

Advice sheet

Self-Care – Older Children

Using a Knife and Fork

Most children are able to use a fork and spoon on their own by the age of five. They usually still need some supervision with a knife but may be able to cut soft food and start spreading. This development of more precise fine motor skills is often also reflected in their drawing, dressing and play. If your child is finding it difficult to master using a knife and fork well after their friends have, here are some suggestions:

- Make sure your child's feet are supported, either on the floor or on a step stool for mealtimes.
- Let the child help with simple food preparation e.g. cut up a banana for a fruit salad.
- Initially start with soft foods that the child can push a knife through e.g. boiled potatoes.
- Then teach the child to cut foods that require a sawing action such as soft meats.
- Using a knife and fork together in a complex skill as each hand does a different action but must co-ordinate together. Emphasise the different actions of each hand – the fork to hold food still, and the knife to cut. This can be practised using large soft foods such as a slice of bread.
- Caring cutlery is a range of cutlery with moulded plastic handles with indents to guide where to place the index fingers. Many children find these easier to use. The Junior range suits infant age children, older children will need the adult size.



- If the plate tends to slide around on the table when your child is cutting, or their food spills over the side all the time you may want to consider a non-slip dycem mat or a plate surround:



Tying Shoe Laces

- Allow plenty of time – do not rush. Choose a good time when you can dedicate your child your attention.
- You will need long, wide shoelaces. Consider colour-coding them.
- Make sure that your child is sitting comfortably with support as needed on a chair, the floor, or against a wall. Your child may sit better in a corner where both walls give added support.
- Sit next to your child during instruction, or sit behind, prompting through the activity in the front.
- Encourage your child to secure the shoe in their lap which may be easier when learning this skill than bending down to the foot.

Self-Organisation

Some children have general difficulties organizing their desk, locker, homework, or even the space on a page.

What you can do

- Encourage child to unpack shopping, sorting items into groups before putting away e.g. fridge items, vegetables, packets.
- Homework/message book would be useful for messages for school/home to ensure they complete assignments (and on time). Letters home/school can also be kept in this book so parents/teacher know exactly where to locate them.
- Encourage them to lay the table or tray with knife and fork, spoon/drink.
- If your child has difficulty in following instructions, limit the amount of tasks given. Break them down into smaller steps and ask them to recall these straight away. In this way they can be encouraged to pay closer attention in the first instance, and could receive further clarification if they were unable to understand them.

Toileting

- Use wet wipes or tissues.
- Practise tearing tissue and kitchen roll via cookery and art activities.
- Ensure child feels safe on the toilet i.e. has a rail to hold on to if needed or foot step.
- Allow plenty of time to practise.
- Use backward chaining technique i.e. wipe child first, child does final wipe.

Good Self-Care Skills for Older Children

- **Daily routine** Help older children organise themselves to carry out selfcare tasks as part of a predictable daily routine. You can create simple charts that have pictures or words as reminders about what to do next. Use familiar timing, location and equipment.
- **Don't step in too quickly to help** it's important that they have enough time to master these things on their own and at their own pace.
- **'Backward chaining'** this is used to teach tricky tasks. Have your child complete the very last step of the task (eg, pulling their sock off after you have pulled it down over their ankle).
- Then introduce the second last step once the last one is mastered and so on. This way, your child is successful at the end of the task and avoids frustration.
- **Keep encouraging them** Reassure your child that mistakes are 'ok' and praise his or her attempts at self-care tasks. Your child will be confident to try new or 'tricky' things, if they feel secure that you don't expect them to get it right all the time.
- **Work on grasp and hand strength** through fine motor activities; go to Using our Hand Info sheet.

Suppliers for all equipment referred to can be found on the [website links page](#).