

## **CHILDREN'S OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE**

### **ADVICE SHEET FOR CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES USING CUTLERY**



For a variety of reasons, some children experience difficulty learning how to hold and use a knife and fork.

The following advice may be beneficial in helping your child to develop this important daily skill.

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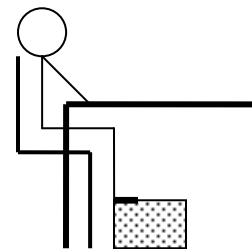
### **Position**

One of the most important things to consider before starting any activity requiring fine motor coordination is the seating position! If the child is not well seated, their trunk control and balance may be affected, which will impact on the function of the arm, wrist and fingers. Make sure you are using the right chair and table for the child using the following ergonomic principles:

Ensure the child sits with his/her feet in contact with the floor or use a footrest and encourage his/her hips and knees to be at a 90° angle. This will ensure a good base of support.

Make sure the child is sitting with his/her bottom all the way back on the chair and the chair tucked in all the way under the table.

Table height should be at elbow level so the forearms rest comfortably on the surface.



### **Cutlery type**

- **Standard cutlery**

This should be of an appropriate size for the child. Some children who have difficulty using a standard style of cutlery find it beneficial to use cutlery with a larger style of handle or heavier / lighter weight. Depending on the age of the child, knives with serrated edges tend to cut through food more easily and are less effortful to use.

- **Adapting standard cutlery**

- ❖ Use chunky handled cutlery, this is often easier to hold, than the thinner flatter handles.
- ❖ Place rubber grips onto a handle of the cutlery (the handle needs to be slim to accommodate the grip). Examples include 'noodle doodle grips', these grips can also be used on the shaft of a pencil.
- ❖ The Occupational Therapy Service may be able to supply you with a piece of plastazote tubing to put on the handle of cutlery.

- **Modular cutlery**

If the child continues to have difficulty, it is possible to purchase cutlery with adapted (i.e. shaped) handles, such as caring cutlery (see below picture), which are useful for training purposes. Some children continue to find these useful for the longer term, particularly if they have a physical difficulty affecting their ability to grip.

### **Finger position**

It is important to demonstrate the correct way to hold cutlery, i.e. placing the index fingers on the top edge of the knife and fork handles, with the remaining fingers and thumb wrapped around the handle. For some children it may be helpful to place coloured sticker dots or elastic bands to mark the correct finger position place. For example placing a spot on the fork where the index finger is positioned, nail varnish can be used to mark the spot.

### **Instruction**

Reinforce any verbal instruction with visual demonstration. When demonstrating to the child, always stand beside them and not opposite them, to avoid them having to interpret the mirror-image. Instructions need to be concise and clear. Using a cognitive 'problem solving' strategy will help your child understand his/her difficulties more easily, will help to overcome the difficulty. Do this by demonstrating to your child how he/she holds the cutlery, and then show the child the correct way. Encourage the child to verbally describe or demonstrate what the differences are between the two methods. Discussing the positives and negatives of each method will reinforce why their method may require adjusting.

### **Practice**

As with any skill it is important to practice often. Initially it may be useful to practice using a play-dough activity, if this is appropriate for a child's age. Older children could be encouraged to cut up a banana for snack time. Gradually increase the amount of time they practice during a meal until

eventually managing for the full duration. This way they won't tire before their meal goes cold.

**Common problems:**

❖ Keeping food on the plate

Some children experience difficulties keeping the food on a standard plate, whilst learning to use the knife and fork. The following equipment may help keep the food on the plate:

- **Plate surrounds** - These attach onto a standard plate, this provides an edge which encourages the food to stay on the plate and also helps the child to scoop food onto the fork/spoon.
- **Scooped bowls or plates** - These have raised edges, which helps to keep the food on the plate and also assists the child to place food onto the fork/spoon.

❖ The plate moves on the place mat

**Dycem** - This is a non-slip material, which is placed under the plate, and prevents the plate sliding and spinning.

❖ Elbow position

For some children, they tend to position their elbows up and to the side, when using cutlery. The child may not be aware that their elbows stick out to the side, during meal times. Using a cognitive approach encourages the child to problem solve and create solution. Demonstrate to your child both the correct arm position and their arm position when using cutlery. Encourage the child to identify how their arm position will affect others that sit next to them i.e. bumping others with elbows. Once the child is aware of their arm position, the child may require a gentle prompt to remind them to lower their elbows. This can be done by gently tapping the child's elbow or giving a verbal prompt.

**Resources discussed in the advice sheet**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Caring cutlery</u></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Noodle Doodle grips</u></b></li> </ul>
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- Junior (under 5 years).
- Standard (over 5 years to adult)

**Kura cutlery**



Available from various suppliers online.



Available from:

**Special direct**

Park Lane Business Park  
Kirkby-in-Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG17 9LE

**Tel: 0800 318 686**

[www.specialdirect.com](http://www.specialdirect.com)

• **Incurve plate surround**



Available from:

Homecraft Rolyan  
A Petterson Medical Company  
Nunn Brook Road  
Huthwaite  
Sutton in Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG17 2HU



Tel: 08702 423 305

• **Scooped plate**



Available from:

Homecraft Rolyan  
A Petterson Medical Company  
Nunn Brook Road  
Huthwaite  
Sutton in Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire

<p><a href="http://www.homecraft-rolyan.com">www.homecraft-rolyan.com</a></p>	<p>NG17 2HU</p> <p>Tel: 08702 423 305</p> <p><a href="http://www.homecraft-rolyan.com">www.homecraft-rolyan.com</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Dycem</b></li></ul>   <p>Available from:</p> <p>Homecraft Rolyan A Petterson Medical Company Nunn Brook Road Huthwaite Sutton in Ashfield Nottinghamshire NG17 2HU</p> <p>Tel: 08702 423 305</p>	

<p><a href="http://www.homecraft-rolyan.com">www.homecraft-rolyan.com</a></p> <p>or</p> <p>Nottingham Rehab Supplies Clinitron House Excelsior Road ASHBY DE LA ZOUCH Leicestershire. England LE65 1JG</p> <p>Tel: <b>0845 120 4522</b> <a href="http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk">http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk</a></p>	
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