

## **What Works in Transition: Key Points to Assure Transitions Support Families**

### **Positive Relationships are the Key!**

Major findings that relate to families of children in transition and are supported by a moderate/large extent of evidence include the following:

- Transition is a complex process, not a static event. Positive relationships and transition-support activities can ease the stress of transition for families.
- Parental sense of self-efficacy is associated with greater school-related parent involvement and improved academic outcomes for children.
- Needs of families must be met before families are able to help their children with disabilities transition between programs or systems.

#### References

Rous, B. (2009, April). Review of transition research. *Transition Alert*. National Early Childhood Transition Center.

Rous, B. (2008, March). Transitions for children from diverse settings and significant disabilities. *Transition Alert*. National Early Childhood Transition Center.

What Works Clearinghouse. (2008). *WWC procedures and standards handbook*.

Princeton, NJ: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

## Family Issues in Transition

### Successful Family Preparation and Adjustment:

- Families are aware of the importance of transition planning and have information they need to actively participate in transition planning with their child.
- Families needs related to transition are assessed and addressed.
- Families have information about and are linked with resources and services to help them meet their specific child and family needs.
- Families actively participate in gathering information about their child growth and development.

### Potential Barriers to Successful Transition:

There are some common barriers that more specifically affect the transition process for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and/or those with significant disabilities.

- Fears and anxieties of family members about the transition process and their child's move to the next environment.
- Other providers and physicians who do not work in the schools provide recommendations for programming that are not consistent with the educational model.
- Changes in frequency and intensity of services as children transition into new environments
- Difficult to obtain records from families that are transitory.
- Philosophical and institutional differences between environments.
- Shortage of available health providers, therapists, and teachers who feel competent with children from diverse backgrounds or with significant disabilities.

Adapted from Stricklin, S., Hains, A., Rous, B., & Schroeder, C. (2005). *Significant disabilities & culturally-linguistically diverse backgrounds*. National Early Childhood Transition Center.

## **Supporting the Child and Family Transition Within the Sending Program**

During the *year before* a child and family will leave your program:

- Review all services family is accessing and plan for continuation of those services family desires that are not offered through Part B
- If child has not been in a playgroup or other group activity, this would be a good time to ask family if they are interested and to assist in locating one in the community so that child has a chance to know what it is like to be in a group with other children.

During the *six months before* a child and family will be leaving your program:

- Encourage and assist family to create a story about child. Support family to identify areas of the child's development that can support a smooth transition. For example, if child is very outgoing, those skills will support moving on to a new setting and meeting new people. If child is shy, but loves to sing, think about including some musical activities as a bridge to the next setting or program. Focus on what the child likes and does well as you plan the next steps.
- Encourage family to make a good-bye book or chart. Include photos or drawings of the people and experiences the family has had in early intervention. Encourage family to write down your thoughts or feelings about what they will miss and how they are feeling. Include a "moving on" page that has pictures or drawings of the new setting or program.
- Consider any logistical changes the transition will create. Will the child need to wake earlier in the morning? Will there be a bus? Will they need to prepare clothing, diapers and nap time blankets to leave at the new program? How will these changes fit into the family's existing schedules? Any information you can gather about the logistics, before the transition actually happens, allows more time for the family to prepare.
- Encourage parents to learn as much as they can about the new program before the child begins. Set up time for family to talk with the staff. Ask for information from the teachers as well as asking the family to give them all the necessary information to help them care for the child. Help family to obtain the parents' manual. Offer opportunities for family to know the parents of other children in the program. Networking with other parents can be helpful in finding resources.
- Help family to have opportunities to visit the program with their child. They may want to visit the classroom when it is not in session, or the child may benefit from seeing the program with children there. If possible, encourage them to visit more than one time. Even though many programs are closed over the summer, staff take

a few days before the official opening to prepare the room. Ask if parent can stop in for a brief visit during that time.

