

Chapter 5:



Planning for Transitions

A transition is any event that results in changes to relationships, routines, expectations or roles. Transitions are a normal part of life and occur throughout the life cycle. For children, transitions occur at various times during their education programs. Starting school, moving from grade to grade and changing schools are common transitions for children.

While any child can have difficulty with transitions, children with special needs may have greater difficulty managing transitions in their lives. To minimize these difficulties, thoughtful transition planning is important.

Transition planning decisions need to be based on an understanding of the individual child. This means understanding the child's strengths, needs and goals, as well as those of the child's family. Transition planning should be dynamic and ongoing since preferences and circumstances regarding transition objectives may change over time. A written record of transition planning, including transition goals and strategies, should be included in IPPs.

Successful transitions involve input from the whole learning team, including parents, children, teachers and possibly community-based personnel, such as career counsellors or post-secondary school admission officers. Drawing on the knowledge of various team members results in informed decision making, the

acceptance of joint responsibility and a generous circle of support for the child.

As children move through the education system, they need to become more involved in planning their own transitions. Involvement in the planning process helps children develop an understanding of their strengths and needs. Transition planning also helps children become aware of the type of supports and accommodations available to them in dealing with their learning difficulties, and provides opportunities for them to develop much-needed self-advocacy and problem-solving skills.

Every child has the potential for benefiting from some type of post-secondary education or training. Planning for post-secondary studies begins as soon as young children express an interest in the kind of work they would like to do when they grow up. However, transition planning should focus not only on the academic skills needed for success, but also on helping children develop the ability to problem solve in new situations, monitor and regulate their own performance, and interact appropriately with peers and authority figures.

Successful transitions depend on:

- early and systematic planning
- consciously identifying hopes and dreams
- thoroughly exploring a variety of possibilities
- using appropriate strategies to help your child move from one stage to the next.

Early planning

Successful transitions require planning well in advance of the actual move. This ensures that planning is always future-oriented, that there is program continuity throughout your child's school years, and that necessary programs and supports are in place. For

example, the transition from high school to post-secondary settings requires informal planning beginning early in your child's education, and formal planning starting in junior high school. This gives you and your child time to become familiar with available services and settings, and time to put the necessary plans into action so your child will reach his or her goals.

At an early age, your child needs to understand that change and challenges are part of life. Children need encouragement and support to achieve small, but measurable successes. Celebrate your child's abilities and build on strengths. Personal skills and attitudes do affect an individual's approach to lifelong learning. Helping your child become more self-confident and self-aware ensures that your child will be better able to set realistic goals and develop the skills necessary to achieve these goals. Learning to manage transitions at an early age creates behaviours that are flexible, adaptable and capable in a world that is rapidly changing.

Identifying hopes and dreams

It is important to identify your child's strengths, abilities and talents, and incorporate them in programming decisions. You also need to help your child identify dreams and hopes for the future. This is especially important in planning for the transition between high school and a more independent adult life.

Talk to your child about his or her thoughts on post-secondary training, entering the work force, options for living situations, and the kinds of recreational and leisure activities they would like for the future. You also need to determine your own realistic wishes and preferences for your child, and develop a family vision for the future.

Exploring possibilities

Some individuals with special needs require specialized living and work settings as adults. Consider a variety of possibilities that may be available as your child moves from one stage to the next. For example, in planning for the transition from high school to post-secondary settings, consider all of the different options available.

When your child is still in junior high school, start investigating the services available in your community for adults with special needs. Learn about vocational and residential options in other areas and compare these to options in your area. When your child is in senior high school, start meeting with different adult service providers to explore options in more detail.

Be informed about the various possibilities by asking questions. For example, when you are planning for your child's transition from junior to senior high school, ask what kind of community-based work experience is available for your child in the high school program. Evaluate how each option meets the skills, needs and dreams of your child.

Bridging from one stage to the next

Transition may be a challenging time for your child. You are the one constant factor as your child moves from one setting to another. Since you know your child best, you will be aware of the areas where your child needs further support and reinforcement to cope with new challenges. This could include strengthening self-advocacy and decision-making skills, independent problem solving and positive feelings about their own abilities.



As your child moves to a new program or school, you may have many questions. Here are some sample questions you might ask.

- What type of strategies will be used to help my child with his or her learning needs?
- How does the program measure progress?
- Will my child follow the regular grade curriculum?
- How long will my child stay in this program?
- What plans do we need to make for future placements?
- Is this a new or established program?
- Will there be students in the class with similar learning needs as my child?
- How can I ensure that teachers are aware of my child's individual learning goals and dreams for the future?
- How will this new program or school further our goals?

Children in transition need to know that there are support systems in place for them if they face personal or academic difficulties. Reassure your child that there will be teachers or employers ready to support him or her in this new segment of life. Involve siblings, extended family members, friends, neighbours or others who can contribute to your child's successful transition.



Transition tips for elementary school

- Be aware of your child's eventual need for independence.
- Be sure the IPP addresses skills that will help your child become more independent.
- Help your child become comfortable with new surroundings and people by arranging to visit new classrooms and meet new teachers.
- Identify the skills your child will need in the next environment and support opportunities to learn these skills.

- Get your child involved in community-based recreational activities.
- Listen to your child's concerns about transitions. Discuss the transition and highlight the positive aspects of a new environment.
- As a family, celebrate the skills and aptitudes your child is developing. These are the building blocks for new skills and the steps toward your child's dream.



