

Make a Paper Chain

Despite the somewhat terrifying image of sharp blades in your child's tiny hands, hoist over those scissors, parents! Cutting paper doesn't have to be dangerous, and it helps kids strengthen the small hand muscles they'll need to eventually write. You don't need to wait for Christmas to hang garlands around the house. Here's a fun activity that will help your child learn to cut on a line and help you to overcome your scissor fears.



What You Need:

- Pair of child-safe scissors
- Pad of construction paper
- Markers
- Ruler or straight edge
- Glue stick or glue bottle

What You Do:

1. Using your straight edge or ruler and a thick marker, draw lines from one end of a piece of construction paper to the other, about 1 inch apart. You can draw the lines horizontally or vertically depending on how long you want your strips to be. Long strips will create wider links, and a looser paper chain. Short strips will create smaller links. Why use a thick marker? Because these lines will serve as your child's cutting guides: if the lines are too thin, it will be difficult for your child to cut on them.
2. Keep in mind that you have a new scissor user on your hands. Show him how to hold the scissors and how to open and close them. Squeeze your fingers in for a little hand-over-hand assistance at the beginning. It won't be long before your child gets the hang of it. Let him cut the strips you've outlined and pile them up beside you for future use.
3. You've got your strips. Now what should you do with them? A paper chain of different colors is interesting in and of itself, and your preschooler will probably love hanging it from his ceiling. But you can add something extra to this activity by writing something on each link in the chain. For example, launch a Read-a-Thon and challenge your child to read 50 books by the end of the month. Then, each time you read a book together, write the title on a strip of paper, and glue one end of the strip to the other end. Do the same thing the next night and then slide the new strip through your other loop/ring, and glue its ends together. Voila! You've got the first two links for your paper chain. Continue in the same fashion until you have fifty books! Then hang up the chain and give your kid full bragging rights.

Paper chains are a great way to inspire creativity and spark discussion. For young preschoolers, you'll probably need to do the writing for them, but they'll enjoy being part of the process. As kids get older, they may want to take a crack at doing some of the lettering themselves. Here are some other ideas for what you can write on the strips:

- Have your child think about what he's thankful for, and write each thing on its own strip.
- For Earth Day, use each link to name something that you can recycle at your house.
- Ask your child to brainstorm the names of all the people who love her.
- Make a chain of your child's "favorite things".

So there you have it—paper chains. Time to start cutting!