

Talking Points for Module 1

Slide 1: Transitions are a part of life for all children and families, beginning at the earliest transition for most—from hospital to home. For children who are at risk, have developmental delays, or have disabilities, they may also be receiving Part C early intervention (EI) services from birth up to age 3. After they are 3 years of age, children must transition out of EI. Some will “graduate” from EI and not need special services, while many will continue on to Part B preschool special education. The transition from early intervention may be particularly stressful for families as they are leaving a family-centered approach to service delivery and entering a student-centered model. The occupational therapists and other service providers they have gotten to know during their child’s infancy and toddlerhood will no longer be a part of their life and they must learn to get to know new providers and a new service system. Another big transition happens when a child moves to kindergarten. Now the child is entering a bigger classroom with more students and higher academic expectations. This move into the “big school” may also bring stress to families.

Slide 2: The research on early childhood transitions has given us some strong findings about the importance of these transitions for children and families. We know that the process of transitioning from one environment to another is indeed stressful for many families, but that occupational therapists and other service providers may decrease that stress by being involved in transition planning activities. We also know that children have better outcomes after transition when participating and practicing skills and activities that prepare them for the new classroom.

Slide 3: Additionally, school adjustment is an important piece of transitions. We know that early school transitions do provide the foundation for all future transitions, so it is imperative that we assist children and families to have a smooth transition from one environment to another, and hopefully help to make the process a positive one.

Slide 4: What does IDEA say about early childhood transitions? For the transition from early intervention to preschool, there are some specific guidelines in the law:

- 1) State agencies *must* provide transition planning.
- 2) The transition conference must occur at least 90 days before child’s third birthday (*preferably 6 -9 months before*). This allows for ample time to begin the transition process.
- 3) An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed after eligibility is determined.
- 4) Part C representatives may be invited. This refers to any service provider, although it is usually the service coordinator who would attend the first IEP meeting. However, this is an important part of the transition process and occupational therapists who work in early intervention may potentially have a lot to contribute about a child and family at an IEP meeting.

5) Ideally, the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) should be considered in developing the IEP; this was set up to help with continuity between the two programs and avoid subjecting the child to unnecessary evaluations. Content from the IFSP can help make decisions about a child's IEP, linking priority areas from early intervention to priority areas in preschool special education.

Children and families who have not received early intervention or preschool special education and move into kindergarten from a community, private, or preschool setting may also benefit from occupational therapy support to ease their transition.

Slide 5: Occupational therapists' unique role includes collaborating with the family, working with a child to prepare him or her prior to the transition, and evaluating the child's needs within the next environment. This may include visiting the receiving environment prior to the actual transition and/or recommending modifications to the environment that will support learning and classroom participation. We need to remember that it is a TEAM effort. We must be prepared to work with providers from both Part C and Part B programs. We must involve families in any decision making or recommendations and attend transition planning, IFSP, and IEP meetings as often as possible.

Slide 6: Early Intervention (Part C) is provided in the natural environment which provides an ideal opportunity to practice transition-related skills (e.g., toileting, drinking from a water fountain, washing hands). Children in preschool (Part B) are already participating a classroom environment so transition-related skills should focus on areas that will support success in kindergarten (e.g., maintaining attention during group learning activities, walking quietly in the halls).

Slide 7: Assessment of a young child should include all aspects of the environment. A thorough assessment includes observing the child in both home and community settings.

Criterion-referenced assessments measure a child's performance on a pre-specified set of outcomes. This approach reports what a child can do and what the child knows rather than comparing the child's performance to others.

The following are 3 criterion-referenced assessments that can help measure a child's progress as well as lead directly to meaningful goal setting, curriculum design and intervention planning.

Slide 8: In the preschool to kindergarten transition, we also need to focus on physical, social, and cultural contexts. This includes occupation-based assessments such as the School Function Assessment, observation of child in all preschool environments (e.g., classroom, playground, cafeteria, etc.), standardized assessments of motor and/or process skills (*if applicable*) and specialized assessments such as the Sensory Profile.

Slide 9: Now let's look at a case scenario of Jacob, a 2 ½-year-old boy with developmental delays who is currently receiving services through Part C. His occupational therapist is the primary service provider on his early intervention team. He will be transitioning to a neighborhood public preschool at age 3 and has had very limited participation in group activities with other children.

Slide 10: Look at his strengths and weaknesses. What pops out at you? If you were Jacob's therapist, what might you do? Jacob has several strengths and some challenges that may impact his transition to preschool.

Slide 11: So what can his early intervention occupational therapist do to help Jacob and his family with the preschool transition? First of all, the OT can start early to support Jacob's family learn advocacy skills they will need during Jacob's transition and beyond. The OT can be sensitive to the stress and anxiety Jacob's family may feel during the transition. The OT can participate in transition planning meetings with Jacob's early intervention team and even with the preschool personnel. The OT can visit the new school with Jacob's family. The OT can meet with Jacob's new teacher (and therapist, if possible) to discuss transition issues and provide recommendations for adaptations/modifications in the new environment that would support Jacob's learning and participation PRIOR to the start of preschool. The OT can encourage Jacob's family to get him involved in play groups to foster the development of social skills prior to beginning preschool.

Slide 12: Brainstorm with your colleagues. What kinds of readiness skills are essential in the classroom? The OT in early intervention can address school readiness by having Jacob practice skills he will need in the classroom or school setting such as washing hands, playing, and feeding himself.

Slide 13: The OT who will become Jacob's therapist once he enters preschool can also help address transition-related concerns. If the OT knows that Jacob will be receiving services, they may participate in the development of his IEP. The OT at the preschool could contact the OT from the early intervention program (or other primary service provider or service coordinator) to discuss Jacob's needs. The preschool OT could develop a way to communicate regularly with the family, such as through a shared notebook. This is particularly important in the critical, early days after the transition. The OT could consult with the teacher regarding the child's adjustment to school and initiate environmental modifications or adaptations early in the school year to maximize Jacob's participation.

Slide 14: There were several positive outcomes from the involvement in occupational therapists in Jacob's transition planning. Although Jacob has experienced positive outcomes in his transition to preschool with support, this is an ongoing cycle. What kinds of supports have you offered children like Jacob?

Slide 15: What kinds of supports have you offered children like Ellie?

Slide 16: Challenges that can be discussed may include increased leisure time, need to be productive, impact of mobility problems on ADL and leisure; perhaps a need to develop new interests. Consider remodeling his home to make it aging-friendly.

Slide 17: As we look forward to school-based services, the need for transition continues. Some additional resources follow on the next slide.

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Slide 19: These seven vignettes illustrate transitions across the lifespan and can be viewed individually, sequentially, or in their entirety. Simply click on the photo and you will be taken directly to that particular vignette.