

First Transition: ECI to Preschool

Getting Ready for Preschool

Your child's transition from an infant program or play group to a preschool will be the first of many educational transitions. It represents the ending of one stage of development and the beginning of another. It involves leaving what was possibly the first program you entered with your child after your child was diagnosed with a disability or special need. This can be hard for both you and for your child. The infant program provided an inclusive and supportive environment where you learned a great deal about your child's needs. So what will this next step into preschool mean?

- New assessments and discussions about your child's needs
- New laws, new abbreviations and new sets of parental rights
- Decisions about eligibility for Special Education services
- A shift of focus from the family's needs to those of the child
- New "case managers" through possibly two or more agencies
- Decisions about "developmentally appropriate" services
- Choices to be made regarding preschool services

Transition Planning

The law that provides for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services for children starting at birth requires that before they turn 3 years old, planning must occur for what will happen when ECI services end. This transition is a significant event and must be carefully mapped out with needed assessments, discussions, and exploration of options to determine the appropriate services for a child. Some children will end specialized services. Others will continue to receive special education services from the school. This may consist of support in a typical preschool program, a specialized preschool program or a mix of the two. Services from the school are educational in nature.

The Transition IFSP/IEP Meeting

- Six months before your child's 3rd birthday, you should receive notice that planning to transition out of ECI services will occur in the next 3-6 months.
- The local school agency should also be notified at that time.
- Before your child is 2 years 9 months, a transition meeting will be held with your service coordinator, a school representative, those who provided direct service to your child, and other important people in your child's life to plan the transition steps.
- The transition planning must include a discussion with you about your child's future needs, possible preschools, how to help prepare your child for this new setting and the process for determining eligibility for special education services.
- If your child is not eligible for special education, you must be provided with information about Head Start, Child Development Preschools and other community options.
- A date must be set before your child turns 3 for a final Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) review of your child's progress and needs.
- If your child is being referred for eligibility for special education services, this must be done no later than 2 years 9 months or before the school break during which your child will turn 3.

Ahead of Time

Some things to consider doing:

- Be sure you have copies of all the assessments/reports that have been done with your child.

- Learn about preschool options and begin visiting preschools that seem appropriate.
- Learn about what makes a “developmentally appropriate” preschool program and what your child’s needs would be in a preschool.
- Before the actual changes in your child’s program occur, begin preparing them in all ways necessary for their new preschool and their new routine.
- Talk with both professionals and other parents about options and about the process of matching the needs of your child and your family to a preschool program.

And Off We Go!

If you prepare and plan with care, it is likely that your child’s transition from ECI to preschool will be positive. You bid farewell to the earliest years and move on to a time when your child will gain skills and independence in the exciting preschool years.

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