

## 2. ABOUT TRANSITION PLANNING

This section describes what transition planning is all about by talking about the following:

- Best practices – a discussion of things that makes transition planning work well;
- Person-directed planning – an approach to involving your child in transition planning;
- Getting an early start – a discussion on the importance of getting a handle on transition planning in the pre-teen years; and
- Managing the process – pointing out that much of the responsibility for transition planning rests with parents.

Transitions are about change. The transition process is about looking ahead to the future and preparing for one of the most significant times in your child's life – becoming an adult. For parents this may be a time of many emotions. As your child grows up, you may suddenly realize that they are becoming their own person with likes, dislikes, and their own view of the world.

Exploring new interests, getting to know the community, starting new programs, working with new service providers, establishing relationships with new caregivers, leaving familiar surroundings and friends and making new ones are some of the changes that lie ahead. Planning for these changes takes time and so an early start is important. Realistically, it will require a lot of preparation to develop a plan for the future that is positive and practical and that best reflects the preferences and interests of your child.

The time of transition planning is about building your child's self-reliance skills. Your natural instinct is to protect your child and as a parent of a child with developmental disabilities that instinct is likely even stronger. However, it is important to not underestimate your child's abilities. Find ways to set expectations for your child and provide them with lots of encouragement to do their best. Encourage them to expect the best from themselves. Throughout the planning process, it will be important to recognize opportunities to strengthen your child's independence and their ability to begin advocating on their own behalf – a skill they will need as they become an adult.



Transition planning will mean making many decisions with your child about various aspects of their life. It is important for you to begin preparing for the time when your child is no longer in school everyday. You need to consider things like living arrangements, community programs, employment opportunities, further education opportunities, health care, recreation and social activities. The transition planning activities will help you look at each of the areas noted above to identify your child's strengths and opportunities for growth, identify things they want to pursue and how they should go about pursuing them.

Not all of these changes need to happen at once. In fact, today many adolescents with or without developmental disabilities continue to live at home with their parents while attending post-secondary programs or after entering the workforce. However, the difference is that as a parent of a child with a development disability you may continue with many parental responsibilities that other parents pass on to their children as they reach adulthood.

Transition is about planning and preparing for the changes that adult life will bring and then having your child do the things that other young adults do. While some young adults with developmental disabilities may require supports and services from their community to do those things, adult life involves much more than receiving services. Becoming an adult is about participating in community life and being a citizen – a contributing member of society.

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### *tip* #1

More information on Best Practices is available in Part 2: Tools & Resources under Tool 1.

## **Best Practices in Transition Planning**

Best practices can be defined as programs, initiatives or activities which are considered leading edge and can serve as exceptional models for others to follow. Research studies on best practices in transition planning typically identify a similar list of outcomes – person-centred or person-directed planning, including others in developing the plan, identifying a coordinator,

and monitoring and updating the plan. Given their importance, many of these issues will also be discussed throughout the document.

In addition, some good examples of best practices research can be found in British Columbia at the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Alberta Central Region Community Board, and the “Transitions from High School to Adult Life” project completed by the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living. In the United States, several good references are available through various states, including Washington, California, North Dakota and Michigan.

### tip # 2

More information on resources in other jurisdictions is provided in Part 2: Tools & Resources under Transition Planning Resources, Transition Planning Guides and Other Transition Planning Resources.

## Person-Directed Planning

Your child will be at the centre of developing their transition plan for their future. You and others close to your child need to find ways to have your child take a leadership role in planning and decision-making throughout the process to the extent that they are able. Involving your child in this way is called *person-directed planning*.

This approach to planning is about understanding your child, their gifts, their dreams, their interests and their preferences. It is about focusing on enabling qualities – the positives – to bring plans to action. Person-directed planning is based on the belief that each individual has gifts and strengths, has the ability to express preferences and make contributions and choices. Again, it is recognized that each child’s ability to contribute to the planning process will be different but every contribution in whatever form is important.

You may already be familiar with person-directed planning from other programs or activities as it is an approach that is not unique to transition planning. Using a person-directed planning approach to develop the transition plan is key to ensuring that your child will be the driving force throughout, with you, the parent, playing a significant role as well.

Much has been written about person-directed planning and there are many tools and exercises available to help those in your network better understand your child. Of particular interest are two such tools – MAPS (Making Action Plans) and PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope). MAPS is a planning process that takes a look at a person’s story – their history – to understand them and help them develop a plan to move in the direction of their dreams. PATH takes a point in the future and works back to the present, identifying the steps needed in between to make a dream a reality.

