

Children with Cerebral Palsy: Understanding the Challenges and Embracing Potential

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Description

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a neurological disorder that affects movement and muscle coordination. It is one of the most common childhood disabilities, with varying degrees of severity and types of impairments. Children with cerebral palsy face unique challenges in their daily lives, but with the right support and understanding, they can lead fulfilling and successful lives. This article aims to provide insights into cerebral palsy, its impact on children, and strategies for supporting their development and well-being.

For many families of children with CP, the experience of unmet social needs is often compounded by the additional needs of their child or young person and the complex systems and services that many families are required to navigate. Discrimination, access to education, and ableism are also SDH experienced by some people with disability; however, this was not reported in the published literature informing this narrative review. Thus, when it comes to addressing SDH, the priorities of families of children with CP will likely be different to families of children who do not have a physical disability. It is therefore crucial to involve people with a lived experience of CP in all phases of research and clinical service design. They bring their expertise and experience to ensure that potential solutions are sensitive, practical, align with family priorities, and are responsive to their needs. Ongoing partnerships with people with a lived experience of CP are critical and will ensure that potential research and clinical solutions adapt as children grow, as consumer priorities evolve, and as family circumstances change.

Understanding Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy is caused by abnormal development or damage to the brain, often occurring before or during birth, or in the early years of life. The condition affects muscle control and coordination, and its manifestations can vary widely. Some common types of cerebral palsy include:

Spastic CP: Spastic cerebral palsy is the most common type, characterized by increased muscle tone and stiffness. Children with spastic CP may experience muscle tightness, difficulty with precise movements, and may have mobility challenges.

Dyskinetic CP: Dyskinetic cerebral palsy involves involuntary and uncontrollable movements. Children with dyskinetic CP may have trouble controlling their body movements, leading to difficulties with coordination, speech, and fine motor skills.

Ataxic CP: Ataxic cerebral palsy affects balance and coordination. Children with ataxic CP may exhibit unsteady movements, tremors, and challenges with tasks that require precise control, such as writing or buttoning clothes.

Challenges and Impact on Children

Children with cerebral palsy face a range of challenges that can affect various aspects of their lives. Here are some common areas where children with cerebral palsy may encounter difficulties:

Motor Function and Mobility: Cerebral palsy primarily affects motor function, leading to challenges with movement, balance, and coordination. Some children may require assistive devices like wheelchairs, walkers, or braces to enhance their mobility and independence. Physical activities and tasks that require fine motor skills, such as writing or self-care, may be more challenging.

Communication and Speech: Communication difficulties are common among children with cerebral palsy. Impaired muscle control may affect the muscles involved in speech production, resulting in speech delays, unclear speech, or difficulties with articulation. Alternative communication methods, such as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), may be used to facilitate effective communication.

Activities of Daily Living: Activities of daily living (ADLs) encompass tasks such as dressing, eating, grooming, and personal hygiene. Children with cerebral palsy may require assistance or adaptive strategies to perform these tasks independently. Occupational therapy can help develop skills and strategies for ADLs, promoting increased independence and self-care abilities.

Education and Learning: Cerebral palsy can impact a child's ability to participate fully in educational settings. Challenges with motor skills, communication, and sensory integration may require modifications to the learning environment, curriculum, or teaching strategies. Special education services, individualized

education plans (IEPs), and assistive technology can support educational goals and inclusion.

Supporting children with cerebral palsy involves a multidisciplinary approach that addresses their unique needs. Here are some strategies that can enhance their development and well-being:

Early Intervention: Early intervention is crucial for children with cerebral palsy. Identifying and addressing developmental delays at an early age can significantly improve outcomes. Early intervention programs may include therapies such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy, tailored to the individual child's needs.

Individualized Therapy: Therapies play a central role in supporting children with cerebral palsy. Physical therapy focuses on improving motor skills, coordination, and mobility. Occupational therapy targets activities of daily living, fine motor skills, and adaptive strategies. Speech therapy addresses communication challenges, including speech production, language development, and AAC.

Inclusive Education: Inclusive education promotes the integration of children with cerebral palsy into mainstream classrooms, providing them with opportunities for social

interaction, peer support, and academic growth. Collaboration among teachers, special education professionals, and parents is essential to create inclusive environments and implement appropriate accommodations.

Children with cerebral palsy possess unique strengths, abilities, and potential. While they may face challenges in various aspects of their lives, understanding their needs and providing the right support can help them thrive. Through early intervention, individualized therapies, assistive technology, and inclusive education, we can create an inclusive society that embraces the abilities and contributions of children with cerebral palsy. With the right support and opportunities, children with cerebral palsy can overcome challenges and achieve their full potential.

Understanding the influence of SDH on health and social outcomes for children with CP is a critical step towards improving health equity and health outcomes, and supporting children with CP and their families to participate in society. SDH can be barriers or enablers for children with CP in achieving their full potential. Clinicians, researchers, and sectors (health, social, and policy) are encouraged to consider how they can take action on SDH and collaborate to implement solutions (big and small) to improve the health and well-being of children with CP.