The importance of scissor skills:

Each child comes to school with varying experiences with scissors—some can cut proficiently and some have never held a pair of scissors. Cutting is used in the early school years for a variety of assignments. Cutting skills also carry over to many daily skills that may be needed over a lifetime—such as cutting out coupons, permission slips, trimming meat, and even using tongs to pick up food from a buffet.

A typical scissors grasp is with the middle finger and thumb in the scissor loops stabilized by the index finger and resting the loops near the bent middle joints of the fingers. The thumb should be facing up towards the ceiling.

Stages of scissor development:
1. The child shows an interest in cutting.
2. Holds scissors correctly.
3. Able to open and close scissors.
4. Snip paper.
5. Cut paper in half.
6. Cut straight lines.
7. Cut out geometric shapes.
8. Cut out simple figures.
10. Cut non-paper items.

Activities you can do to encourage scissor skills:

- Use of index cards, oak-tag, old file folders, fine grade sandpaper, construction paper or thicker type of paper for the children to practice cutting (these will not bend as much as regular paper and is easier to cut).

- Allow opportunities to play with or do crafts with a variety of tweezers, tongs, squirt toys, paper hole punchers, eye droppers, etc. These manipulatives promote the muscles in the hands that are needed for cutting. These also help promote the opening and closing movement needed for cutting.

- Use of cardboard shapes, craft sticks, sandpaper, puffy paint to make tactile borders so the child is not able to cut into the shape in which they are cutting.

- Have the child cut from “dot to dot”—you can use stickers, stamps, etc. for a variety of targets.

- Make a cutting center—you can use a hard plastic Kiddie pool, sandbox, or a Rubber-maid under the bed box filled with various types of paper and media for the children to practice cutting. The center helps keep the mess contained and the lid can be placed on the top when it is not in use.

- Use cardboard or a file folder to make a template in which the child needs to cut within.

- Have the child practice cutting play-dough snakes.

- Have the child squeeze “stress” type balls, play-dough, water out of a washcloth or sponge.

- Have the child snip straws to make a necklace or a picture using the straws.

- Provide opportunities to manipulate spring clothespins—this can be on the edge of a box, on a clothesline, to clip papers to an easel or use in playing math/language games.

- Provide opportunities for crafts that include tearing of paper or wadding paper (i.e. Tissue paper).

ADAPTATIONS FOR CUTTING:

- If the child cuts with his arms in the air have him/her lay on their tummy to cut (this will provide stability to their arms for cutting). You can also have the children sit in chairs that provide high back support. Also, cue the child to keep their forearms on the table/desk.

- If the child bends or tears the paper try using thicker paper or wrap the loops of the scissors with yarn or rubber-bands. This will promote shorter, more precise motions.

- If the child has difficulty closing the scissors, wrap a rubber-band around the opening of the scissors to provide more input to their nervous system when opening and closing the scissors.

- If opening the scissors is a problem try loop scissors.

- If you still have problems teaching the child to cut, talk to your occupational therapist for more suggestions.