

T RANSITION: A COLLABORATION STORY

By DOROTHY TAYLOR, Editor

Picture a family with a 3-year-old boy who has special needs. The child is happily enrolled in an early childhood special education program that is meeting his needs and that he enjoys. Family members are pleased at the support they receive from the early childhood program and from their local school district. What did it take to get to this point? The following is a description of a well-conceived transition process and provider training that are making it happen in Utah through careful and creative collaboration among agencies. We will introduce you to some families and their transition experiences.

As a bonus, this article contains reprints of three excellent handout materials related to transition that are designed for early intervention providers to share with families. Permission to use them has been granted by Project AHEAD Outreach, which trains and equips early intervention providers to deliver effective family-centered services. The handouts are (a) Transition Map, a visual representation of the sequence involved in transition (p. 4); (b) Possible Questions to Ask, a list questions families might ask throughout the transition process (p. 11); and (c) Items to Bring for Meetings, a checklist that can be used prior to each meeting (p. 10). Other valuable handouts that AHEAD incorporates into its training on transition include (a) Family Transition Needs Checklist, (b) Glossary of Transition Terms and Acronyms, (c) Child Portfolio, providing a variety of family-friendly ways for families to share information about their child, (d) Equipment/Materials Form to list all used by the child, (e) Contact Person List, (f) Preparing My Child, a prioritization list of readiness skills for preschool, (g) Program Observation for Families, a checklist-evaluation form, and (h) Transition Evaluation, a feedback form families can complete.

Background of the Utah Training Program

In the mid-1990's, the Early Intervention Research Institute (EIRI) at Utah State University conducted a longitudinal study of children enrolled in Utah's Part C and Part B programs. One objective of the study, named the Utah Early Intervention Project (UTEIP), was to evaluate parent satisfaction and team understanding of the early intervention-to-preschool transition process.

The UTEIP final report contained several recommendations related to transition, and in response, a multi-agency task force formed. The task force was comprised of three transition teams from Part C and Part B, a Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) representative, parents, and state lead agency representatives. The task force identified seven recommended practices and 32 critical activities believed to be essential for a seamless system of transition. With these in mind, a multi-agency team developed a training program to equip early intervention and special education providers with the procedures to help families and children prepare for and participate fully in transition. The training program, called *The Transition Process: Early Intervention to Preschool*, includes an extensive trainer's manual, group training procedures, video presentation, and self-study DVD. The production of these materials was jointly funded by four state agencies: Utah Department of Health Baby Watch Early Intervention, the Utah State Office of Education Students at Risk, the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Parent Infant Program, and the SKI-HI Institute at Utah State University. The training program is guided by recommended practices and critical activities which were based on the federal regulations contained in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Building Blocks for Effective Transition

Each early intervention program in Utah, its local school district, Head Start agency, and other appropriate parties are required to develop a local interagency agreement. The agreement should identify essential elements which develop and maintain a collaborative process for transitioning families and children to the Part B preschool program or other community agencies.

Early intervention providers have the responsibility of preparing the family and child for the transition and developing a transition plan. IDEA requires that the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) include a plan that will support the child's transition from early intervention into other services. In Utah as in many other states, the Part C and Part B programs collaborate in making that transition as smooth as possible. They observe the following major milestones, with prior notice given to the parents:

