2 Motor Development in Early Childhood

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EB is a serious condition, which depending on its form, influences many parts of the body. Until now, occupational therapy (OT) intervention has usually concentrated on hand function, which may be extremely limited, especially in JEB and DEB. The overall motor development has probably been largely neglected because of all the other problems.

It is easy to understand that blisters and wounds covering the body have a significant influence on early physical movement and can limit a child’s exploration of its environment. Considering the value of this early basic experience and the influence on further development, it deserves greater therapeutic attention.

Thinking along these lines, intervention for children with EB has been extended beyond hand and grip function to include the complete motor and perceptual development.

2.1 Motor Development Screening

It has proved expedient to carry out gross motor development screening in children with EB aged between 18 months and 4 years. Only with increasing age of the children is the emphasis gradually shifted to the assessment of the tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive senses (see p. 29).

The milestones of motor development in early childhood as described, for example, by Largo (2007) can be used for orientation. The very wide range of ages at which early motor development manifests itself must, however, always be taken into consideration.

As a further support tool, a parental questionnaire on early motor development (see p. 18) can be used and the basic motor development steps and environmental exploration behaviour of the child recorded. The questionnaire has been especially adjusted for children with EB and enables therapists to gain an overall picture of possible developmental delays or deficits. This knowledge can then be used in planning the intervention.

2.1.1 Typical Development of Motor Ability

3–6 Months

Head control: At the age of 3 months an infant can raise his/her head to look ahead while lying face down. The child supports him-/herself on the elbows/forearms and begins to look at and follow objects. At 6 months the baby can turn his/her head to either side and look up and down while in this position.

A bimanual grip is first possible at approximately 3 to 5 months.

Active rolling over/support on hands when lying face down: Between 3 and 7 months infants roll over, first from their backs or fronts onto their sides. Then they roll from their fronts onto their backs, and finally from their backs onto their fronts (cf. Largo 2007).

An important milestone in the development is firstly the support on the forearms at approximately 6 months, then support on the hands while lying face down (like a ‘press-up’). In this position the infant can raise most of the thorax away from the surface he/she