

Collaborating for Smooth Transitions



Transitions are life-long, from one grade to another, from one stage to another. Transitions affect children, as well as their parents.



- Transitions form a bridge from childhood to adulthood. A major transition occurs from preschool, which may include early intervention programs, to school. The transitions through the grades are part of school life. Another transition takes place from high school to post-secondary, the community or a workplace setting.
- The first transition for many parents of children with disabilities may occur when their child is diagnosed with a disability. The period of loss and grief is a transition from the original hopes and dreams parents had for their child, to a new reality and a new vision of the future.
- Transitions through the school years may lead to parents feeling that they are “starting all over” each time their child moves to a new grade, a new class or a new school. With each transition, there can be a feeling of loss and a resurgence of emotions. Being aware of this can help teachers support parents.
- A few critical transitions include:

- **Diagnosis of a disability** – Diagnosis of a disability may have occurred at birth, but may not occur until the child is several years old, or even in school, depending on the type of disability. **What a parent needs** is emotional understanding and support.
- **Beginning school** – Starting school, usually at age 5 or 6, can be a major transition for a child, particularly one who has had extensive one-on-one early intervention experiences. **What a parent needs** is information – facts about the school, about expectations, about daily routines, and about the supports their child will have to ensure they are successful.
- **Nearing puberty** – As children near puberty, there are hormonal and growth changes, but also emotional changes. Children are becoming adolescents; they are beginning to explore their sexuality and learning how to relate appropriately to others. They have a desire to have more independence,

and are coping with a new range of emotions. Often they will be moving to a new school for their junior high school years.

What a parent needs is active participation in planning for the transition to junior high school, to help allay their fears of this new stage, and help them adjust to a different level of direct involvement.

- **Career planning** – As adolescents move through junior high school and prepare to move to high school, longer range planning, including career planning, becomes critical. Program choices for high school and, in some cases, greater community involvement all need to be addressed. **What a parent needs** is a thorough understanding of their changing role as their adolescent matures and moves toward independence as an adult.



- Understanding the changing needs of parents at different transition points can help teachers to meet these needs of parents, assisting them to manage the transitions of their children effectively.
- Although transitions do have a component of “change”, the more that can be done to reduce the unknown elements, the easier the transition will be.
- The keys to successful transitions are:

- Planning for change or transition,
- Including parents in the planning process,
- Establishing at least one individual who the parent can feel comfortable approaching, and with whom a closer relationship will be established,
- Ensuring that people have an opportunity to meet each other prior to the transition occurring,
- Providing opportunities for parental peer support by linking parents to parents of older children,
- Using multiple modes of communication, and
- Celebrating successful transitions by recognizing the roles parents and teachers have played in meeting student needs through collaboration.

