

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Planning for Transition

Hanson, M.J., Beckman, P.J., Horn, E., Marquart, J., Sandall, S.R., Greig, D., & Brennan, E. (2000). Entering preschool: Family and professional experiences in this transition process. *Journal of Early Intervention, 23*(4), 279-293.

BOTTOM LINE

Through interviews with families and professionals, observations of their transition planning meetings, and analysis of their transition planning documents, researchers identified six key themes:

1. Transition as an event, not a process
2. The effect on families and children of transitioning from one system to another
3. The importance of communicating and exchanging information;
4. The limitations on family choices
5. The impact of the child's characteristics and readiness for preschool on making decisions
6. The factors that facilitate successful transition experiences

Twenty-two families and the professionals who worked with them throughout the transition process were the subjects of this research.

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ACTION STEPS

- Recognize that transition is a goal-oriented process. Because it is a process, it requires the family, teachers, and others involved to be partners — in planning before the transition meeting, in making decisions during the meeting, and in regular follow-up after the meeting.
- Tell the preschool professionals what you have liked most about your child’s early intervention program, and work to be equal partners with them so that the preschool experience will be as family-centered as possible.
- About nine months before your child’s third birthday, talk with her early intervention professionals to determine how you can give and receive information about your child’s transition to preschool.
- Ask early intervention professionals to put you in touch with parents whose children have transitioned to preschool in the last one to two years, so that you can gain their advice.
- Gather information from other families and visit preschools before the transition planning meeting occurs.
- Consider what experiences and outcomes you hope your child will have in preschool and kindergarten.
- At the transition planning meeting, talk about your wishes for the type of preschool your child will attend, even if one exactly like it doesn’t exist right now in your community. Remember that the school is required to provide services in the least restrictive environment.
- As you think about your child’s characteristics and how ready she is for preschool, remember that the preschool is required to provide supplementary aids and services that can help her be in an inclusive classroom, rather than a segregated one.
- Also, remember that you are entitled to any support needed to help you be an equal partner in making decisions for your child — before, during, and after the transition planning meeting. This means that you can request things that you believe will help you make the most informed decisions. These might include having information in advance, having an informational meeting before the regular transition meeting, being able to visit preschool programs (with your child, if you wish), and having a key person guide you through the process.

These researchers translated their findings into six booklets containing practical guidance for parents. You can [learn more](#) about those booklets from the publisher (www.brookespublishing.com).

KEY FINDINGS

- Most families find that transition is a specific and isolated event rather than the coordinated process that it should be.

- ◆ Most families lack knowledge about the nature of their rights and how to act on those rights. They say practitioners made the decisions without any real participation by the family. “But what the teacher did was she just rang me up. She said, ‘We need it. We’re going to do a transition meeting. Can you make it Thursday afternoon?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ And, you know, I never thought to say, ‘Oh, what does that exactly mean?’ . . . So I didn’t know what it [the meeting] was about.”
- ◆ Professionals often describe the process as involving too much paperwork.
- Families expressed concerns about the transition from early intervention services to school services.
 - ◆ There seemed to be a shift from more of a family-centered approach in early intervention service agencies to more of a system-centered approach in school settings. “The communication that I had with the teacher and her affiliates [at the early intervention service agency] — the eye lady, the speech lady — they were there. They were available. They made the time. . . . And I always felt reassured through the whole program.” (pp. 285-286)
- Families strongly emphasized the importance of communicating and exchanging information before the transition planning meeting.
 - ◆ Some families were very well prepared, and others were not. One service provider described how she prepared families: “I have just spent parts of my home visits going over some of that paperwork with the parents and trying to describe the process. And I have just done it a little at a time. You know, there are so many pieces of paper that need to be signed and need to be reviewed.” (p. 286)
- Families believed they were given very few choices in the types or locations of preschool services.
 - ◆ Children who had participated in inclusive early intervention services were more likely to also experience an inclusive preschool environment.
 - ◆ About two-thirds of the families said that the professionals made the choices; the other third said that they were able to choose.
 - ◆ Parents generally tended to be most interested in finding a specialized program for their child, rather than an inclusive program.
 - ◆ Inclusive options were not available at all locations. One professional said, “I always feel caught in the middle, because I want to tell them, yes, your child should be in an inclusive [setting] . . . [but] there’s not one out there that I can offer them.” (p. 287)
 - ◆ The child’s behavior and level of development were major factors in deciding the child’s preschool placement.
 - ◆ Language and cultural issues also strongly influenced preschool placement.

- ◆ Families had different opinions about their child's levels of development as compared with others in the class.
- Factors in success included viewing transition as a process, starting early in planning for transition, exchanging information between families and professionals before the transition planning meeting, holding an informational meeting before the transition planning meeting, visiting preschool programs, bringing the child into the process (for example, placing a photograph of the child on the table or using a video to provide important information), and having a key person (another parent or a professional) to facilitate or guide the process.
 - ◆ The extent to which parents were equal partners in the process was largely determined by whether or not professionals welcomed their involvement. "Having a buddy system so that . . . we have parents who've just transitioned into preschool and have gotten adjusted can serve as mentors to parents that are coming in, and even if possible to be a mentor to a family . . . as to what to expect." (p. 289)

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Hains, A.H., Rosenkoetter, S.E., & Fowler, S.A. (1991). Transition planning with families in early intervention programs. *Infants and Young Children*, 3(4), 38-47.

Rosenkoetter, S.E., Hains, A.H., & Fowler, S.A. (1994). *Bridging early services for children with special needs and their families*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Rous, B., Myers, C.T., & Stricklin, S.B. (2007). Strategies for supporting transitions of young children with special needs and their families. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 30(1), 1-18.

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