Here are a few things to help parents think about and talk about with their children:

- There may now be both “big” and “little” children in the playground or school building, where before the child may have only been around other young children.
- Transportation may be very different – some children may be picked up by a big yellow school bus, or a van, others may still be brought to school by a parent.
- There will be new toys, songs, tables, rooms, smells, sights and sounds.
- The day may be longer, or shorter, with group activities and transitions embedded in the routine.
- Children may be expected to try to do more tasks for themselves, such as putting on coats, zipping, pouring juice at snack time and following more adult directions about things on which three-year-olds can be working.

During the last *two to four weeks before* a child and family will be leaving your program:

- Try a “count down” calendar to the start of the new program. You and parents can make a paper chain representing the days until the new program or activity begins. Taking off a link each day can make the passage of time real to the child, or simply use a regular calendar and mark off each day.
- Encourage the family to practice new routines. These routines could include getting up earlier, or traveling a new route to the new program, before the change happens. Encourage parents to look out for new landmarks to point out to the child. The new route will soon feel familiar.

*After* the child leaves your program:

- Contact parents to evaluate their satisfaction with the transition.
- Keep in touch with the new program to assist if questions arise.
- Evaluate the transition and identify any improvements needed.

Adapted from Massachusetts Department of Early Care and Education, Department of Public Health (2007). *Continuing the journey: A guide for families*.

## **Providing Support for the Child's Transition to the Receiving Program by Families and Staff**

*Before* the beginning of school:

- Observe and interact with the child in the sending program and in the child's home.
- Provide or give information to family to access resources and materials (i.e. books, photos, video of children interacting in the program) about transition to share with the child.
- Provide suggestions to family about opportunities for the child to learn skills that will make transition to a new environment easier (i.e. following simple directions, playing with other children, separating from parents for longer periods of time).
- Encourage family to talk to children about the new program with excitement so the child will begin to look forward to participating.
- Encourage family to begin adjusting the child's schedule to make transition to a new environment easier.
- Provide opportunities for family to participate with the child in group experiences for transitioning families (i.e. program orientation meetings, observations, open house, transition fairs).
- Anticipate possible difficulties child will have in the new program and adjust transition practices accordingly (i.e. bringing familiar object or favorite toy, parent attending program or riding bus with child, decreasing time in setting).
- Provide needed training to personnel including early childhood program staff to support the child's special needs.

During *the first few months* at school:

- Identify any assistive technology or other special equipment needed for child and make sure it is available on the first day of attendance.
- Plan activities during the first few weeks of class that provide continuity with the previous program (i.e. familiar songs, routines, books, games).
- Review classroom rules, routines, and procedures with the child daily during the first few weeks of class.

### References

- 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.
- Sarathy, P. (2005). *"Together we succeed": Building a better system for transitioning preschoolers with disabilities*. Horsham, PA: LRP.

## **Providing Support to Families During Transition**

*During* the transition planning process:

- Share information with families about the evaluation and assessment process, determination of eligibility, possible service options and placement opportunities.
- Share legal rights with families using multiple methods of communication.
- Review existing child records and determine the need for any additional assessment with families.
- Obtain written consent for any additional assessment and schedule assessment times that are respectful of families' schedules.
- Involve families in assessment at the level of their choosing.
- Provide families with observation opportunities and options including visiting the classroom when children are not attending to full observation with all children present.
- Schedule time to talk with families during visits to the program.
- Provide for child care during the time the families are visiting the program if necessary.

*Before* the beginning of school:

- Provide families with a primary contact person from the new program.
- Provide group experiences for transitioning families to meet each other, learn more about the program and meet program staff (i.e. program orientation meetings, open house, transition fairs).
- Provide families with opportunities to meet with other families that have been through the transition process.
- Make home visits to welcome families and to learn more about families' cultures, lifestyles and values.
- Explain the meaning of any unfamiliar terms and educational jargon used with families and check for their understanding.
- Give families choices for involvement in the program and have them decide how they want to be involved.
- Encourage families to share information about their child, any concerns about transition and their expectations for the program.
- Develop an ongoing communication plan between families and the program that incorporates each family's preference for the method and frequency of communication.
- Talk about family activities that will help the child be better prepared for participation in the program.