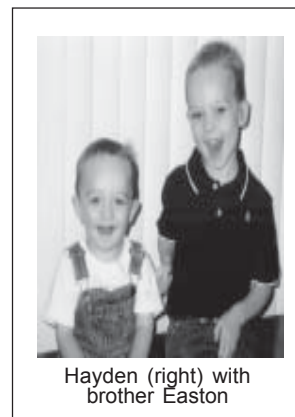
1. The 2nd Birthday IFSP Meeting. The purpose is to revise the current IFSP to include transition outcomes to meet the needs of the child and family. The meeting must be preceded by explanatory discussions between the early intervention provider and the family, and by assessment of the child. As stated in the *Transition Process Trainer's Manual*, "If early intervention providers do not begin the process much before the 90-Day Transition Meeting, they frequently run out of time to adequately prepare the child and the family."
2. The 90- or 120-Day Transition Meeting. The IDEA requires that a transition conference be held at least 90 days, and up to six months, before the child is eligible for early childhood education services. The Utah *Transition Process Trainer's Manual* specifies certain activities for this important meeting, the purposes of which are to "revise and enhance the transition plan that was started at the 2nd Birthday IFSP Meeting, identify a continuum of preschool service delivery patterns, and ensure that eligible children receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education on or before their 3rd birthday." The Part B early childhood special education representative attends the Transition Meeting along with the early intervention team. For the child who may not be eligible for early childhood services under Part B, the early intervention program must make a reasonable effort to convene a conference to discuss other appropriate services.
3. The IEP Meeting. The purpose is to generate the child's first IEP document. The *Transition Process Trainer's Manual* states that it is critical for early intervention providers to understand the IEP process in order to assist families in preparing for this meeting. Utah recommended practice is that the early intervention service coordinator be present at this IEP meeting. The child's transition team must ensure that the IEP is developed and implemented and that placement of the child is determined on or before the child's 3rd birthday so the child will have uninterrupted services as required by the IDEA.

The Transition Process training program provides extensive training and support materials that may be used with professionals, paraprofessionals, and administrators. The training manual, accompanying videotape, and DVD allow for efficient and complete training to take place. The training is divided into four sections: (1) Procedural Safeguards, (2) Second Birthday IFSP Meeting, (3) The 90- or 120-Day Transition Meeting, and (4) The IEP Meeting. Ideally, the training should be conducted by individuals with experience in the transition process and state regulations and be provided to small groups of both local early intervention program and receiving school district personnel. The training requires 6 hours of contact and comprises a review of each section of the training video and small group breakout sessions for local problem solving and discussion. Field testing of this program was made possible through funding from an Interagency Outreach Training Initiative (IOTI) grant from the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University. The training package has been made available for purchase from HOPE, Inc. (see resource list for contact information).

Four Families' Experiences with Transition

Hailee, Zachary, and Bryson are three children who completed their transition from early intervention into early childhood special education programs during the past year. A fourth child named Hayden and his family completed transition before the new transition processes had been fully implemented.

Hayden has a hearing loss and was receiving aural-oral programming during early intervention. His parents participated in a 90-day Transition Meeting and an IEP Meeting, but at first did not clearly understand the transition process or their rights in that process. The first IEP included a small-group speech therapy program, but no classroom placement. There was thus little opportunity for interaction with peers, which Hayden's parents felt he needed. In searching for more information, and as new transition-related procedures were implemented, Hayden's mother, Stefanie, soon learned that she had the right to express what she felt Hayden needed, to call another IEP meeting, and to invite those she wished to be present, including her early intervention provider. In the next meeting, Stefanie was prepared to advocate more knowledgeably for her son. The school district was responsive to the parents' requests and concerns. Services became more appropriate for Hayden, and eventually Stefanie found a



private community preschool in which Hayden's classroom needs were met. He continued receiving concurrent speech therapy from the school district. Hayden's younger brother, Easton, now 1-1/2, also has a hearing loss and is in early intervention. Stefanie believes that with the family-centered approaches that are in place, with the advocacy skills she has developed, and the support of her early intervention program and school district, Easton will have a good transition experience.

Hailee, Zachary, and Bryson's parents began talking with their early home interventionists months before their children's 3rd birthday about the upcoming transition. This early introduction gave these parents time to think about their priorities, their child's abilities, and the available options.

Hailee has a visual impairment and other special needs. Her mother, Cami, wanted her and her twin sister, Hope, to go to school together. In the Transition Meeting, Cami had an opportunity to express her desires and concerns. The program provided her with a list of schools that might meet the family's expressed needs. Cami visited the schools and, after talking with teachers and considering location, she made a choice. The two girls turned 3 in March, and indeed they were placed in the same school, where they are doing well. A number of helpful adaptations have been made for Hailee's special needs in the classroom, and an aide has been hired for her.

