

Parent Tips for Transition Planning

Successful and meaningful transition services are the result of careful planning. This planning is driven by a young person's dreams, desires, and abilities. It builds a youth's participation in school, home and community living.

Transition planning helps to prepare young people for their futures. It helps them to develop skills they need to go on to other education programs after high school. It builds skills to live, work, and play in the community. It helps to build independence. Youth learn important adult decision making roles when they participate in this school-based planning.

Must transition planning be part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

Transition planning is required in the IEP for students by age 16. Many students will begin this planning at age 14 or earlier so that they have the time to build skills they will need as adults. Parents should feel comfortable asking for transition planning to start earlier than age 16 if they believe it is needed. Transition planning, goals, and services will be different for each student.

Transition services include instruction, community experiences and building employment skills. They include post-school adult living objectives and, if needed, daily living skills training and functional vocational evaluations. All of these services must be provided in a manner that is sensitive to a student's cultural background and native language.

Transition services are based on a student's strengths as well as needs. They consider a young person's preferences and interests. Activities that are part of transition services must be results-oriented. This means that they are focused on building specific skills.

Must students be involved in transition planning?

Schools are required to invite students to participate in their IEP meetings whenever transition goals or services are considered. Transition services are a required component of IEPs for

students age 16 and older, and should be routinely discussed at IEP meetings. These services may become part of discussion and planning as early as the IEP team finds is needed for an individual student. (Some states require transition planning beginning at age 14.)

What if my child does not attend his or her IEP meeting?

If a youth is unable to participate in his or her IEP meeting or chooses not to attend, school personnel must take steps to ensure that the youth's preferences and interests are considered in developing the IEP.

The best transition plans are those that help youth achieve their dreams and aspirations. Youth should be included in all aspects of planning and goal setting, and encouraged to participate at IEP meetings. This participation helps keep team members focused on the young person's individual needs and desires. It also helps the youth to develop the skills for making decisions and becoming a self-advocate. Preparing a young person for his or her role in transition planning helps them to become knowledgeable members of the IEP team.

How can I be sure that the IEP meets my child's transition needs?

Transition services begin with age-appropriate transition assessments. They include student and parent interviews, interest and skill inventories and other tools.

In order for an IEP to meet a student's transition needs, both parents and school personnel participate in the assessment. The school does this through assessments and observations. Parents do it through day-to-day knowledge and talks with their child about their goals and dreams.

Answering the following questions may help guide how parents and students prepare for and participate in an effective IEP meeting that is focused on transition planning:

- *What does the young person want to do with his or her life?* What are his or her dreams, aspirations, or goals? The youth's answers should be incorporated into all



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aspects of transition planning. If a young person is non-verbal or has difficulty communicating, parents can still use their knowledge of their child to be sure that transition planning and services reflect the youth's preferences and choices.

- *What are the young person's needs, abilities, and skills?* Parents should be familiar with how much assistance their child needs or does not need to accomplish tasks.
- *What are the outcomes that the youth and parents want?* Parents and their child should bring suggestions to the transition planning meeting. Suggestions might include the kind of services, actions, or planning they believe is needed to achieve desired goals in the transition section of the IEP.
- *Will the young person attend the transition IEP conference?* Parents can help by encouraging their son or daughter to attend. He or she will be invited. Together, parents and youth can prepare for the meeting. If the youth does not attend, parents may represent their desires and wishes.
- *How do young people develop self-advocacy skills?* Parents and school staff should encourage self-advocacy in young people. Staff should direct questions to the youth, even when it is the parents who may provide answers. It is important to encourage young people to have and state (by any means available to them) their own opinions. It is important for students to understand their disability and to ask for the accommodations they may need.
- *What are the programs, services, accommodations, or modifications the young person wants or needs?* Parents and their youth need to think about and be clear on what they want or need. IEP team discussions address these topics, but often parents and young people have had conversations at home that will be useful in planning.
- *What kinds of accommodations will students need when they go on to higher education or employment?* Parents and youth need to think what accommodations will be needed after high school and how the youth will obtain them.
- *Who will be responsible for what part of the transition plan in the IEP?* It is wise for parents and youth to know who is responsible for each transition goal. Each task should have a specific timeline that is included in the IEP.
- *Should the educational and transition programs emphasize practical or academic goals?* Does the young person need a combination of both? This will depend on the goals of each individual student.

- *What are the community-based training opportunities the school provides?* Parents and their child should decide how much to participate in those activities.
- *If a student plans on going to college, is he or she taking the courses needed to meet college entrance requirements?*
- *When will the young person graduate?* What kind of diploma option is the best choice?
- *Are work experience classes appropriate to reach employment goals?* Research suggests that youth have more successful employment outcomes after high school if they have had hands-on, work-based learning experiences as students.
- *How could the educational and transition program be more integrated into the regular program?*
- *Who will attend the IEP meeting?* Parents and the youth should become familiar with the roles and functions of team members. They should also know what community agencies might be present (vocational rehabilitation, etc.). Parents may request that a specific community agency be invited to the IEP meeting if the youth is or may be using services from that agency. Becoming familiar with adult service systems or agencies now can be helpful in making future decisions. At times parents may want a family member, friend, or advocate to go to planning meetings with them for support or to take notes.

Parents and youth will want to have a copy of the daily school schedule each quarter or semester. It is important to have information on all classes available so that their child can participate in selecting classes and the scheduling process.

A final tip: Parents will need to start thinking about their child's legal status before he or she turns 18. If a youth is not able to make informed decisions about major issues (medical treatment, living accommodations, financial arrangements, etc.), the family may need to learn more about guardianship or conservatorship.

IDEA 2004 requires that students be notified at least one year in advance of the rights that will transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority (becoming a legal adult in that state). These rights include being the responsible person for planning and agreeing or disagreeing with services in the IEP. It is important that parents understand what this means for them and their role in planning. The age of majority is 18 in most states.

By learning as much as possible about the options available for transition planning, a parent can ensure that their young person's rights are protected while they are learning the skills needed to develop independence.