

USING A KNIFE AND FORK

Importance of seating:

It is really important that your child is sitting in a stable position to use a knife and fork efficiently. It is essential that the chair and the table are the correct height.

- If the table is too high for the child you may want to use a bigger chair or provide a firm cushion for them to sit on. The table height should roughly be in line with their elbows.
- If their feet do not touch the floor you can give them a firm box or telephone directory to put their feet on.
- The chair should be positioned fairly close to the table so that there is no more than a couple of inches gap between them and the table. They may need you to push their chair closer once they are sitting down.
- The plate should be positioned a couple of inches from the edge of the table.

How to hold cutlery properly

1. First pick up the fork in the left hand. Put the index/Pointer finger on rounded base of the fork so that the prongs face downwards.



2. Then, whilst still holding on to the fork with the left hand, pick up the knife with the right hand. Look carefully to see which side the teeth are on. Then place the index/pointer finger on the top surface of the knife about an inch from the end of the handle.



3. Hands should now look like this.....



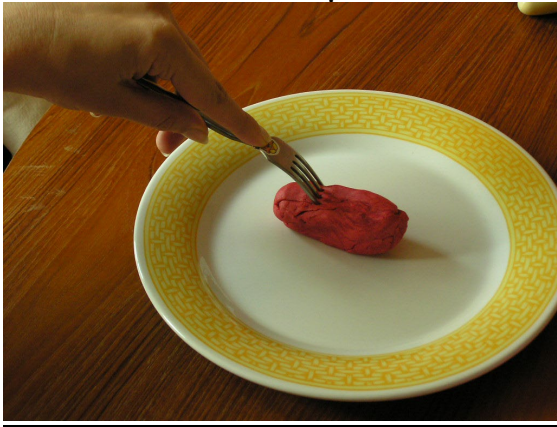
METHOD:

1. Pick up the cutlery as shown above.

(Sometimes it helps to first give children their cutlery to hold one at a time. Once they have the correct positioning, place plate of food in front of them. This allows them to focus on correct positioning and then on the food).

Tip: Do not be afraid to provide a little bit of hand -over - hand positioning when they are struggling so that they can feel what movement is needed.

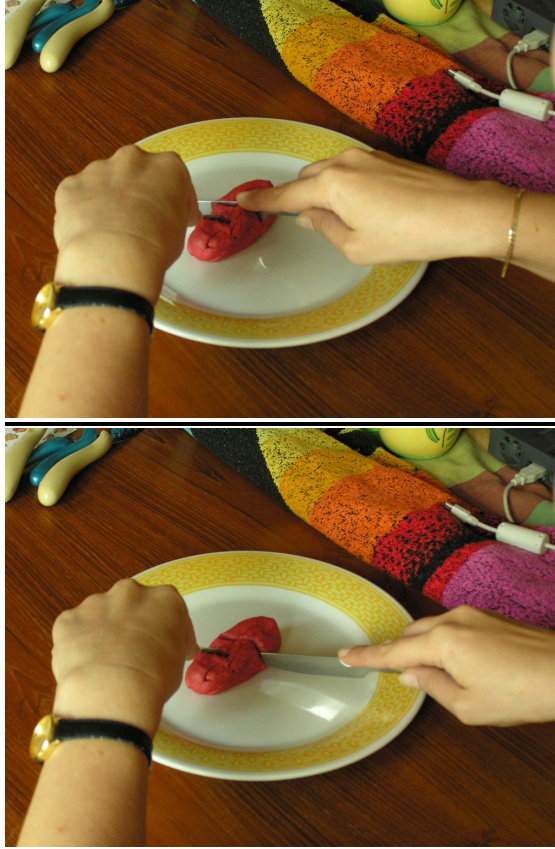
2. Spear the food with the fork first - making sure that it stays steady. Initially it may help to angle the fork almost vertically- in time this angle should reduce as they learn to exert the correct pressure.



3. Position the knife onto the food roughly 1cm away from the end of the fork. Make sure that the knife is not trapped underneath the fork. Also make sure that the teeth of the knife are facing down.



4. Produce a forwards-backwards motion with the knife ("like a saw"); making sure the fork stays still. Children often tend to tear food apart with their knife - again prompt them (first verbally and then with hand over hand) to go "forwards" and "backwards". Keep the knife in an upright position.



Sometimes children that are acquiring this skill tend to adopt a "chicken wing appearance" (elbows out). Encourage them to keep their elbows nearer their body. This may take time to learn - initially concentrate on the correct positioning of cutlery.

Your child may require plenty of gentle prompts during this process. It can be useful to ask them to put down their knife and fork and pick them up again if their positioning tends to slip. Asking them to pass you the salt/pepper can be a sneaky way of helping them to do this!

How can I stop knife and fork slipping around in their hands?

Sometimes normal cutlery can be quite big/ narrow for children's hands. You may want to try using cutlery with thicker handles to provide a better grip. Training cutlery can be useful to use for a while as they are tailored for smaller hands and have specific rests for the index fingers. Sets of training cutlery (knife, fork and spoon) are available from Boots for around £6. For larger hands "Caring Cutlery" can be bought from the "Disabled care and Mobility shop" (514 Cricklade Road, Swindon Tel: 01793 70313.)



What about mealtimes at school?

If you have found specific cutlery/ techniques that work well you may want to discuss sending these into school. You should discuss this with your child and teacher first.

My child often forgets how to hold the cutlery - even though I have just showed them?

It can be useful to have an additional prompt to assist them. The training cutlery mentioned above can be useful as there is a specific place for index fingers, however you can also place stickers on the correct points to direct them (please refer to the previous photo). Using stickers with different textures can sometimes be useful -for example a piece of Band-Aid, sandpaper, elastic band wound around the handle.

What about Lefties?

Start by showing them the conventional method (as described above) so that they know the correct positioning and general techniques. Don't be too concerned if they change hands - as long as they are consistent with use once they have found what is comfortable for them. Allow them some time initially to experiment as to which hand is more comfortable.

It is too difficult to focus on this every mealtime - what can we do?

- Agreeing set practise times with your child can be beneficial.
- Use play times to practise e.g. Playdoh, cookie dough, snacks (for example cutting up fruit or chocolate)
- Quiet time alone with your child to practise without distractions.
- Parents and siblings are important role models. Praise other siblings and your child when they are attempting the correct method.
- Avoid negative comments- rather provide a demonstration of what you are expecting or suggest alternative strategies. For example " you may find it easier if you put your fork in first"
- Spending time on this area will help it to improve.

SCOOPING

1. When scooping, ensure that the fork prongs are positioned flat/ snugly against the plate. (It may be beneficial to practise tilting the fork so your child learns the best angle for positioning).



2. Gently use the knife to "dribble" the food onto the fork. This needs to be done SLOWLY.



3. Keep the fork prongs horizontal to ensure the food doesn't fall off on the way to the mouth!

