



KIT

"Keeping In Touch"

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Resource Article



Transitioning from early intervention to a new preschool involves change for the child, the parents, the sending providers, and the receiving program and providers. Considering everyone involved in the change and developing a transition plan early are essential elements to facilitating a smooth transition. But what should be considered when developing a transition plan? This month's KIT article "Entering a New Preschool: How service providers and families can ease the transition of children turning three who have special needs" includes several helpful strategies for preparing for the changes associated with transitioning from early intervention to preschool.

Long before the transition team members should begin planning. The planning process must be individualized for each child and family and include consideration of what is happening now and what needs to happen to help the child be successful in the new setting/program and to prepare the parents for the change. Children react differently to changes in their routines. Some children adjust easily while others have a difficult time separating from parents and navigating a group preschool experience. Anticipating adjustment challenges and implementing strategies to minimize adjustment struggles

are essential ingredients in transition planning.

This transition is a major change for parents too. Concerns parents have may include being away from their child for the first time, putting their child on a bus, building a trusting relationship with a new teacher, learning new program policies and practices, adjusting schedules, and "saying good-bye to the service providers who supported them during the period when they first learned about the special needs of their infant or toddler" (Donegan, Fink, Fowler, & Wischnowski, 1994, p. 2). Addressing parents' concerns and employing strategies to help parents work through these concerns are also key elements in transition planning.

In this month's KIT article, Donegan, Fink, Fowler, and Wischnowski (1994) describe six strategies critical to effective transition planning.



The first is to start the transition planning process early, even before the required six-month timeframe. Late or hurried planning can result in plugging the child into the only available classroom slot without time to determine what the child might need to be successful and without time to for the parents to make visits, meet teachers, and feel comfortable about the transition decision.

The next strategy is to use "positive forecasting," that is speaking positive about moving on to preschool and engaging the child in preparations for the transition, such as buying a new book bag.

Third is encouraging the child to ask questions and express fears. This includes using dramatic play and reading stories about starting school or going to day care for the first time. The authors include a list of books to prepare children for transition.

Engaging children in concrete experiences is the fourth strategy. Such experiences might include making visits to the receiving program, meeting the new teachers, participating in class activities, trying out the playground equipment, and meeting other children in the class. Inviting the receiving program staff on an early intervention visit is also helpful for both children and parents. Other concrete activities to consider are identifying a transitional object that the child can carry back and forth, helping the child learn to play with the types of toys available in the new program, learning songs and finger plays common in the new program, and having play dates with preschool classmates.

The fifth strategy is teaching the child specific skills and routines that will be useful in the new program. This might include learning how to put toys away, participating in play with peers, increasing independence with self-care skills, and increasing ability to transition between activities.

Communicating and sharing information between programs before the transition marks the sixth strategy. It is important for parents and early intervention providers to share information about the learning strategies that work well for the child. It is also important for receiving providers to share information about routines and expectations to prepare the child and his/her parents.



Following the transition, it is also important for the receiving program to apply strategies to facilitate the child's

successful adjustment. Donegan et al. (1994) describe four strategies that can be helpful. These include incorporating information shared from the sending program, maximizing parental involvement, and support during the entry and adjustment time, individualizing communication with the child's family, and adjusting expectations for the child's behavior (p. 7).

Individualized for children and families, these strategies form an excellent template for developing effective transition plans. As teams develop transition plans, they are encouraged to review and consider the six "before transition" strategies. The information included in this article is not only useful for the early intervention programs it is also useful for parents and receiving programs.

Donegan, M., Fink, D. B., Fowler, S. A., & Wischnowski, M. W. (1994). Entering a new preschool: How service providers and families can ease the transitions of children turning three who have special needs. FACTS/LRE University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Information Series #2. Retrieved from <http://facts.crc.uiuc.edu/facts2/facts2.html>

On the WWW

The web has many sites for sign language. Here are a few that have some useful features.

<http://www.signingtime.com>

The site above simply advertises sign language books and DVDs. The DVDs are particularly good for children. They are colorful and interesting and feature children doing the signs. Families love them as children enjoy watching them.

<https://www.babysigns.com>

The program that is available in many Child Development Centers throughout the military is described in the site above. It has a map that shows where to find certified instructors and classes. It also features articles about

signing to babies, the research and rational, that may be useful to share with parents who are concerned that learning to sign may decrease rather than increase oral speech.

