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.

Level IV:
- Needs support to sit
- Can move in and out of seat with assistance or something to hold onto
- At best: walks with walker and adult for short distances
- Transported for long distances
- May use powered mobility

Level V:
- Restricted and uncontrolled movements
- Limited in all areas of function
- Cannot achieve independent mobility and is always transported
- Some may use powered mobility with personalized qualities

My Child Has Cerebral Palsy

A Guide to Understanding the Gross Motor Function Classification System (Expanded and Revised) of Cerebral Palsy for Children Between 4th and 6th Birthday
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
- Transformed – another person moves wheelchair for child
- Wheeled mobility – any type of device with wheels

What are the Levels
Between 4th and 6th Birthday:
Level I:
- Can walk in all environments
- Can get into and out of a chair alone
- Can climb stairs
- Begins showing abilities to run and jump

Level II:
- Can sit without assistance
- Can change position using something to help stabilize or balance
- Can walk without assistive device inside and for short times
- Can climb stairs if using railing
- Cannot run or jump

Level III:
- Can sit with support
- Can change position if able to push or pull on stable object
- Walks using hand-held mobility device
- Can climb stairs with assistance
- Transported for long durations