**Description of Information Needed from Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals**

*[NOTE: The information in this document is taken directly from the SSA’s webpage on instructions for medical personnel. We reproduce it here so that the information can be easily located, printed and reviewed or provided to a healthcare professional who will help families with proper documentation of disability and severity.]*

*Social Security Administration, Office of Disability Programs, Professional Relations Branch, 4670 Annex Building, 6401 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21235 Publication No. 64-048; ICN 436930*

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SSA evaluates physical and mental impairments in children in terms of several domains of activity that together represent all aspects of a child's functioning. We need your opinion about how the child typically functions in these domains compared to children of the same age who do not have impairments. The descriptions of the domains below are drawn directly from our regulations and operating instructions.

**Acquiring and Using Information**

We consider how well a child:

* learns or acquires information, and
* uses the information he/she has learned.

Learning and thinking begin at birth. A child learns as he/she explores the world through sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. As a child plays, he/she acquires concepts and learns that people, things, and activities have names. This lets the child understand symbols, which prepares him/her to use language for learning. Using the concepts and symbols acquired through play and learning experiences, a child should be able to learn to read, write, do arithmetic, and understand and use new information.

Thinking is the application or use of information a child has learned. It involves being able to perceive relationships, reason, and make logical choices. People think in different ways. When a child thinks in pictures, he/she may solve a problem by watching and imitating what another person does. When a child thinks in words, he/she may solve a problem by using language to talk his/her way through it. A child must also be able to use language to think about the world and to understand others and express him or herself; e.g., to follow directions, ask for information or explain something.

**Attending and Completing Tasks**

We consider how well a child:

* is able to focus and maintain attention; and
* begins, carries through, and finishes activities, including the pace at which the child performs activities and the ease with which the child changes them.

Attention involves regulating levels of alertness and initiating and maintaining concentration. It involves the ability to filter out distractions and to remain focused on an activity or task at a consistent level of performance. This means focusing long enough to initiate and complete an activity or task, and changing focus once it is completed. It also means that if a child loses or changes focus in the middle of a task, he/she is able to return to it without other people having to remind him/her frequently to finish it.

Adequate attention is needed to maintain physical and mental effort and concentration on an activity or task. Adequate attention permits a child to think and reflect before starting or deciding to stop an activity. In other words, the child is able to look ahead and predict the outcome of his/her actions before acting. Focusing attention allows a child to attempt tasks at an appropriate pace. It also helps determine the time needed to finish a task within an appropriate timeframe.

 **Interacting and Relating with Others**

We consider how well a child:

* initiates and sustains emotional connections with others;
* develops and uses the language of his/her community;
* cooperates with others;
* complies with rules;
* responds to criticism; and
* respects and takes care of the possessions of others.

Interacting means initiating and responding to exchanges with other people, for practical or social purposes. A child interacts with others by using facial expressions, gestures, actions, or words. A child may interact with another person only once, as when asking a stranger for directions, or many times, as when describing his/her day at school to parents. A child may interact with people one-at-a-time, as when listening to another student in the hallway at school, or in groups, as when playing with others.

Relating to other people means forming intimate relationships with family members and with friends the same age, and sustaining them over time. A child may relate to individuals, siblings, parents or a best friend, or to groups, such as other children in childcare, friends in school, teammates in sports activities, or people in the neighborhood.

Interacting and relating requires a child to respond appropriately to a variety of emotional and behavioral cues. A child must be able to speak intelligibly and fluently so that others can understand; participate in verbal turn taking and nonverbal exchanges; consider others' feelings and points of view; follow social rules for interaction and conversation; and respond to others appropriately and meaningfully.

A child's activities at home or school or in the community may involve playing, learning, and working cooperatively with other children, one-at-a-time or in groups; joining voluntarily in activities with the other children in school or community; and responding to persons in authority (e.g., parents, teacher, bus driver, coach, employer).

**Moving About and Manipulating Objects**

We consider how well a child:

* moves his/her body from one place to another and;
* moves and manipulates things.

These are called gross and fine motor skills.

Moving one's body involves several different kinds of actions:
Rolling one's body; rising or pulling oneself from a sitting to a standing position; pushing oneself up; raising one's head, arms, legs, and twisting one's hands and feet; balancing one's weight on one's legs and feet; shifting weight while sitting or standing; transferring from one surface to another; lowering oneself to or toward the floor as when bending, kneeling, stooping, or crouching; moving oneself forward and backward in space as when crawling, walking, running, and negotiating different terrains (e.g., curbs, steps, hills).

Moving and manipulating things involves several different kinds of actions:
Engaging one's upper and lower body to push, pull, lift, or carry objects from one place to another; controlling shoulders, arms, and hands to hold or transfer objects; coordinating eyes and hands to manipulate small objects or parts of objects.

These actions require varying degrees of strength, coordination, dexterity, pace, and physical ability to persist at the task. They also require a sense of where one's body is and how it moves in space; the integration of sensory input with motor output; and the capacity to plan, remember, and execute controlled motor movements.

**Caring For Yourself**

We consider how well a child:

* maintains a healthy emotional and physical state, including how well the child gets his/her physical and emotional wants and needs met in appropriate ways;
* copes with stress and changes in the environment; and
* takes care of his/her own health, possessions, and living area.

Caring for and regulating oneself effectively, with the degree of independence appropriate to a child's age, depends upon the ability to respond to changes in emotions and daily demands of the environment. Caring for oneself is characterized by a sense of personal autonomy, or independence, and mastery, or competence. The effort to become independent and competent should be observable at birth and should continue throughout childhood. Emotional well being requires a basic understanding of the body, including its normal functioning, and physical and emotional needs.

To meet these needs successfully, a child must employ effective coping strategies, appropriate to his/her age, to identify and regulate feelings, thoughts, urges, and intentions. Such strategies are based on taking responsibility for getting needs met in an appropriate and satisfactory manner. This includes establishing and maintaining adequate self-control when regulating responses to changes in moods and environment, and developing appropriate means to delay gratification.

Caring for and regulating oneself means becoming increasingly independent in making and following one's own decisions. This entails relying on one's abilities and skills, and displaying consistent judgment about the consequences of caring for oneself. As a child matures, using and testing his/her own judgment helps develop confidence in independence and competence.

**Health and Physical Well-being**

We consider the cumulative physical effects of-

* physical or mental impairments, and
* their associated treatments or therapies on a child's functioning.

A physical or mental disorder may have physical effects that vary in kind and intensity, and may make it difficult for a child to perform activities independently or effectively. A child may experience problems such as generalized weakness, dizziness, shortness of breath, reduced stamina, fatigue, psychomotor retardation, allergic reactions, recurrent infection, poor growth, bladder or bowel incontinence, or local or generalized pain. A child may have difficulty with senses, including reduced hearing or visual acuity.

In addition, the medications a child takes (e.g., for asthma, depression) or the treatment a child receives (e.g., chemotherapy, multiple surgeries) may have physical effects that also limit performance of activities.

A child's illness may be chronic with stable symptoms, or episodic with periods of worsening and improvement. We will consider how a child functions during periods of worsening and how often and for how long these periods occur. A child may be medically fragile and need intensive medical care to maintain his/her level of health and physical well being. In any case, as a result of the illness itself, the medications or treatment a child receives, or both, he/she may experience physical effects that interfere with functioning in any or all activities.

All requests for this information will be accompanied by a release-of-information form signed by a parent or guardian (and/or by the child, if appropriate).