<http://www.signwithme.com/default.asp>

Presented at this link are signs of most interest to young children. The signs are organized by categories. Also included is a description of how to do the sign, a video clip of someone doing the sign, and suggestions for when to use it.

<http://www.masterstech-home.com/ASLDict.html>

This final site is a complete dictionary of American Sign Language. It includes more than 1270 terms with animated and text definitions.

What Do the Data Say?



What percentage of children eligible for EDIS early intervention services are receiving supports and services per their initial IFSP, second, or third IFSP?

To answer this question Special Needs Program Management Information System (SNPMIS) data for the past DoD reporting years (01 July 2007 to 30 June 2008) were examined.

Based upon children's last IFSP in the DoD reporting year 2007-2008, the vast majority (81%) of children and families were served per their initial IFSP. Only 16% were served per their second IFSP, and 3% were served per their third IFSP. Considering the data reported in last month's KIT (the mean length of time in program is 10.6 months) it is not surprising that the majority of services are being provided per initial IFSPs.



Consultation Corner



This section of the KIT features consultation, in the form of questions and answers, from national experts and leaders in the field of early intervention.

From June through September 2008, the Consultation Corner will feature Dr. Beth Rous and Caroline Gooden responding to questions related to our focus topic:

Transition from EI to Preschool

Q: What strategies do you recommend for identifying families' needs related to the transition from early intervention to their next placement?

A: Research conducted through NECTC with families and providers has resulted in the identification and national validation of key practices and related strategies that can assist families and children as they transition. These practices include:

Develop transition plans that include individual activities for each child and family. *Potential Strategies that reflect this practice:*

- Use a family services notebook or handbook with a section for medical information, IFSPs, agencies, and EI staff names to organize all papers and introduce families to services system.
- Have family and providers visit public school and programs after eligibility determination.
- Invite children in EI to a play group time/visitation for observation.
- Develop more individualized education plans and following through with IEPs.
- Offer visits to the new school prior to transition for personal introduction of child

and family to new environment (e.g., 1:1 visit, small group visit, NOT open house).

- Implement gradual transition into preschool with specific goals and objectives.
- Have more visits by family to preschool prior to transition as part of transition.
- Conduct comprehensive planning to discuss the child's and family's specialized needs.
- Personalize the transition into schools with a more personal information sheet from teacher and parent to the new staff.
- With parent permission, share the transition referral packet containing the following types of information:
 - Pictures, social stories, primary reinforcers, strategies to implement/avoid, and videotape for the specific child.
 - With parent permission, provide a note with a picture and biography of the child (e.g., likes, dislikes) so everyone knows he/she is an individual. Include family information for introductions at planning (e.g., IFSP/IEP) meeting.
 - Forward teaching strategies for child to receiving teachers.
 - Write a parent report and place a picture of the child on the front of the report or include a note with a picture and biography of the child and family, for introduction to the new teacher.
 - Provide information on child and family before transition (e.g., number for whom to contact; numbers of previous teachers/service provider agencies).
 - Provide copies of reports for parents to share with school or agency.

Support families' awareness of the importance of transition planning and providing information they need to actively participate in transition planning with their child. *Potential Strategies that reflect this practice:*

- Simplify communication and information regarding transitions so they are clear and to the point (e.g., address different literacy levels and languages).
- Prior to transition, invite parents to orientation specifically for them.
- Provide parents with an information sheet with principal name, school name/address, and school phone number.
- Hold quarterly meetings/socials for parents, sending and receiving agencies, and community providers to plan for the transition and to answer any questions.
- Provide opportunities to meet with the receiving school staff prior to transition and include the regular education teacher.
- Inform and educate families on all possible placement options, and the procedures and expectations of the programs.
- Arrange for children and families to visit preschool programs.
- Explain information when it is not understood by the families.

Continuing Education For KIT Readers



The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for EDIS KIT readers.

In line with the focus on transition, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (June through September 2008) and completing a multiple choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

If you are interested, take the exam online at www.edis.army.mil and upon successful completion, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

Please send your Consultation Corner questions and KIT ideas via email to ediscspd@amedd.army.mil