Transition tips for junior high school

- Support the school's efforts to provide service learning and work experiences.
- Ensure that the IPP addresses skills your child will need in a variety of settings.
- If possible, teach your child to use the public transportation system.
- Explore appropriate assistive technologies and encourage keyboarding skills.
- Begin exploring career interests.
- Encourage your child to identify his or her learning strengths.
- Actively encourage your child to participate in goal setting.
- Help your child learn how to monitor his or her own progress. Help your child develop a plan to share this information with the learning team.
- Identify success and build upon it.
- Identify approaches that are not working and begin to search for alternative methods and plans.

For more information on choosing high school courses see:
A Credit to Yourself
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp



Transition tips for high school

- Be a mentor to your child. Listen to your child's hopes and dreams, and continue to support them.
- Help your child explore the consequences of decisions and how beliefs, attitudes and values affect life and career decision making.
- Encourage independence and provide opportunities for community involvement.
- Continue to explore appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies.
- Explore post-secondary institution opportunities and community-based services, such as Alberta Human Resources and Employment.
- Know the entrance requirements of post-secondary institutions that your child might attend.
- Ensure your son or daughter has all the necessary documentation to receive support in post-secondary settings.
- Make sure that appropriate educational, vocational and residential services are in place before your son or daughter graduates.

See Appendix F, page 100 for a sample transition checklist to complete with your son or daughter.

Beyond the school system

Transition planning often involves investigating opportunities for post-secondary training. Over the last decade, the range of post-secondary options available to all students has greatly expanded. Colleges, universities, community agencies and private training companies are now more willing and able to offer appropriate training opportunities for adults with special needs. A number of colleges and universities now have specialized services to support students with special needs.

Some institutions' application forms have a box to check or a line to complete that identifies a disability. The disability services office will contact the student to discuss what kind of support will be needed. If the application form does not have a place for self-disclosure, it's up to students (and if required, their parents) to contact the disability services office.

For most students, Canada Study Grants and Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) funding will cover disability-related supports that students need to complete their education. To ensure this funding, students will need documentation about their disability and the supports they received in high school. If they do not have sufficient documentation, they will have to be assessed so appropriate supports can be identified. These assessments are coordinated by the institution's disability services office and can take up to four months to complete.

The disability services office will use information from documentation and assessments to develop a service plan. This plan, also known as an education plan or accommodation plan, outlines the supports students are eligible for. Every student's plan is different and could include services such as the following:

- note taking
- alternate format texts (braille, large print, audio)
- exam accommodations
- assistive technology
- interpreters
- captioning services
- tutoring.

For more information see:

National Educational Association of Disabled Students
www.neads.ca

Most disability services offices have orientations for new students with disabilities. A few campuses also have student-run disability organizations.

Disability services offices will advocate for students, but first they will encourage students to be their own self-advocates. Most disability service offices believe that students need to be equal partners in their education and take responsibility for the accommodations they need. By learning these skills in school, students will be able to carry them into the work place and community.

Several campuses offer Inclusive Post Secondary Education (IPSE) programs that provide adults with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate in a modified post-secondary educational experience. Students are included in regular college or university classes as auditing students and are supported to participate to their fullest potential. Their education goes beyond the classroom to encompass three main components:

- relationship opportunities
- life enriching experiences
- career development and education.

These programs are currently available at the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan College, the University of Calgary, Lethbridge Community College, and Red Deer College. Check the Web sites of these institutions to see current programs offered.



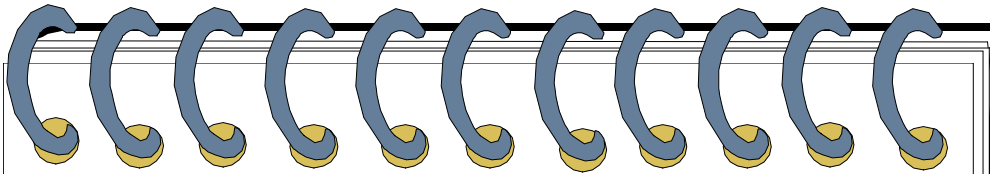
As you explore these options, consider the following questions.

- How will this agency or program meet my son or daughter's learning and vocational needs?
- What is their philosophy and is it compatible with our family's values and goals?
- What kind of success has this agency or program had?
- What is their commitment to individualized programming?
- What supports and accommodations do they provide?

The Learning Team

- What is their commitment to community-based programming?
- What are the criteria for admission?
- Is there a waiting list? If so, how long?
- What are the qualifications and training of the service providers?
- How are parents and family members involved in service delivery?
- How long does the follow-up and support of the agency or program last?
- What are the costs and fees of the program?

See Appendix G, page 101 for a listing of government agencies that you may need to contact during transition planning.



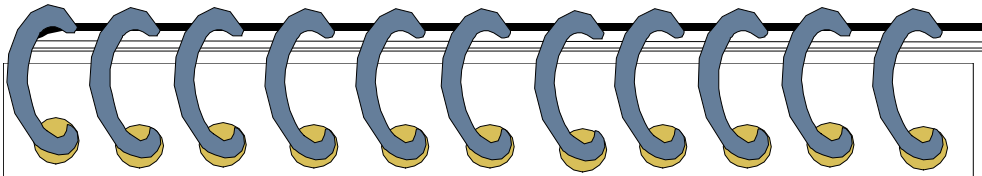
Parent Notebook

My child's strengths are:

My child's skills are:

My child's interests are:

My goals and dreams for my child's future are:



Parent Notebook

Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about transition:

- ◆ What skills does my child need to develop so he or she will be successful in school next year?
- ◆ Is there a special interest or strength my child has that surprised you? If so, how were you able to use this in the classroom?
- ◆ Based on what you have learned about my child this year, what suggestions do you have for next year's teachers?

Sample questions I might discuss with my child:

- ◆ What kinds of things would you like to be different next school year?
- ◆ What would you like your new teachers to know about you?
- ◆ What are your goals and dreams for the future?