Zachary has a hearing loss and began receiving Auditory-Verbal tutoring as part of his early intervention program. His mother, Laura, reports that she and her husband wanted school placement where the strong focus on speech skills could continue. They felt that although he would not turn 3 until this November, he would benefit from starting school with his classmates in September, rather than later in the school year. They felt he was ready for a classroom environment. The program agreed, and this September Zachary entered the preschool class his parents preferred. His mother says he likes it and is doing fine.

Bryson was born with muscular dystrophy. By the time he was two years old, his parents began discussing with their service coordinator the options for services after early intervention ended. The family lives in a small town, and the natural place for him to go was a nearby town where the family already went for many of their needs. A special preschool classroom located in an elementary school was chosen. Bryson was able to attend a "pre-preschool" for two months before he started class. This gave him exposure to being away from Mom and to doing activities with other children. Bryson turned 3 last December, and by early January he was in preschool. He likes school, and adaptations have been made for his wheelchair use and special diet needs, so that activities and materials are within his reach, and he joins in snack time with all of the other children.

Parents' Thoughts

The parents of these four children were asked if they had suggestions for early intervention service providers and other parents to think about during transition. Here are some of the things they talked about:

- Parents should not be afraid to explain to the receiving program what their child needs or what they would like to have for their child.
- Make sure the transportation for the child is safe; for example, that the driver never lets the children out of the vehicle unless there is an authorized person to meet them, or that the driver or aide knows how to install a car seat properly in a bus.
- It is good for the program to have an information sheet for parents in their first transition meeting, clearly listing the main topics of the meeting, expected outcomes, available options, or helpful suggestions.
- It is good to explain to parents ahead of time the purposes of the transition and IEP meetings and what will happen there, and to make sure they know their rights related to the meetings.
- It is helpful for the program to examine all documents and informational materials that will be given to parents to make sure they are written in understandable language.
- Parents appreciate it when the program or early interventionist offers an abundance of information – don't assume the parents already know something or would not like repetition of the information.
- It is helpful if all agencies involved in the transition process have coordinated and are not offering conflicting information, from large issues to smaller details such as what date school will start.
- Parents can be encouraged by and seek advice from other parents.



Hailee (far right) with twin sister Hope and brother Preston



Zachary (left) with brother Ryan



Bryson

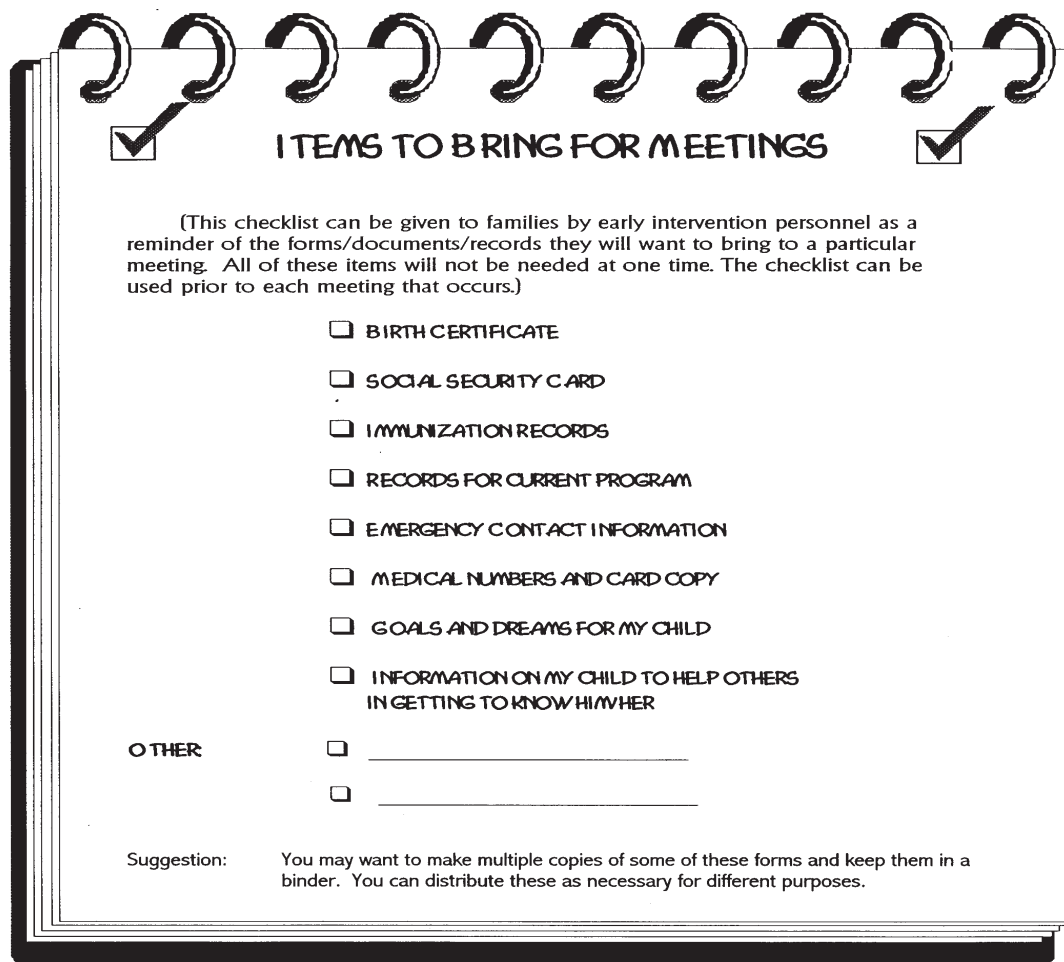
Hailee's mother, Cami, says it is "traumatic" for parents to think of their child going to preschool, and they themselves losing the home and family support of early intervention; but the staff in Hailee's preschool have been very supportive, and the twins have thrived. Bryson's mother, Jessica, says she knows some parents are hesitant to send their 3-year-old to school, but it has opened her son up socially and emotionally, and she encouraged other parents to confidently take this step in their child's development.

