The Importance of Environment and Personal Factors

The environment affects how a child will perform gross motor functions. For instance, a child may walk without assistance in the house where there is a level floor but may need an assistive device when walking in the park where the environment is less predictable. Also, a child may show preference for one form of transportation. These all influence how the therapist may classify the child. It is important to have a good understanding of what preferences your child may have and how the environment influences him or her, and give this information to your child’s physical therapist.

Between 2nd and 4th Birthday:
Level I:
• Sits without help
• Prefers to walk without assistance and can get into standing position

Level II:
• Some problems sitting balanced; may need to use hands to support self
• Can pull self into standing position
• Can crawl but needs assistive mobility device to walk

Level III:
• Often sits with legs in a “W”
• Creeps on stomach or crawls
• May pull on something to stand but limited movement while standing
• May walk with assistance for short distances.

Level IV:
• Cannot stay balanced alone
• Aid needed for sitting and standing
• Can crawl, creep, roll for short distances

Level V:
• Little control of motion
• Cannot keep posture
• All motor function is limited
• No independent movement, transported.

My Child Has Cerebral Palsy

A Guide to Understanding the Gross Motor Function Classification System (Expanded and Revised) of Cerebral Palsy for Children 4 and Under
The main classification for the intensity of cerebral palsy is called the Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) and consists of 5 distinct levels. Additionally, the creators of the GMFCS break down each level by age. Environmental and personal factors influence gross motor function and are also taken into account when defining what level a child is classified as.

The Expanded and Revised version of the GMFCS (GMFCS-E&R), which has been proven to be valid and reliable, is what will be described in this brochure.

General trends for levels:
Level I - able to walk
Level II - walks with limitations
Level III - hand-held mobility device needed to walk
Level IV - limited self-mobility, use of powered mobility
Level V - transported in wheelchair

What are some important definitions?
Mobility Devices – used to aid in movement
- Body support walker – supports pelvis and trunk
- Hand-held mobility device – canes, crutches, etc. Do not support the trunk
- Physical assistance – another person helps child move
- Powered mobility – a joystick or switch activates the machine to move
- Self-propelled manual wheelchair – child able to move normal wheelchair
- Transported – another person moves wheelchair for child
- Wheeled mobility – any type of device with wheels

What are the Levels
Before 2nd Birthday:
Level I:
- Can sit without help
- Crawl on hands and knees
- Pull to stand and take steps holding furniture
- Should begin walking 18 months-2 years.
Level II:
- May need to use hands to support self when sitting
- Can creep on stomach or crawl
- Pulls on something to stand
- Can take steps using furniture for stability
Level III:
- Back must be supported to sit
- Can roll and creep
Level IV:
- Head control but needs trunk support
- Can roll to back but may not be able to roll to stomach
Level V:
- Limited control of movement
- Requires help to roll