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. 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:
- Wheeled mobility
- Needs adaptive seating
- Transferring positions need assistance from 1-2 people
- May walk with physical assistance, wheeled mobility, or body support walker inside
- Capable of using powered mobility
- Most are transported in manual wheelchair outside of the home
- Needs physical assistance and/or powered mobility to participate in sports or physical activity

My Child Has Cerebral Palsy

A Guide to Understanding the Gross Motor Function Classification System (Expanded and Revised) of Cerebral Palsy for Children Between 12th and 18th Birthday

Level V:
- Always transported in manual wheelchair
- Limited in ability to control movements of all limbs especially keeping head up
- Adaptive equipment for head and trunk support
- Assistance of 1-2 people needed to transfer, or mechanical lift
- May use powered mobility to allow for self mobility in addition to other adaptive equipment
- Extreme adaptive equipment needed to play sports or be active (in addition to powered wheelchair)
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 Between 12th and 18th Birthday:

Level I:
- Can walk in all environments
- Can walk over curbs and on stairs without help
- Can run and jump
- Limited speed, balance, and coordination
- May be in sports or other physical activities depending on personal choices

Level II:
- Can walk but struggles with long distances or uneven ground, inclines, or crowded areas
- Preference may influence choice in mobility
- Can walk up stairs using railing or help
- May need hand-held (at school) or wheeled mobility device (outdoors)
- May have limitations in gross motor skills that influence sports

Level III:
- Can walk with hand-held mobility device indoors
- Much variability in mobility method
- Position changes need adult assistance or extra stability
- May use self-propelled or powered wheelchair at school
- May need wheelchair for sports or activities