



# New School Year

## Tips and Strategies

By Lanya McKittrick, PhD

Parents play a crucial role in helping their children with disabilities transition between school years. By working closely with IEP (Individualized Education Program) teams, parents can ensure a smoother and more supportive transition. Here are some ways parents can collaborate with IEP teams:

### 1. Be Actively Involved in Transition Planning:

- **Attend Meetings:** Make sure to attend all IEP meetings, especially those focused on transition planning. Your input is vital in shaping the supports and strategies that will be in place for the upcoming school year.
- **Ask Questions:** Don't hesitate to ask questions about the transition process, including how the new environment will be structured and what supports will be available.
- **Request Specific Supports:** If you believe certain supports or accommodations are necessary, advocate for their inclusion in the transition plan.

### 2. Share Valuable Information:

- **Provide Detailed Insights:** Share any insights or observations about your child that may help the IEP team understand their unique needs, strengths, and challenges. This includes information about successful strategies used at home.
- **Update the Team on Changes:** Inform the IEP team of any changes in your child's needs, medical conditions, or home life that might affect their transition.
- **Student Profile:** Help create a student profile or a "transition binder" that includes important information about your child's learning preferences, strengths, challenges, and successful strategies. Share this with the IEP team and anyone working with your child.
- **In Service Training:** In collaboration with IEP team members (TOD, TVI) conduct in-service training on vision and hearing loss/deafblindness.

### 3. Facilitate Communication Between Schools (if applicable):

- **Ensure Information Sharing:** Make sure that your child's current and future teachers communicate effectively. You might need to facilitate this process by sharing key documents or requesting joint meetings between the schools.
- **Student Profile:** Share student profile or a "transition binder" that includes important information about your child's learning preferences, strengths, challenges, and successful strategies. This can be given to the new teacher.

## 4. Prepare Your Child for the Transition:

- **Talk About the Change:** Discuss the upcoming transition with your child in a positive and supportive way. Use social stories or visual aids if necessary to help them understand what to expect.
- **Visit the New School or Classroom:** Arrange for your child to visit the new school or classroom before the start of the school year. This can help reduce anxiety by making the environment more familiar.

## 5. Build Relationships with New Staff:

- **Introduce Yourself:** Take the time to introduce yourself to the new teachers and support staff. Building a positive relationship from the start can help ensure better communication and collaboration throughout the school year.
- **Share Contact Information:** Provide the new team with your preferred contact information and best times to reach you. Establish a communication plan that works for everyone.

## 6. Monitor the Transition Process:

- **Stay Informed:** Keep in close contact with the IEP team during the first few weeks of the new school year. Regular updates can help you monitor how your child is adjusting and whether any additional supports are needed.
- **Be Ready to Adjust:** If your child is struggling with the transition, work with the IEP team to make any necessary adjustments to the plan or supports.

## 7. Support Your Child at Home:

- **Maintain Routines at Home:** Keep routines as consistent as possible at home to provide stability during the transition period.
- **Provide Emotional Support:** Acknowledge your child's feelings about the transition, whether they are excited, anxious, or unsure. Offer reassurance and support as they navigate the change.

## 8. Encourage Training and Workshops:

- **Advocate for training opportunities for school staff,** particularly if your child has specific needs that require specialized knowledge or strategies.

By taking these proactive steps and maintaining a collaborative relationship with the IEP team, parents can help ensure a more successful and less stressful transition for their child as they move to a new school year.