

Using a knife and fork

All children in reception, year 1 and year 2 are entitled to a healthy, free school meal. School meals must adhere to the school food standards which are intended to help children develop healthy eating habits and ensure that they get the energy and nutrition they need across the whole school day.

School meals provide a wide range of foods across the week which are both delicious and nutritious. Variety is key – your child can try different fruits, vegetables, grains, pulses or types of meat and fish. Lunch times are an important part of your child's school day. It is an opportunity for them to socialise and sit with their friends. It is also important that your child is able to use a knife and fork and be able to sit at a table confidently so that he/she can enjoy their school lunches.

This leaflet provides general advice to parents and carers whose child/ren find it difficult to use a knife and fork. Learning how to use a knife and fork will help your child become more independent at meal times.

Some simple specific activities may help.



Making a mark with Tippex on the knife and fork can help remind your child where their first finger should be placed. We sometimes call the first finger “Peter Pointer.”

Encourage your child to hold the knife and fork as shown here, with the first finger resting on top of the knife and fork. Some children may prefer to hold the cutlery 'left handed'.



The next step is to put the fork into the food.



Next, leaving a small gap, cut with the knife using a sawing action.



How to practise using a knife

Initially it can be helpful for your child to practise using just a knife with no fork. It can help to practise away from meal times when there are fewer distractions.

- Practise with Plasticine or Playdough instead of real food.
- Make a roll in Plasticine or Playdough.
- Your child should hold the roll with one hand, just beside where the cut will be made; keeping fingers a suitable distance from the knife.
- They should use the same hand they would use to hold a pencil, to pick-up the knife. Now, placing the knife on the roll beside their other hand, a suitable distance from their fingers, they should cut through the roll.
- It may be easier for your child to put the knife down to move their grip on the roll before making another cut. This can be repeated until four or five pieces have been made.

How to practise using a knife and fork

To introduce a fork, it may be easier to use shorter pieces of Plasticine or Playdough. Place these on a flat board and concentrate on cutting them in half.

- Your child should leave the knife on the table, pick-up the fork and push it into the Plasticine or Playdough, near where the cut is to be made.
- Holding it still with the fork, your child should pick up their knife and cut through the piece.
- Use a longer roll to make several cuts.
- Progress to putting the Plasticine or Playdough pieces on a plate rather than on a flat board.
- Place a non-slip mat under plate to keep it from moving.

Other ways to help

- Practise with foods such as sausages, chips, carrots and fish fingers that are longer and therefore easier to cut.
- Encourage your child to cut the food at the beginning of the meal. Offer help towards the end when they get tired.
- Ideas that will help:
 - Pretend cutting toy food and vegetables that are attached together with Velcro
 - Hold a tea party
 - Let your child help with baking and cutting pastry
 - Let your child cut up soft fruits such as bananas with or without their skins.

