
- Look at how your child is holding their knife and fork. Their hands should be pointing down towards the plate. To help when cutting, show them how to point their index fingers down the length of the knife and fork.
- Consider adding stickers/coloured dots or a nail varnish dot on the shaft of the knife/fork to show where to put index fingers correctly.
- Encourage your child to hold the knife in their dominant hand. This is the strongest side and should be easier for your child to saw and push down at the same time to cut through food.
- When first learning to use cutlery it is acceptable for your child to load the food onto a fork or

spoon using their other hand, and then lift the utensil to their mouth. Once they can do this well, you can encourage them to use their knife to load food onto a fork.

## Things to try:

- Practice using a knife and fork during a fun activity such as cutting Play-doh or cookie dough.
- Teach one step at a time; let your child learn one step before trying the next. For example:
  - stab Play-doh balls with the fork
  - saw backwards and forwards with the knife
  - use the knife and fork together
- Try guiding your child's movements by placing your hands over theirs while cutting. This allows your child to feel the necessary movements for cutting.
- It is easier to practise cutting with soft foods, such as fish fingers, egg, boiled potato, well-cooked vegetables, or bananas. You could slice 'round' food (such as potatoes or sausages) in half to stop them rolling round the plate.
- At mealtimes, start by asking your child to use their knife and fork for just one item, then

gradually increase the amount they do as their skill and confidence improves.

- Hold a doll's tea party.
- Let your child help with baking and meal preparation.
- Pretend to cut toy vegetables that are stuck together with Velcro.

Break activities into smaller parts and encourage them to do each part themselves before moving on. Young people learn new skills easier by copying others (modelling). Have fun while you are learning new skills.

It may be better to practice the use of cutlery at the weekends when there is more time to engage in activities such as spreading butter on bread, sitting at the table for mealtimes and time to play. Remember to give praise during these activities; there may be some mess and they may not master the task straight away, but making the activity fun can help them to engage.



# Contact Information

## East Ayrshire

### **Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (East)**

Level 2

The Johnnie Walker Bond Building

15 Strand Street

Kilmarnock

KA1 1HU

Telephone: 01563 553611

## North Ayrshire

### **Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (North)**

Rainbow House

Ayrshire Central Hospital

Kilwinning Road

Irvine KA12 8SS

01294 323070

## South Ayrshire

### **Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (South)**

Arrol Park Resource Centre

Doonfoot Road

Ayr KA7 4DW

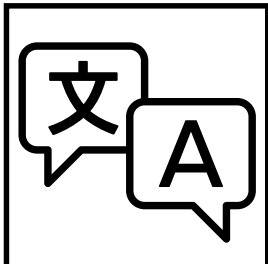
01292 614988

**All new requests for assistance for Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy services should be forwarded to:**

The Rainbow House Mailbox:

**[aa-uhb.clinical-rainbowhouse@aapct.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:aa-uhb.clinical-rainbowhouse@aapct.scot.nhs.uk)**

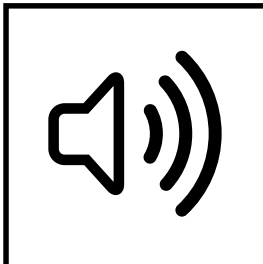
**We are happy to consider requests for this publication in other languages or formats such as large print.**



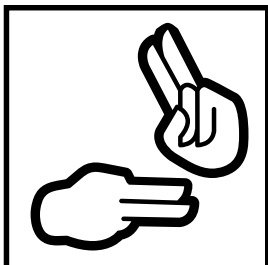
Translations



Easy to read



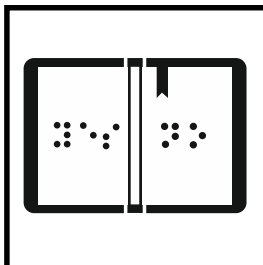
Audio



BSL



Large print



Braille



**Call: 01563 825856**



**Email: [pil@aapct.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:pil@aapct.scot.nhs.uk)**



## **Tell us what you think...**

If you would like to comment on any issues raised by this document, please complete this form and return it to our Feedback and Complaints team: PO Box 13, Eglinton House, Ailsa Hospital, Dalmellington Road, Ayr KA6 6AB.

Alternatively, you can call free on **0800 169 1441** or email **[complaintsteam@aapct.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:complaintsteam@aapct.scot.nhs.uk)**

Name

---

Address

---

---

Comment

---

---

---