

## Transition from the Infant-Toddler Program

### Introduction

Children receiving early intervention services from the Infant-Toddler Program must transition out of the Program at the age of three. Families must be informed that the entitlements afforded them and their children under the Infant-Toddler Program end at the child's third birthday. Assisting the family with transitions, including negotiation of timelines and participants, is a major role of the Service Coordinator. The Service Coordinator must involve the family in planning transitions and provide appropriate assistance and attention to ensure that transition is as smooth as possible. The Individualized Family Service Plan team, facilitated by the Service Coordinator, must develop outcomes for the Individualized Family Service Plan related to transition from the Infant-Toddler Program.

### General Principles for All Types of Transitions

One synonym for transition is "change." Individuals and families react very differently to change. For some, changes are unsettling, disruptive, or threatening. For others, changes are seen as growth-producing opportunities or as a benchmark for progress. Good transitions are well-planned processes that occur because of effective communication and collaboration activities among both individuals and agencies. Such transitions allow both families and providers to "close" old relationships and prepare for new ones. A child and family may make numerous transitions while in the Infant-Toddler Program. Examples of such transitions include hospital to home; agency to agency; provider to provider; home to center-based, and from the Infant-Toddler Program to the Preschool Program or other community settings. General principles for all types of transitions include:

1. Transition is a process, not an isolated event.
2. Transition processes and local community transition procedures need to build in average agency response times to requests for services. For example, most systems cannot accommodate a multidisciplinary evaluation request on short notice.
3. Families have the right and responsibility to make informed decisions about their choices and options. This may include having the opportunity to visit programs and agencies before decisions are made, having discussions with providers or with other families using those services, reviewing videotapes or written materials, etc.
4. Communities must develop and design their own local transition procedures, based upon the needs of families in the community and local resources.
5. Families need to be prepared for possible differences in service models. Supporting families in becoming more informed about community transition options will strengthen their comfort with the change. Service providers should be careful to present facts only and not personal bias or prejudice.

**Steps in the Transition Process from the Infant-Toddler Program for All Children**

The steps for transitions from the Infant-Toddler Program for all children include:

1. Discussion with and preparation of the parent regarding future placements and other matters related to the child's transition.
2. Discussion with the parent about the need for service coordination beyond age three and referral to the Child Service Coordination Program or another community provider, as appropriate. The Children's Developmental Services Agency should share information with the parent about other community resources, as appropriate. Written authorization from the parent to make any referrals, other than to make the child known to the Local Education Agency, is required.
3. Evaluation, as appropriate and needed, to determine future needs and eligibility for other programs.
4. Preparation of the child for changes in service delivery, including steps to help the child adjust to and function in a new setting, if appropriate.
5. Documentation in the Individualized Family Service Plan of steps to support the transition of the child from the Infant-Toddler Program, including the addition of appropriate outcomes, activities, timelines, etc.
6. With written parental authorization, the transmission of information about the child to the new provider to ensure continuity of services, including evaluation and assessment information and a copy of the current Individualized Family Service Plan. New providers may include the Local Education Agency or other community programs offering services to young children.
7. Completion and submission of the *North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program Data Form* to the Children's Developmental Services Agency at the child's third birthday.

**Steps in the Transition Process for Children Not Eligible for the Preschool Program**

1. At the Individualized Family Service Plan review closest to the child's second birthday, the Service Coordinator in conjunction with Children's Developmental Services Agency staff and the parent discuss whether the child may be eligible for the Preschool Program. If the child clearly is not eligible, the Service Coordinator, with the approval of the family, convenes a planning meeting to discuss other possible services that the child and family may want, need, and qualify for and to develop a transition plan.

Note: The transition plan is part of the child's current Individualized Family Service Plan.

2. Meeting participants include:
  - parent, guardian, or surrogate parent;
  - Service Coordinator, and
  - representatives from current and possible future programs.

## Steps in the Transition Process from the Infant-Toddler Program to the Preschool Program

The following steps outline the process for transitioning from the Infant-Toddler Program to the Preschool Program for all children who may be eligible for the Preschool Program. This process applies to children already enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Program or children who are referred to the Infant-Toddler Program shortly before their third birthday.

1. **On or before the child's second birthday (primarily for children with vision and hearing problems or those with complicated or intense service delivery needs):**
  - a. The Service Coordinator discusses transition with the parent, including steps in the transition process, possible service options, etc. Documentation is made in the Individualized Family Service Plan of steps to support the transition of the child from the Infant-Toddler Program, including the addition of appropriate outcomes, activities, timelines, etc.
  - b. The Service Coordinator contacts the Local Education Agency to provide information about the child, his special needs, current level and modality of service, his developmental abilities, and other special considerations. Written parental authorization is required for the Service Coordinator to share more than the child's name, date of birth, and contact information for the parent.

Note: While the above steps are primarily for children with vision and hearing problems or those with complicated or intense service delivery needs, they are recommended for all children, as appropriate. Early notification will allow the Local Education Agency additional time to plan appropriate services. For children with vision and hearing problems, the Local Education Agency should be informed of such things as the child's service modalities, communication approaches, the level of services on the Individualized Family Service Plan, the child's hearing age, language age, or cochlear implant age.