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Further information about these tools is available at [www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com). They are also identified in Part 2: Tools & Resources under Transition Planning Resources, Person-Directed Planning Tools.

Much of the literature on person-directed planning suggests that families should engage a facilitator to help through the planning process as is the case with the MAPS and PATH tools. The facilitator does not have to be a service professional but it is helpful if it is someone who has been trained in the use of person-directed planning tools. The Central Alberta Community Board has developed a set of person-centred planning tools so that families can engage in the planning activities and manage the process on their own. Many individuals, families, and service providers have been involved in conceptualizing, designing, piloting, and evaluating the person-centered planning process now being implemented in communities across the Central Alberta region. A person-centred planning tool and guidebook have been developed; a literature review and personal stories of success are also available for review. In Ontario,

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The Alberta documents can all be accessed at <http://www.pdd.org/central/resources/personcp.shtml>. and the Ontario document is available at [www.individualizedfunding.ca](http://www.individualizedfunding.ca). More information is available in Part 2: Tools & Resources under Transition Planning Resources, Person-Directed Planning Tools.

the Individualized Funding Coalition developed a person-directed planning guide, also available in a plain language version.

Involving your child from the beginning to create a plan that best reflects their interests and preferences is more likely to enhance the outcomes for your child and lead to the development and implementation of a more appropriate plan for the future. You should involve your child in ways that make the most sense based on their abilities and circumstances. Person-directed planning is a great way for your child to take ownership of their plan and to feel in control of their lives. It also provides them with an opportunity to begin advocating for themselves, an important skill in building self-reliance.

### **Get an Early Start**

Planning for an event helps to identify the things that need to be done ahead of time, prepare for what is coming and think of alternative strategies if things do not go exactly as planned. Transition planning will help your child identify opportunities and experiences during their school years to help prepare them for life as an adult.



One of the most important aspects of transition planning is getting an early start. By the time your child reaches the age of nine you can begin with casual conversations about what they want to be when they grow up. Talking about the future with your child will help them become more comfortable with the whole notion of change. You will need to prepare your child well in advance to make sure they are ready to be involved and make decisions about the future. This is an important time for them and one they may not be ready to participate in at first. Planning allows both you and your child to prepare for the change ahead, to identify concerns and questions and become emotionally prepared for the move to adult life.

Through the education system, at age 14, your child will begin planning for the future through the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and a Transition Plan. These plans will identify specific actions and activities that will help move your child closer to achieving their goals for the future. Further details about transition planning in the education system in Ontario are discussed in Section 4.

However, you don't need to wait for the education system to get started. You can begin by keeping track of basic information about your child (reports, records, certificates of achievement etc.) and your family to share with various individuals as you go through the planning process.

Having your child help you complete these transition planning documents that are found in Part 2 of this guide and discussed in Section 3 is a great way to introduce them to becoming involved in the planning process.

### **Manage the Process**

Transition planning is a partnership involving you, your child, other family members, teachers, friends, community and adult service providers, employers and any other individuals with a vested interest in your child. As parents, your role will involve taking charge and effectively coordinating a set of activities to develop a transition plan that best reflects the interests and preferences of your child.

Transition planning is not an easy task and it is likely to be overwhelming at times. But you do not have to face it alone. Early on you will want to surround yourself with people who can help you. These people will become your network of support that know and have a vested interest in your child. Your network should be energizing and creative and will likely include other members of your family, friends, peers, teachers, and/or community support workers and even other parents of children with developmental disabilities. Find ways to give people in your network the opportunity to enjoy hospitality and to become familiar with one another. This will help build strong and effective relationships and help build commitment to your child. Many of the individuals in your network of support may become part of your transition planning team – individuals you select to help you put your plan together. While you are your child's best advocate, there are many other people involved in your lives – both known to you and new to you – that can provide a wealth of information from an objective and fresh perspective. Section 3 provides more details on establishing this team.

You will encounter transition planning in the education system; it may also come up through your involvement in the service system; and you need to be thinking about transition planning activities at home as well. However, this planning process is not going to happen on its own and you cannot wait for someone else to start the ball rolling. It is going to

take your hard work and effort to do this. You will need to coordinate your efforts across the community and education systems and build the most effective transition planning process for you and your child. The more prepared and knowledgeable you are, the more ready you will be to take charge and coordinate these efforts successfully.

