

TRANSITION PLANNING: FOR STUDENTS WITH TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Overview

The uncertainty that comes with leaving the familiar environment of home and high school and navigating the maze of young adult life is intimidating. For many the road to adulthood is daunting; for an adolescent with a disability the challenges are even greater.

Why is the transition to adulthood difficult for students with TBI?

Many students with TBI experience difficulty with attention, memory and behavior; frequently they also face challenges with executive function skills, including planning, initiation, judgment and decision making. These challenges can disrupt both their plans for the future and their emerging identities. Students with TBI need to consider not only “What will I become as an adult?”, but also “Who have I become since the injury?” and “What are my strengths and challenges now?”

What does the federal special education law say about transition planning?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 300.43 addresses the needs of students with disabilities by requiring that all students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) have transition services in effect when the student turns 16. The law mandates that these transition services facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities and is based on the individual child’s needs—taking into account strengths, preferences and interests.

What does the research say?

The research related to transition planning for students with TBI is limited. But the literature on best practices in transition planning for all students with disabilities has identified several components necessary for a successful transition process.

The [Taxonomy for Transition Planning](#) (Kohler, 1996) provides a framework for effective transition practices. The Taxonomy outlines five broad categories that serve as the foundation of transition planning (a) student-focused planning, (b) student development, (c) interagency collaboration, (d) family involvement and (e) program structure. Click on the links below for lesson plans and/or more information from the [National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center](#) (NSTTAC).

Student Focused Planning	For all students with disabilities, student-centered planning provides an opportunity to learn self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Participating in student centered transition planning can help students learn skills and evaluate abilities in areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision making• Planning• Setting realistic expectations• Understanding the effects of behavior and choices in plans
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<p>Student Development</p>	<p>Student development activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills instructions • Employment skills instruction • Structured work experience • Assessment & support services
<p>Interagency Collaboration</p>	<p>Interagency collaboration is the process of establishing relationships with outside agencies that might provide needed service to the student once she/he leaves school. These services might include paying for tuition, job coaching or life skills training.</p>
<p>Family Involvement</p>	<p>Families play a pivotal role in the lives of students and in their successful transition to adulthood. Active family involvement in the transition planning process can be encouraged through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent participation in IEP meetings • Development of educational brochures/tip sheets about transition process • Effective and ongoing communication with parents • Getting parents involved before it's time to start the transition planning process
<p>Program Structure</p>	<p>Kohler defines program structure as features that relate to efficient and effective delivery of transition-focused education and services, including philosophy, planning, policy, evaluation and human resource development. These elements provide the framework for a school's transition policy.</p>

Key points to keep in mind

- Start early; strengths and abilities might have changed since the injury. It could take time for the student to re-evaluate and accept that their pre-injury timelines for reaching their goals may no longer be realistic.
- Provide on-going support via regular contact with the student; problems with initiation, memory, planning and follow-through are common after TBI. The student may need assistance staying on track.
- Promote self-advocacy and self-determination. Young adults who know what their challenges are and know how to ask for the supports they need are more successful in post-secondary education and employment.
- Keep parents engaged; their influence and support are critical to the student's success.
- Help parents and students link with community social service agencies that can provide support after the student leaves high school.

Many students face tremendous challenges navigating their lives in the years after high school. These are the years that set the stage for their entire adult lives. By providing guidance to students with TBI based on best practices for transition, teachers and transition specialists are uniquely positioned to help students identify the important components of their goals and aspirations and set the foundation for a successful transition to adulthood.

Hayes, S., Sublette, P., Harwick, R., & Hood, D. (n.d.). *Transition toolkit for students with traumatic brain injury*. Kellems, R. O., & Morningstar, M. E. (2010). *Tips for transition*. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43 (2), 60-68.

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