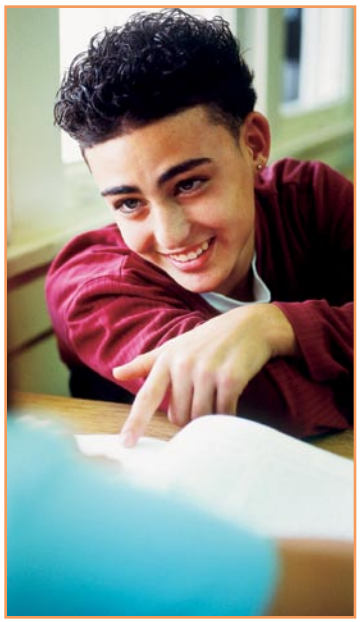
FAQ: Occupational Therapy's Role in Transition Services and Planning



What are transition services?

Transitions are "actions coordinated to prepare for or facilitate change, such as from one functional level to another, from one life stage to another, from one program to another, or from one environment to another" (AOTA, 1998, p. 866). Transitions are important landmarks in a child's educational career because successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten, elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school ultimately prepare a child for adult life. Collaborative and cohesive transition services provide important continuity for children with disabilities to acquire critical life skills. Occupational therapy practitioners are key members of the team to support a student's function and performance in daily life activities and support engagement in occupation to enhance participation (AOTA, 2002).Transition services have evolved from a disability focus to a child focus, emphasizing abilities and self-determination (Kohler & Field, 2003). Self-determination supports the belief that all individuals have a right to direct their own lives, including choice making, self-advocacy, risk taking, problem solving, and goal setting and planning, which results in achieving better outcomes (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003). Acquisition of these essential skills should begin in the early years and continue throughout the life span.

What is a transition plan and how does it differ from transition services?

The transition plan is the section of the individualized education program (IEP) that describes the services and activities needed to prepare for life after graduation. The transition plan defines the student's long-term goals and outcomes, and it is related to his or her post-school objectives. The transition plan lists measurable annual goals (and may include short-term objectives based on the annual goals) and identifies the individuals responsible for addressing the goals and objectives. If appropriate for the student, the transition plan can address further concerns related to postsecondary education (e.g., applying to or attending a college or university), vocational education (e.g., applying to or attending a trade or technical school), supported employment (e.g., job carving [Griffin & Hammis, 2002], job coaching), and life skills and community participation (e.g., transportation, leisure pursuits, self-care skills, money management, social skills, independent living). Person-centered planning is necessary to support the student in developing skills necessary for community living. Transition services are the coordinated set of activities used to implement the transition plan and that help prepare the student for life post–high school graduation. Transition services can involve a variety of agencies and services, mak-

ing coordination of activities essential. The transition plan is often sequential in nature and spans several years, whereas the transition services are updated yearly as part of the IEP process. Collaborative activities provide opportunities to develop an integrated approach to support children with disabilities and their families (Kohler & Field, 2003).

What is the role of occupational therapy in transition services and planning?

Occupational therapy practitioners have expertise in technology, task and work analysis, behavior and psychosocial needs, sensory processing, and independent living skills, which prepares them to assume a vital role in transition planning for students. The occupational therapy practitioner works collaboratively with the IEP team to share resources and responsibility in addressing the student's goals and plans.

Sample of Occupational Therapy Activities Provided Under Transition Planning and Services:

- Promote student development of self-advocacy skills (e.g., student-led IEP meetings, advocating for additional supports at school or in community-based settings).
- Use prevocational modalities in service provision (e.g., keyboarding, basic computer skills, money management).
- Enhance development of functional skills (e.g., cooperative work, organization of materials, time management, safety, community mobility, self-care).
- Conduct activity analysis for job requirements and internships in both school programs and community-based partnerships.
- Provide job carving and job coaching.
- Participate in curriculum development and instruction for life skills or transition classes.
- Conduct assessments that support transition and life skills to promote independent living.
- Develop portfolios of skills, abilities, interest areas, aptitude, and necessary transition information (e.g., transcripts, résumés, cover letters).
- Measure progress and establish goals collaboratively with the team that have functional life skill outcomes.
- Collaborate with community agencies such as the Rehabilitation Services Administration or Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Facilitate development of social communication skills and peer relationships.
- Recommend accommodations to physical and social environment to enhance participation and accessibility.
- Provide expertise in assistive technology to promote student access, participation, and progress.

What are the unique considerations addressed in early childhood transitions?

Early childhood transition planning, which refers to the transitions from early intervention (EI) to preschool, and from preschool to kindergarten, is characterized by a complex set of issues that may cause significant stress for both the child and family (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2007). As children in EI settings move into preschool special education or another educational environment such as Head Start, changes that have potential impact include differences in service delivery approaches (family-centered in EI versus child-focused in an educational environment), new providers in the educational environment, and different expectations for participation in occupations of the classroom. The transition into kindergarten also has changes, such as moving to a new location (e.g., from a preschool center to a neighborhood elementary school), new providers, and a greater emphasis on academics.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA; Pub. L. 108-446) does require that state agencies provide transition planning for children moving from Part C (EI) to Part B (preschool) services in the form of a transition conference held at least 90 days before the child's 3rd birthday. The child's individualized family service plan from EI can be considered in the development of the preschool IEP, and the child's parent can request that representatives from Part C be present at the IEP meeting, thus increasing collaboration between providers from the two agencies. Although there are no formal guidelines for the transition to kindergarten, issues specific to the needs of the transitioning child may be discussed at an IEP meeting. Occupational therapy practitioners may work with families to prepare them for changes in roles and routines that will accompany the transition; assist the child with learning to perform skills necessary for classroom participation; and evaluate the supports, such as modifications or assistive technology, required for a child to be successful in the new environment.