2. **Six months (180 days) prior to the child's third birthday:**
  - a. The Service Coordinator discusses transition with the parent, including steps in the transition process, possible service options, etc, if not previously done. Documentation is made in the Individualized Family Service Plan of steps to support the transition of the child from the Infant-Toddler Program, including the addition of appropriate outcomes, activities, timelines, etc. or appropriate revisions are made to the Individualized Family Service Plan.
  - b. The Service Coordinator contacts the Local Education Agency to discuss transition and possible eligibility for preschool services, if not previously done.
  - c. The Service Coordinator arranges for the Children's Developmental Services Agency or another evaluation provider to begin the evaluation process, if the child is suspected of being eligible for the Preschool Program.
  - d. The Service Coordinator gives the parent a copy of *Early Childhood Transitions in North Carolina: A Parent's Guide to the Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs* and reviews the content and transition process with him, if not previously done. This guidance document will

- inform the parent of any differences between the two Programs regarding service availability and options, legal responsibilities, the requirement that the child be determined eligible and need special education services before he can receive services from the Local Education Agency, and the role and responsibilities of the Individualized Education Program team in determining service delivery options.
- e. The parent should be informed of all service options available through the Preschool Program for his child and invited to visit different settings.
  - f. The transition meeting may occur at this time, if the parties agree.

Note: It is highly recommended that a meeting, not just a contact, occur six months prior to the child's third birthday if the child has a vision or hearing problem or has complicated or intense service delivery needs. A face-to-face meeting may be helpful to the Local Education Agency in identifying any special assistance in the form of specialists, equipment, or environmental adaptations that will be needed in order to ensure a free and appropriate public education. This special assistance may include, but is not limited to, large print storybooks and various devices in order for the child with a visual impairment to reach developmental levels. This may also include instruction in sign language, instruction using the Auditory Verbal or Oral approach, the need for interpreters or translators, FM sound system, or other support in order for the child with a hearing loss to communicate and reach developmental levels.

**3. Three months (90 days) prior to the child's third birthday:**

- a. The Service Coordinator must convene a transition planning meeting with the following persons:
  - parent;
  - Local Education Agency representative;
  - representative of the evaluative agency if the child has been evaluated, and
  - any other person or service providers who might help support and develop the transition plan.
- b. The transition-planning meeting may include the following steps:
  - referral may be made to the Local Education Agency, and they may begin official paperwork, if all evaluations have been completed. (From official referral to placement should be ninety days.)
  - if more evaluations are needed to determine outcomes of the Infant-Toddler Program, then the Children's Developmental Services Agency is responsible for completing evaluations in a timely manner until the child turns three.
  - Individualized Education Program development and possible placement options may be discussed.

- the transition plan, which is part of the child's current Individualized Family Service Plan, is reviewed or updated to ensure that:
  - Infant-Toddler Program services continue until third birthday,
  - the plan delineates responsibilities of sending and receiving agencies, and
  - upon the third birthday, Preschool Program services become available to eligible children.

Note: This transition planning meeting can be held up to nine months before the child's third birthday if all participants are in agreement.

4. **One month (30 days) prior to the child's third birthday:**

- a. The Preschool Individualized Education Program Team may convene a meeting. Members of this Team must include:
  - parent, guardian, or surrogate;
  - referring agency personnel, Service Coordinator, and current service providers, as appropriate (for children with a vision or hearing problem, a representative from the Office of Education Services);
  - director of programs for exceptional children or another designee from the Local Education Agency other than the child's teacher;
  - teacher qualified to provide special education;
  - teacher qualified to provide regular early childhood education or services (may be a child care representative if the child is enrolled in a child care program);
  - person knowledgeable about evaluation results (may be one of the other members of the team), and
  - other people who are appropriate.
- b. The Preschool Individualized Education Program Team gives rights to the parent (to become effective on third birthday) and finalizes:
  - official referral, if not done earlier;
  - eligibility determination, if all evaluations have been completed (when eligibility is determined, the Individualized Education Program must be written within 30 days);
  - the Individualized Education Program which may be completed and signed at this time to begin on the child's third birthday (The child's Individualized Family Service Plan must be considered when writing the Individualized Education Program.), and
  - placement decisions which may be made with official forms signed by the parent.

- c. The Service Coordinator, Local Education Agency representative and the parent, as part of the Individualized Education Program Team, work closely together to ensure that decisions regarding service provision, once the child is determined eligible for and needs special education, are made collectively by the entire Team:
    - at the time of the Individualized Education Program meeting, if differences between team members exist regarding the services for the child, the Individualized Education Program Team must try to come to consensus, and
    - if the Individualized Education Program Team cannot reach consensus, then the Local Education Agency must make the decision and the parent advised of his rights to due process if he is not in agreement with the Team's or the Local Education Agency's decision on educational services.
5. **Upon a child's third birthday:**
- a. The LEA assumes responsibility for ensuring a free and appropriate public education and guaranteeing protection of child and family rights.
  - b. The Individualized Education Program becomes effective. If a child becomes eligible over the summer, an Individualized Education Program may be written for services to begin at the beginning of the school year if the child is not eligible for extended school year.
  - c. The Individualized Education Program Team has ensured a smooth transition from Infant-Toddler Program services to Preschool Program services.

### **Eligibility Categories for the Preschool Program**

The term "preschool children with special needs" includes all three and four year-old children and those five year-old children who are ineligible for kindergarten and who, because of permanent or temporary cognitive, communicative, social-emotional, or adaptive disabilities, are unable to have all of their developmental needs met in a normal environment without special education and related services. Preschool children become eligible for services upon reaching their third birthday. Categories of eligibility, along with other details about Preschool Program services can be found in ***Procedures Governing Programs and Services for Children with Special Needs***. Information about obtaining this document is available from the Local Education Agency.

Additional information on developing transition procedures is available from the Regional Early Intervention Consultants. (*For additional information, see the Resources and Publications Section.*) The publication ***Early Childhood Transition in North Carolina: A Parent's Guide to the Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs*** is available from the Children's Developmental Services Agency.