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Developmental Motor Problems: Understanding the Challenges and Seeking Intervention

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Description

Motor development is a crucial aspect of a child's growth, enabling them to explore their environment, interact with others, and perform daily activities. However, some children may experience difficulties in acquiring and refining motor skills, leading to developmental motor problems. In this article, we will explore developmental motor problems, their impact on a child's daily life, and strategies for intervention and support.

Movement difficulties were assessed and classified using the Movement Assessment Battery for Children, Second Edition (MABC-2), a validated test previously used in high-risk populations such as children born extremely preterm. It considers performance on eight motor tasks in three domains: manual dexterity; aiming and catching; and balance. All tasks are summed and converted to an age-adjusted centile score and classified into: no movement difficulties (>15th centile); at risk of movement difficulties (6th–15th centile); and significant movement difficulties (≤5th centile). Because national norms do not exist in all countries, we applied UK norms, which were originally developed for the test and are most commonly used to derive centile scores for all children. The MABC-2 was administered by trained psychologists or physiotherapists in local routine follow-up programmes where available (Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden), or in the SHIPS research teams (other countries). Common data collection guidelines and a core data collection form were developed to standardize procedures and reporting.

Information on CP diagnosis was reported by parents in the 5-year questionnaire, except in France where CP diagnosis was ascertained during a medical visit.

Understanding Developmental Motor Problems

Developmental motor problems, also known as motor coordination disorders or developmental coordination disorder (DCD), are characterized by difficulties in performing coordinated movements and acquiring age-appropriate motor skills. These difficulties are not due to intellectual or sensory impairments, and they significantly impact a child's ability to engage in activities that require motor coordination. Let's explore some common characteristics of developmental motor problems:

Delayed Milestones: Children with developmental motor problems may exhibit delays in reaching motor milestones. They may take longer to sit, crawl, walk, or perform other gross motor skills compared to their peers. These delays may become more noticeable as the child grows older and is expected to acquire more complex motor abilities.

Poor Motor Coordination: Children with developmental motor problems often struggle with motor coordination, making it challenging to perform precise movements or sequences of actions. They may have difficulty with tasks such as tying shoelaces, using utensils, catching or throwing a ball, or coordinating movements in activities like dancing or playing sports.

Fine Motor Difficulties: Fine motor skills involve the coordination of small muscles, such as those in the hands and fingers. Children with developmental motor problems may struggle with tasks that require fine motor control, such as writing, drawing, cutting with scissors, or manipulating small objects. They may have difficulty with hand-eye coordination and dexterity.

Balance and Posture Issues: Maintaining balance and appropriate posture can be challenging for children with developmental motor problems. They may have a tendency to trip or stumble frequently, experience difficulties with activities that require balance (e.g., riding a bicycle), or have poor body awareness and spatial orientation.

Impact of Developmental Motor Problems

Developmental motor problems can significantly impact a child's daily life and overall development. Here are some areas where children with motor coordination difficulties may face challenges:

Academic Performance: Fine motor difficulties can affect tasks such as writing, drawing, and manipulating small objects, which are essential for academic activities. These challenges may

impact handwriting legibility, completing worksheets or assignments, and participating in activities that involve fine motor skills, such as art projects or science experiments.

Physical Activities and Sports: Participation in physical activities and sports may be challenging for children with developmental motor problems. Difficulties with coordination, balance, and motor skills can affect their ability to engage in activities such as running, jumping, catching, or throwing a ball. This may lead to reduced participation in physical education classes or extracurricular activities.

Self-Care Tasks: Developmental motor problems can impact self-care tasks that require fine motor skills, such as dressing, grooming, and feeding oneself. Difficulties with buttoning clothes, tying shoelaces, using utensils, or fastening zippers may lead to frustration, dependence on others, and a negative impact on self-esteem.

Strategies for Intervention and Support: Intervention and support can significantly improve the motor skills and overall functioning of children with developmental motor problems. Here are some strategies to consider:

Occupational Therapy: Occupational therapy is a key intervention for children with developmental motor problems. Occupational therapists can assess a child's motor skills, identify specific areas of difficulty, and provide targeted interventions to improve motor coordination and skill development. Therapy may include exercises, activities, and games that focus on balance, coordination, fine motor control, and sensory integration.

Environmental Modifications: Modifying the environment can help support children with developmental motor problems. This can include providing adaptive equipment or tools, such as pencil grips, specialized scissors, or assistive devices for activities like writing or drawing. Creating an organized and clutter-free environment can also help minimize distractions and improve focus.

Skill-Building Activities: Engaging children in activities that target specific motor skills can be beneficial. This may include activities that promote hand-eye coordination, balance, bilateral coordination, or fine motor control. Examples include playing with construction toys, practicing catching or throwing balls, using manipulatives like beads or puzzles, or engaging in art and craft activities.

Collaboration with School and Teachers: Collaborating with teachers and school staff can help ensure that appropriate accommodations and support are provided within the educational setting. This may involve implementing assistive technology, providing extra time for assignments or tests, or modifying tasks to accommodate motor difficulties.

Developmental motor problems can significantly impact a child's motor coordination, daily activities, and overall functioning. However, with early identification and appropriate intervention, children with developmental motor problems can make significant progress and improve their motor skills. By implementing strategies such as occupational therapy, environmental modifications, skill-building activities, and collaboration with schools, we can support children in overcoming motor coordination difficulties and achieving their full potential.