

Voices from the Field: Caroline Gooden



Q1: Why is it important to include a child's individual goals and outcomes for transition?

Let's consider some of the reasons why it is important to include a child's individual goals and outcomes for transition on Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs) or Individual Education Programs (IEPs). IFSPs and IEPs can better support children and families' needs during the transition to another program when intentional goals for the transition process are planned, written, and implemented by a team that includes families and professionals. A child's success in the next environment will be supported when individualized goals are developed, implemented, and monitored.

Q2: What are the essential components of the transition process?

Let's consider three important components of the transition process to support children, families, and programs.

First, it is critical that we develop and implement goals that support each child's development in preparation for transition. When individualized IFSP transition goals, steps, and supports are developed in collaboration with family and team members, a more effective transition for the child is supported. Individualized child transition goals specify the skills that are necessary for the child to be successful in the next environment. For example, goals that include increasing interactions with peers or independence in self-care skills will facilitate the child's success in the next setting.

Second, it is important that we facilitate and support family involvement in the transition process. Families are the primary caregivers for their children, know their strengths and needs thoroughly, and maintain the most consistent presence in their child's life. Family participation is key to the development of individualized goals and the implementation of realistic transition activities. Involving families in every step of the transition process communicates respect for their values and for their knowledge of their child. When IFSP goals include family priorities and needs, the implementation of an effective process for transition is supported.

The third important component of the transition process includes active involvement from staff of both the sending and receiving agencies or programs. We know that it is most effective to include staff who know the child's current strengths and needs, as well as staff who will be receiving the child in the next setting. Collaboration between sending and receiving staff needs to address alignment of curricula, communication, and infrastructure that support effective transitions. Some examples of transition goals that address interagency collaboration include planning for on-site visits, cross-agency team meetings, and the designation of specific staff in each agency who facilitate the transition process for children and families.

To summarize and emphasize the importance of intentional transition planning, each one of these components is essential to effective transitions- individualized goals to support the child in the new setting, family involvement, and collaboration between the sending and receiving staff. Successful transitions are a process that occurs over time and requires active involvement of each of these components. If one of the three components is not addressed and included in planning the resulting transition may become a disconnected process that, at best, meets regulatory requirements, but that doesn't support individual child or their family to successfully progress from one program to the next.