

# GMFCS – Level 5

## What Movements to Expect in Your Child with Cerebral Palsy (CP) up to Age 18

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There are 3 main ways to classify cerebral palsy (CP): by area of the body affected (topography), by atypical body movements and postures (movement disorder) and how they use their body to get around (gross motor function or functional mobility). This handout explains how CP is classified by gross motor function, which describes how people sit, stand, walk and do activities.

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### What is GMFCS?

The Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) is used to describe levels of functional mobility and gives children with CP a score or level to describe how they will get around as they grow up.

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### What do the levels mean?

The difference between levels is based on your child's ability, the need for devices like crutches, walkers, or wheelchairs and the quality of movement. Level 1 means less help is needed and Level 5 means more help is needed. There is a range of ability within each level.

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### What does Level 5 mean?

Children will be transported in chairs or standers throughout their life, and with increased supports, they may drive powered mobility. After a diagnosis, your child's level usually stays the same as they age. This tool may not be a predictor of your child's movements at all ages.

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## What can I expect at different ages for my child at Level 5?

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### Before age 2

- Have very limited control of movement
- Are unable to maintain head and body postures while laying and sitting
- Require adult help to move



### To Learn More

- Cerebral Palsy Program  
206-987-0199
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Age 2 to 4

- Have very limited control of movement
- Are unable to maintain head and body postures while laying and sitting
- Require adult help to move
- May not get enough help from adaptive technology to allow standing and sitting on their own
- May achieve self-mobility using a powered wheelchair with adaptations



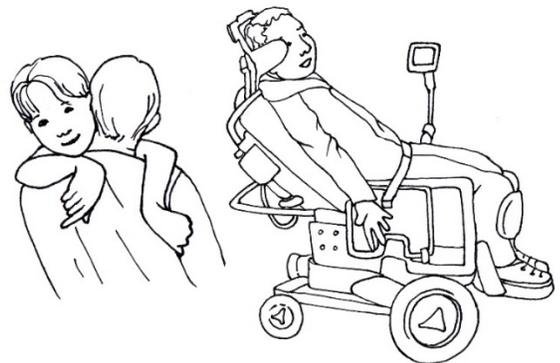
Age 4 to 6

- Have very limited control of movement
- Are unable to maintain head and body postures while laying and sitting
- Require adult help to move
- May not get enough help from adaptive technology to allow standing and sitting on their own
- May achieve self-mobility using a powered wheelchair with adaptations



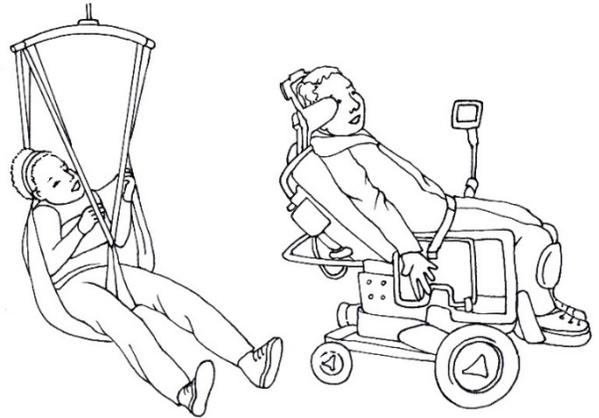
Age 6 to 12

- Are transported in a wheelchair in all settings
- Are limited in their ability to maintain head and body postures and control arm and leg movements
- Use assistive technology to improve head alignment, seating, standing and mobility
- Require adult help to move
- At home, may be able to move short distances on the floor
- May get around using powered mobility with adaptations
- Need adult help and powered mobility with adaptations to play physical games or sports



### Age 12 to 18

- Are transported in a wheelchair in all settings
- Are limited in their ability to maintain head and body postures and control arm and leg movements
- Use assistive technology to improve head alignment, seating, standing and mobility
- Need caregivers or a mechanical lift to move
- At home, may be able to move short distances on the floor
- May get around using powered mobility with adaptations
- Need adult help and powered mobility with adaptations to play physical games or sports



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### How can I help my child?

- In early years, support assisted standing to promote general health, improve bone development and prevent hip problems and loss of flexibility. This can be done with adaptive equipment like standers and good fitting wheelchairs.
- In later years, work with your provider to make sure you have all the equipment needed to complete daily life activities.

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### Where can I get more information?

You can read more about GMFCS at CanChild: [canchild.ca/en/resources/42-gross-motor-function-classification-system-expanded-revised-gmfcs-e-r](http://canchild.ca/en/resources/42-gross-motor-function-classification-system-expanded-revised-gmfcs-e-r)