



# Transitioning of Young Children with Disabilities

Every year thousands of children with special needs move from one type of early childhood program to another. Although transition is a normal and anticipated part of every child's life, it is a stressful and worrisome period for parents of children with disabilities.

## What is transition?

Transition is the process of moving a child from one location or program to another. For children with disabilities, transition is a coordinated set of activities designed to promote a smooth transfer of a child from one service setting or delivery system to another without an interruption in their services. Transitions for young children with "special needs" can occur at a number of points; for instance, when the child moves:

- from the hospital to the family's home
- from care in the home to infant/toddler early intervention services
- from infant/toddler services to preschool
- from preschool to kindergarten and elementary school

## The law and transition

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, all states must develop a transition policy for all children with special needs. The law requires that a transition plan be developed for any child with an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) when the child is between 30 and 33 months of age. The Service Coordinator, designated in the IFSP, from the "sending" agency is responsible for planning and coordinating the transition plan.

It is important to know that you should obtain written consent from the child's parents before sharing any information about a child with any person outside of the child care program.

## There are four stages in implementing a Transition Plan

1. Stage one: The initial plan occurs when the family and the service provider get together and discuss the transition plan.
2. Stage two: The child will be re-assessed to figure out his /her progress according to the goals in the child's IFSP or Individual Education Plan (IEP).
3. Stage three: The child's family and the child care provider from the current (sending) program get familiar with the new (receiving) program. Open communication between the family and the new program's administrator and teacher begins.
4. Stage four: The transition plan is evaluated for its efficiency.

## At what age must young children have a Transition Plan?

When children reach the age of three, they are no longer eligible for services from the "Birth to Three" system (provided for in Part C of IDEA), and begin receiving services from the local school district (provided for in Part B of IDEA).

Federal and state regulations require that the first transition plan be developed by the time the child is two years six months of age. The transition plan should specify when the child's IEP meeting will take place. This will give parents sufficient time to advocate and discuss placement for the child in a preschool program. The child must have an individualized education program (IEP) in place by his/her third birthday.

The second important transition happens when a child is approximately six years old and about to transition to kindergarten. Again, as occurred at age three, all children with special needs should be re-evaluated for appropriate placement prior to transitioning to a new program. If the results of the re-evaluation indicate

that the child is no longer eligible for special needs services, his/her transition will be followed like that of a typically developing child. But, if the results show that the child is still qualified to receive special education services then the service provider should plan for the child's transition to inclusive kindergarten. It is important at this point that the parent and service provider meet and plan these transition events. This also serves as continuous monitoring process.

## Transitioning children with special needs from a preschool program to kindergarten

The end of the preschool program occurs with the beginning of kindergarten, which is the first step to formal education. The transition to kindergarten marks a milestone in the lives of children and their families. Transitioning a child with "special needs" to kindergarten should also be a collaborative process with the parent and service provider in order to make the process as smooth as possible. Similar to the transition from early intervention programs, the transition into kindergarten can be stressful and worrisome but it can also be an exciting and happy period of time for children and their families. An appropriate re-evaluation must be conducted before the child enters kindergarten to determine whether the child needs further special education and should have an updated IEP in place. Transition planning should be included as part of the child's annual IEP.

## What is a child care provider's role and responsibility?

Child care providers are important members of the child's transition team. They can assist families by providing support, and preparing the child and family for the new program and change of services. Plan visits to the new program and accompany the family and child to the receiving program. Communicate with the new service providers regarding the child's strengths and needs.

## Who attends a transition planning conference?

It is up to the parent to invite and include any individual in the transition meeting. This might include the child's IEP team, members of multidisciplinary team, and/or caregivers. The appropriate educational and

related services professionals are the individuals who will be involved in developing the transition plan.

The place for the conference meeting should be central and based on parent's wish.

## Who coordinates the transition conference?

The term Service Coordinator or Transition Coordinator was first used in IDEA-1997 and introduced in early intervention laws. He or she is the primary contact person for service providers, parents, administrators, teachers, and other related services personnel for the program details, eligibility requirements, services, and resources.

## What are the components of a smooth transition?

- Parents are involved at every level of the decision making and planning process.
- The transition plan is developed in a timely manner with input from parents.
- Responsibilities are well defined and every member including parents are informed.
- The team is well informed about the new program.
- An agreement between the agencies has been developed and signed by appropriate administrators.
- The transition plan was developed with respect to family's culture and their home language
- A visit to the new setting is included in the plan.
- Transportation issues are explained clearly in the plan.

Although transition is a stressful time for both parents and children, with good planning this event could be a positive learning process for their advocacy.

## Resources and References

K. Eileen Allen and Glynnis E. Cowdery, *The Exceptional Child Inclusion in Early Childhood Education*, 5th Edition, 2004, pages 386-399

Janet W. Lerner, Barbara Lowenthal, and Rosemary W. Egan, *Preschool Children with Special Needs*, Second Edition, 2005, pages 272-286

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

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