



Fox Wood School OT Ideas



Cutlery Skills

Where do I start?

This programme is about providing ideas to support your child to develop self-feeding skills using cutlery. It is important to consider that many of our Fox Wood learners struggle with the sensory aspects of eating and have a limited diet. This programme aims to look at different ways to encourage cutlery skills with using your child's current food preferences. Be mindful that working on both the development of cutlery skills and introducing new foods is likely to be a mammoth challenge. If your child is motivated to want to eat something that they know and like they are more likely to be more motivated to have a go!

Children developmentally progress through different self-feeding stages:

- Holding and mouthing food, playing and exploring with fingers and utensils.
- Finger feeding picking items up and bringing to their mouth.
- Using a spoon assisted to dip in food and bring to mouth - but very messy!
- Scooping food themselves and bringing successfully to their mouth - still messy.
- Becoming more accurate with spoon feeding and less messy but starting to stab at food with a fork.
- Using a knife to start cutting and spreading assisted
- Using a knife and fork together with success.



It is important to identify where your child is at and then look at how you can work on the next stage using some of the ideas below. The key to success is lots and lots of practice and repetition.

It is suggested that all children are supervised whilst eating to ensure their safety. If you are concerned that any of the activities or tips pose a risk to your child, please do not attempt.

Generic Tips

- So that you can use your hands with skill you need to be in a good sitting position with your feet on the floor and your back well supported and the table at elbow height. Try using a box under their feet if they are dangling mid-air or a small table and chair.
- Try to set up a routine when you are going to use cutlery so that they start to understand the expectations. Try and present the cutlery in the same way and use the same utensils and bowls/plates.
- Consider the type of cutlery you use. Utensils that are fatter and shorter in handle can be easier to control and grip. Heavier cutlery can work well for some. Shaped cutlery to help with finger placement can also be assistive - caring cutlery.
- There is nothing worse than chasing food around a bowl or plate and is likely to cause an individual to give up. Think about putting some non-slip rug matting underneath the bowl or a dampened tea towel/kitchen roll to stabilise the plate/bowl. Consider whether you could try a high sided or raised edged bowl/plate for them to scoop against.
- Consider when best can you cope with trying something new with your child. If you find mealtimes already very stressful, consider about practising cutlery skills at snack time instead. It is important that both you and your child are calm and in the best place to try something new!



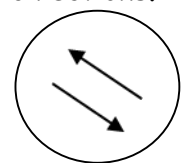
- It is best to be consistent in your approach to using cutlery. Start with encouraging them to use the utensil for a couple of mouthfuls to limit frustration and then build on this as they become more proficient.
- Physically assist your child using a hand over hand technique to show them the action they need to gain i.e. get them to grasp the utensil appropriately and then you put your hand over their hand.
- Make sure you model how you do the task so that they can see what is required.

Learning to Use a Spoon

- Think about the food you use to encourage success. Runnier liquids are trickier when learning as they don't stick to the spoon and fall off! You need to ensure success so that they are motivated to try again! Try and think about things like ready brek, porridge, mashed potato to start off with.
- Make sure your child wraps their fingers round the main barrel of the spoon.
- Encourage your child to support the bowl with their non-feeding hand.
- Start by loading the spoon for them and supporting them to bring to their mouth (hand over hand). Then once they are doing this, try just supporting them to grip the spoon but see if they will bring to their mouths themselves. Once this is working well see whether they will pick the spoon up themselves after you've loaded it. Then start to work on scooping once you have mastered these stages.

Learning to Use a knife and Fork

- Lay the table with the knife at the dominant side and the fork on the non-dominant side. If you are in doubt as to their dominant side, place a utensil on the table in line with their tummy button (midline) as see which hand they chose to pick up with. This is a rough guide but will help you at home!
- Think about the food you cut up. It needs to be soft enough to cut effectively particularly in the early stages of learning. Soft yet holds its form - fishfingers, burger (without roll), mini roll, potato waffle, scotch pancake, banana.
- To increase the pressure being used, encourage placing the first finger (their pointy finger) on top of the cutlery, rather than wrapping the whole hand around the handle. Carving cutlery works well as provides clear finger placement holes. You can try sticking stickers on the utensil where their pointy fingers need to go or a little bit of Velcro (soft side) if they don't mind the feel of this.
- Try and encourage a diagonal cutting action, rather than cutting in lots of different directions.
- To help with knowing where to cut effectively get them to slide the knife down the fork once it has stabbed into the food.
- It is okay if it helps after they have cut that they swap the fork hand into their dominant hand to take to their mouth initially, as they become more confident try and get them to stop swapping hands.
- When teaching the stabbing and cutting action try using sound noises to help! When encouraging them to saw with the knife, get them to growl like a lion.



Equipment that may help to support your child with cutlery skills - (all readily available from Amazon or Self care websites)

Non-slip matting - Dycem or similar.



Caring Cutlery - In sizes for small hands or adult sized hands. Cutlery with specific indents for finger placement.



Scoop bowls - Specialist bowls that have a high side to assist with effective scooping.



Plate guards - rim's that can be applied to plates at home to assist with scooping.



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