Who are the members of the transition team and what are their responsibilities?

Participants of each student's formal transition team are unique and are selected according to the individual's needs. There is no predetermined number of team participants. Under IDEA, some members are mandated and some members are optional, based on the needs specified in the student's IEP. Usually a teacher or school administrator who works closely with the student is his or her transition coordinator. If a student requires occupational therapy services to benefit from his or her educational program, these services are

included in the student's IEP. Under such circumstances, the occupational therapist, as the practitioner responsible for occupational therapy services, may become an invited member of the transition team.

The following is a list of possible transition team members:

- The student: He or she is a primary team member and must be invited to all transition planning meetings where decisions are made
- The child's parents or legal guardians
- Representatives from agencies serving individuals with disabilities, such as advocacy agencies, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and social services staff
- The student's special education teacher, regular classroom teacher, or school administrator/guidance counselor must be included
- Related service personnel, such as an occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, and school psychologist

Transition team members work collaboratively to develop life goals in a comprehensive transition plan that becomes part of the student's IEP. The following areas covered under the transition planning process should be addressed as appropriate:

- Planning for postsecondary education
- Selecting a career or job path
- Determining financial, income, and health benefits needs
- Obtaining employment
- Identifying residential options
- Determining personal, home, and money management issues
- Establishing social networks
- Planning for recreation and leisure opportunities
- Determining advocacy and legal needs
- Selecting transportation options

What are the legal definitions of transition under IDEA and NCLB?

The purpose of IDEA includes preparing children with disabilities for "further education" as well as for employment and independent living (Section 601(d)). Schools should prepare all students, with or without disabilities, for life skills necessary in young adulthood. Transition services are included in statutes and regulations under No Child Left Behind (NCLB; Pub. L. 107-110) and IDEA.

Statutory references to transitions under IDEA definitions are as follows:

> 34) Transition Services: The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—(A) is designed to be within a result-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (IDEA, Sec. 602).

As mandated by IDEA, transition services begin no later than the first IEP when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team. The plan is updated annually thereafter. A statement in the child's IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills.
- Transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching these goals.

Transition services are included under NCLB Section 1418 Part D, under Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at risk.

Where can I learn more about transition services?

For more information, please refer to the following Web sites, books, and articles.

Web sites

IDEA Partnership Communities of Practice
www.sharedwork.org

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities
www.nichcy.org/resources/transition101.asp

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center
www.nectac.org/topics/transtoK/transtoK.asp
www.nectac.org/topics/transition/transition.asp

National Early Childhood Transition Center
www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/

Rehabilitation Services Administration
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html

Books

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2007). *Occupational therapy services for children and youth under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (3rd ed.).* Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press.

Spencer, K. C., & O'Daniel, S. (2005). Transition services: From school to adult life. In J. Case Smith (Ed.), *Occupa-*

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Articles

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AOTA Online Course

Shepherd, J. (2004). *Addressing transition and school-to-work in school settings*—Elective Session 1. Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association. http://store.aota.org/aotastore/product.asp?pf%5Fid=OLSB1. Please note: You must successfully complete the Core Online Course *Occupational Therapy in School-Based Practice: Contemporary Issues and Trends* before Elective Sessions.

CE on CD™

Conaboy, K. S., Nochajski, S. M., Schefkind, S., Schoonover, J. (In Press). *Occupational therapy and transition services* CE on CD™. Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association. Note: This is content from a February 6, 2008 AOTA AudioInsight™. ■

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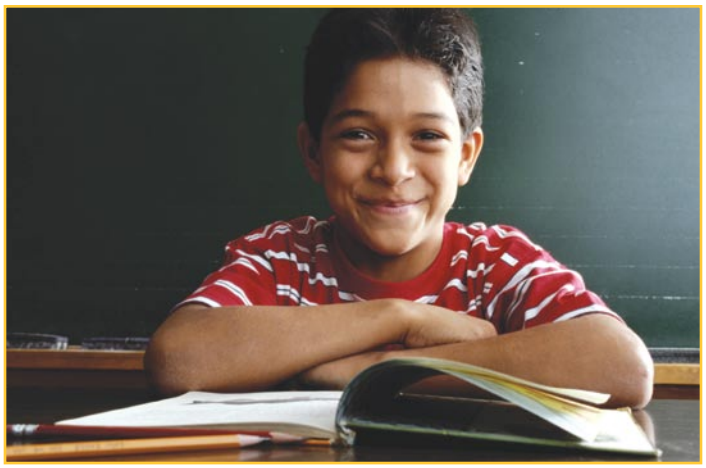

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