

# Developing Scissor Skills that are a Cut Above

Cutting out shapes, pictures and other materials is required for many classroom projects. But knowing how to use scissors capably is not a skill with which a child is born. Children can learn to use scissors effectively once their motor coordination develops. Specifically, children become more adept at using scissors with the development of their bilateral coordination, or the ability to use both hands and arms together in a coordinated manner to accomplish an activity.

Bilateral coordination helps develop student's hands and fingers for refined movements and skillful activities, like scissors skills. When using scissors, muscles in the fingers help separate the two sides of the hand.

Here are some things to consider in helping a child develop scissor skills:

**Hand position** – Stability and control allow for coordination of arms and hands. Finger placement is important for effective and appropriate use to cut an item. “Thumb up” is a term often used to verbally and visual cue children for proper scissor s orientation.



**Appropriate size** – Try various types of scissors to determine the type with which the child feels most comfortable and most successful. Using the incorrect size will result in limited precision and poor control of the scissors.

**Type of scissors** – “Learning Scissors” (i.e. Benbow scissors) help children develop beginning scissor skills. Adaptive scissors (“squeezers”, long-looped, self-opening/closing, etc) are often used for children with limited hand and/or finger function, and can assist the child with successful task completion.

TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCISSOR SKILLS	
<i>Age</i>	<i>Scissor Skills</i>
3 1/2 –4 yrs old	Snip narrow strips of paper
3 1/2 –4 yrs old	Cutting across a 6-inch piece of paper
3 1/2– 5 yrs old	Cut simple shapes (circle, square, triangle, etc)

This article is one I a series of child development articles offered by Pediatric Therapy Network.

PTN offers several after-school learning groups for the FL elementary school students.

## Extra Tips from Ms. Shirley

**Getting ready to try scissors**—help your little one develop small motor strength and bilateral coordination by trying these fun activities at home:

- Tear strips of paper into small pieces, (both hands are coordinated together)
- Use tongs to pick up cotton balls, small blocks, etc
- Use eye-droppers to move colored water from one container to another
- Punch holes in an index card with a hole-puncher
- Use small scissors to practice cutting through playdough

**Stress Scissor Safety**—Scissor safety is critical and should always be emphasized at the beginning of each cutting activity.

- **Scissors are only for cutting paper. Nothing else!** (This includes shirts, crayons, fingers, and hair)
- **Avoid walking with scissors.** Tell your child they can only cut when they are seated at a table.