References and Resources:

ProjectAHEAD Outreach, The SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322-6500; (435) 797-5600; www.skihi.org.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997.

The Transition Process: Early Intervention to Preschool. Available from HOPE, Inc., www.hopepubl.com, hope@hopepubl.com, 1-435-245-2888 (phone or fax).



ITEMS TO BRING FOR MEETINGS

(This checklist can be given to families by early intervention personnel as a reminder of the forms/documents/records they will want to bring to a particular meeting. All of these items will not be needed at one time. The checklist can be used prior to each meeting that occurs.)

- BIRTH CERTIFICATE
- SOCIAL SECURITY CARD
- IMMUNIZATION RECORDS
- RECORDS FOR CURRENT PROGRAM
- EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION
- MEDICAL NUMBERS AND CARD COPY
- GOALS AND DREAMS FOR MY CHILD
- INFORMATION ON MY CHILD TO HELP OTHERS
IN GETTING TO KNOW HIM/HER

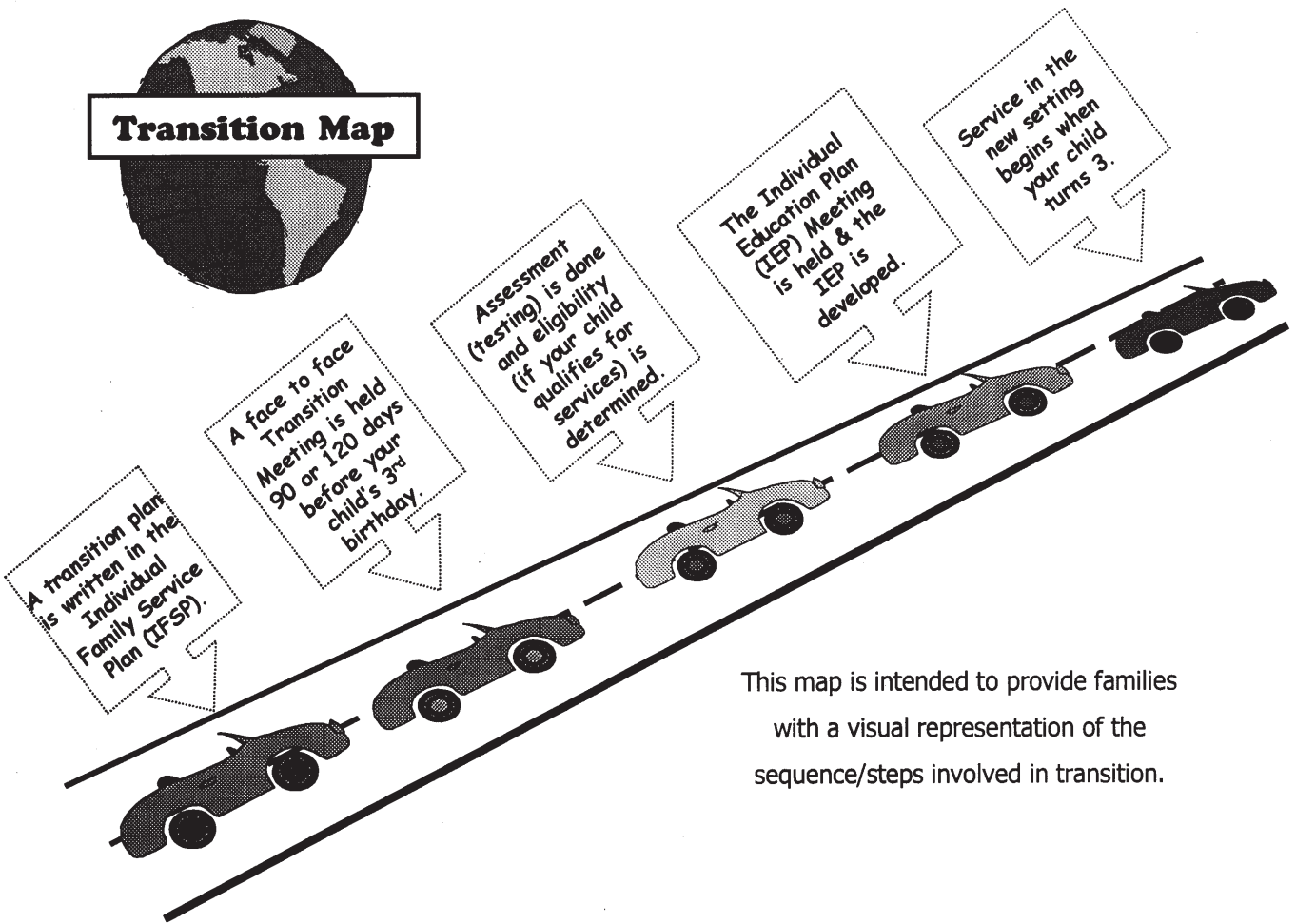
OTHER:

- _____
- _____

Suggestion: You may want to make multiple copies of some of these forms and keep them in a binder. You can distribute these as necessary for different purposes.



Transition Map



This map is intended to provide families with a visual representation of the sequence/steps involved in transition.



Possible Questions To Ask



(This list of questions is intended to give families some ideas on questions that might be asked throughout the transition process. These might create ideas for other questions to ask.)

What are the steps involved in transitioning my child?

What tests will be done? How are they done? When? By whom?

What are your program's eligibility procedures? What criteria do you follow? What happens if my child isn't eligible?

What program options are available? What services are provided?

What are the program's philosophy and goals?

Does staff have training and skills related to my child's special needs? Does the program have specialized equipment that my child uses?

Are policies/procedures in place for emergencies and health related issues (e.g., contagious diseases, giving medication)? Please describe these.

How many children are in the program?

What is the staff/child ratio?

Is therapy provided in or out of class? Integrated into preschool activities?

If we choose a community preschool for our child, how are therapy and other services provided?

Tell me about the opportunities that my child will have in interacting with children with and without special needs. Describe some of the activities.

How are families involved in the preschool program?

How long would my child travel on the bus? Are there seatbelts in the bus? Is the bus equipped for my child's special equipment/devices? Would it be possible for me to ride with my child on his or her first bus ride?

What are the hours of the program (e.g., half days)?

What is the program's calendar?

What is available for my child during the summer months?

How do we make arrangements to visit programs? Who do we contact?

What can I do to help prepare my child for preschool?

Who do we contact if we have more questions?

What is the fee and what does it cover? Will insurance cover this service or therapy?

Other questions:
