



Anthony Wayne Local Schools GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Partnering with Families for Future Ready Students

Fostering Mealtime Independence at School

Opening a milk carton can be difficult from time to time, or a stubborn banana just won't peel. It happens to all of us. But school staff are seeing an increase in the number of students who are asking for help in the cafeteria.

"We are finding that many children are struggling to complete mealtime tasks like opening juice boxes and spreading toppings," said Megan Menchaca, AWLS Food Service Director.

While the cafeteria aides and food services staff are happy to help students with the occasional hard-to-open package, parents can also help their children develop the skills to independently enjoy mealtime without the frustration of waiting for help.



"When students lack the hand strength, dexterity and coordination to complete activities, it can limit their ability to be independent at home, at school and in the community," said Rachel Meinert, OTD, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist at Whitehouse Primary. "They tend to tire more easily when working on schoolwork, need more assistance when dressing and need more help when eating."

You can help by encouraging your child to practice opening cheese sticks, fruit cups and water bottles, cutting their own food and spreading toppings on bagels during meal and snack times at home. There are also many other fun and easy activities that kids can do help build the strength, motor skills and perseverance to be more independent. Keep reading for a few ideas.

Foundational Skill: Fine Motor Development

What it means: Using the smaller muscles of the hand in conjunction with the brain and nervous system for precise and coordinated movements of the hands and fingers.

Why it is important: Developing fine motor skills helps children to complete daily tasks such as eating, writing, manipulating objects and getting dressed.

How to practice:



Cook with your child, letting them open containers, and measure, mix, stir, slice and spread ingredients...and wash the dishes



Draw and color with your child, play tic tac toe, complete mazes and puzzles, make paper airplanes and other crafts



Build with LEGO or other blocks, play board games, play typing games, use tools like screwdrivers and hammers with supervision

Foundational Skill: Finger and Hand Strength

What it means: Just as it sounds, building strong hands and fingers make many tasks easier.

Why it is important: Many everyday activities such as writing, cutting food, climbing on the playground and manipulating zippers and buttons require strong hands and fingers.

HOW TO PRACTICE:



Open PlayDoh containers and squeeze/squish/form it into shapes, squeeze stress balls and wring sponges, pop bubble wrap.



Use the garden hose or sprayers to water plants or help wash the car. Play with toys that squirt water in the bath or pool.



Play catch with a ball or Frisbee, steer the handlebars of a bike or scooter, climb on the playground and push and pull objects.

Foundational Skill: Bilateral Hand Use

What it means: Using both hands together, simultaneously and independently to complete a task.

Why it is important: Most activities, such as peeling an orange and tying our shoes are more easily completed when using both hands.

HOW TO PRACTICE:



Use scissors to cut, or tear pictures out of a magazine to make a collage, create art out of odds and ends, sharpen pencils



Teach your child how to fold laundry, wash dishes, brush the family pet, or complete other chores that use both hands



Encourage your child to tie their own shoes, zip their coat, pack their backpack and practice other self-care skills.

Have questions? Concerned about your child?

Speak with your child's teacher, principal, counselor, or physician.
or contact:

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About General Knowledge

Feedback from AW families indicated they want more information about how to support their child's academic learning, personal skills and development at home. What topics would you like to see covered? Send your ideas to communications@anthonywayneschools.org.



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www.AnthonyWayneSchools.org

*Anthony Wayne Local Schools
empowers students
to be future ready!*