

# Strategies for Supporting Transition From Early Intervention to Early Childhood Special Education

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**F**amilies who have received support from teachers and occupational therapy practitioners throughout the process of transitioning from early intervention (EI) to early childhood special education (ECSE) have identified several beneficial strategies (Hanline, 1988; Hanson et al., 2000). These transition strategies include collaboration among program staff, team support, discussing the differences between sending and receiving programs, and continuity between the sending and receiving environments (Hanline, 1988; Hanson et al., 2000). Families who felt comfortable with the transition process reported that they were prepared by their therapists in EI (Lovett & Haring, 2003).

Communication between EI providers and ECSE providers assists in preparing and educating the child and family about

the necessary skills needed in the new environment (Myers et al., 2011). In addition, this communication could also help prepare a receiving preschool team with information regarding the child's strengths, interests, and challenges. Occupational therapy practitioners working in EI are aware of the areas of strength and concern for the child, and therefore can support the child in transitioning to school by providing suggestions of how to modify tasks or the environment to support successful participation (Handley-More et al., 2013). Practitioners working in EI can also assist the child in learning the skills necessary to participate in the preschool environment, including self-care and pre-academic tasks (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2017).

According to Rous and colleagues (2007), several instructional activities can prepare a child and family for the transition. ECSE providers can support the family in setting up and accessing program-wide activities, such as home visits, formal orientation events, and individualized materials (e.g., calendar of transition activities or transition packets), and child-specific activities, such as those that will prepare a child in EI for routines they will experience at school (e.g., riding the bus). EI occupational therapy practitioners can encourage families to inquire about such supports with the ECSE team.

Occupational therapists (OTs) can use the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process* (3rd ed.; AOTA, 2014b) as a guide for intervention planning when considering best practice in early childhood transitions in both the sending and receiving environments.

The following are some strategies and tactics for occupational therapy intervention before and during the transition:



## Create/Promote

### Before the transition

- Encourage the family to connect with other families who have experienced or are experiencing similar transitions.

### During the transition

- Collaborate with the family to make a Social Story (Gray, 2015) regarding the transition from EI to ECSE.
- Reflect on and celebrate achievements made during EI with the child and family.

## Establish/Restore

### Before the transition

- Practice self-help skills, particularly those used in the receiving environment (e.g., putting on/taking off a coat, washing/drying hands, toileting, self-feeding).
- Address academic-based participation challenges, such as fine motor deficits.
- Encourage the family to keep medical records up to date and share information with relevant stakeholders.

### During the transition

- Help the family establish a morning routine for the child.
- Collaborate with the family to write down a list of questions and concerns as well as strengths and areas of need to share at the individualized education program (IEP) meeting.

## Maintain

### Before the transition

- Support the family in locating and enrolling in community groups, library programs, etc., to help the child practice interacting with peers and being part of a group.

### During the transition

- Address empowerment and advocacy issues so the family can access resources needed to participate fully in the transition process.

## Modify

### Before the transition

- Offer suggestions on how to adapt materials (e.g., snack/lunch box, backpack, pocket) so it is easier for the child to independently access their belongings.

### During the transition

- Participate in the transition meeting and offer ideas on how task demands can be altered to match the child's unique strengths and challenges.

## Prevent

### Before the transition

- Practice simple gestures and sounds that the child can use to communicate needs and wants across environments (e.g., home, school, community).
- Encourage the family to read books about preschool with their child.
- Visit the receiving environment with the child and family.

### During the transition

- Contact the ECSE OT or occupational therapy assistant (OTA) and provide information regarding the child and family's unique strengths, challenges, and interests (after receiving consent from the family).
- Partner with EI service coordinators to support the family in understanding their rights during the transition process.
- Collaborate for improved communication about when transition or IEP meetings will take place and discuss with families to determine whether they would like the EI OT or OTA to attend these meetings.

## Case Example: Luke

Luke was a 2.5-year-old boy who was nonverbal and recently diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. He received occupational, developmental, and speech therapy services through EI. During a 6-month transition meeting, the individual family service plan team began a discussion regarding the upcoming transition to ECSE, including the change in service delivery model, the role of service providers, and timelines for the transition process. Over the next 6 months, Luke and his family worked with their sending and receiving team, including the OT, to ensure a smooth transition into a preschool setting. The OT provided the family with the handout *Living With an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)—Supporting a Smooth Transition to Preschool* (AOTA, 2014a), which helped them understand the role of the OT in the transition process.

The EI OT used clinical observation, informal discussions with parents, and collaboration with team members to identify and address areas of need. Luke worked on improving participation in ADLs crucial in the school environment, such as self-feeding, washing hands, toileting, and dressing, with support from the OT to adapt activities to meet his current level of functioning. Luke also visited the school with his caregivers and OT before the transition, played on the school playground, and practiced riding a bus in his community. With parent consent, the EI OT contacted the ECSE OT before the meeting and provided additional information to ensure a smooth transition. Before the meeting, the OT also empowered the family to actively participate by encouraging and guiding them to write down questions and concerns to share with the school team. The OT also encouraged the family to visit and observe possible classroom placements. The OT attended the discharge meeting in EI, and the family invited the OT to also attend the initial IEP meeting at the school. The family reported feeling supported by the entire interprofessional team in both the sending and receiving environments, thus reducing stress and increasing confidence that their child was set up for success at school.

## Conclusion

It is evident that children transitioning from EI to ECSE and their families achieve better outcomes when providers and other important stakeholders communicate and collaborate throughout the transition process. Occupational therapy practitioners can play a great role in helping to prepare children and families for these early childhood transitions. Strategies may include altering or modifying activities, remediating deficits, reducing environmental barriers, and preventing challenges by anticipating needs in the receiving environment. Although barriers exist to participation, practitioners can reduce such barriers through collaboration and accessing resources related to best practice in transition planning. 📖

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## For More Information



### Guidelines for Occupational Therapy Services in Early Intervention and Schools

By the American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017.

American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 71, 7112410010p1–7112410010p10. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2017.716S01>



### Transitions Across the Lifespan: An Occupational Therapy Approach

By M. L. Orentlicher, S. Schefkind, & R. Gibson

2015. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press. \$69 for members, \$98 for nonmembers. Order #900372. eBook: \$49 for members, \$78 for nonmembers. Order #900449.



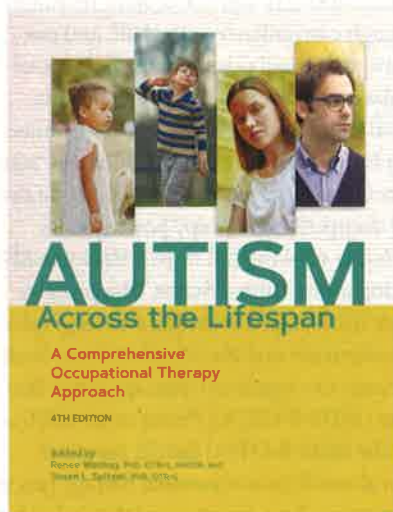
### Online Course: Best Practices in Transition Planning for Preschoolers (Chapter 22)

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