**Cutlery Skills**

The following activities use some of the same skills necessary for using cutlery. They will give your child opportunity to practice the skills. Any games or activities that encourage the child to hold one hand still whilst moving the other hand will help with the foundation skills for using cutlery.

**Activities**

* **Using a dustpan and brush** – emphasise keeping the dustpan still and moving the brush. Your child may be tempted to move both together at the same time.
* **Using scissors** – start with easy patterns and progress to more complex designs.
* **Using play dough** – practice cutting using cutlery.
* Playing with clay (or other modelling material)
* **Cooking / Baking** – holding a bowl while mixing with a spoon or spooning the mixture out of the bowl.
* **Colouring** – ensure the paper is held with one hand whilst the other hand does the colouring.
* **Opening screw top bottles and jars**.
* **Construction games** – e.g. Meccano, K-Nex,

**Sitting Position**

It is vitally important that children are correctly positioned when sat down to eat a meal. They need to feel stable and secure whilst sitting on a chair and need the table to be at the correct height for them when possible. Following the basic principles of good positioning will not only make facilitate good cutlery skills but will also promote good concentration skills when eating.

**The chair**

It is important that the chair is a suitable size, to provide stability when eating:

* Hips flexed at 90.
* Feet flat on floor and hip width apart.
* Bottom and back supported.
* Chair tucked in under the table.
* Elbows supported on the table.
* Work out a simple physical reminder such as a slight stroke down the back or tap on the shoulder when posture is poor.
* If children are in specialist seating, ensure that they are firmly held in the chair with the lap and chest straps and if they have a waistcoat on make sure it is reasonably tight fitting over their shoulders.
* Some children in wheelchairs should be encouraged to sit on a standard chair during mealtimes.

**The table**

* Ensure that the child is sat close to the table – make sure that the table is at the right height (e.g. elbows rest comfortably on the table).
* Keep the table space clear from clutter this will encourage them to concentrate on the task in hand.
* Set the table with knives and forks, where possible encourage the child to help you whilst they wait for their food.
* Ensure the plate does not slip by using a tablecloth, dycem grip or blue tac.

**Cutting**

* At mealtimes, do not expect the child to practise more than two or three cuts.
* Encourage them to slow down and think about each stage of cutting separately (e.g., stab with the fork and then cut with the knife)
* If the child will accept physical help, stand behind them and help the hand with the fork in it to stay still whilst the knife moves back and forth across the food. Expect untidy cutting and some tearing of the food to continue initially.
* To increase the pressure being used, encourage placing the first finger on top of the cutlery, rather than wrapping the whole hand around the handle.
* When adults demonstrate cutting, a child will often copy trying to cut in the same direction. We cut food in a diagonal stroke.
* Children can find it difficult to monitor the appropriate amount of force to exert when cutting. Also when applying too much force, it may be difficult to cut and press at the same time. The combination of balancing movement and pressure can be difficult. To help, experiment with different food textures ranging from very hard to soft. Talk about different textures of food and how difficult it is to cut and how hard you need to press. This will increase awareness and hopefully encourage how to exert appropriate pressure and movement relevant to the food.
* When cutting food, we adjust the knife with our hands several times. Children tend to hold the knife very tightly and do not adjust it. Encourage movement of the knife with their hand. This will encourage better control and the ability to monitor grip.

**Options to purchase:**

Doddl Cutlery

OR

Nanna’s Manners Cutlery

OR

Kura Cutlery/Caring Cutlery