

Intervention for Youth Who Are in Transition from School to Adult Life

Section on Pediatrics FACT SHEET



PEDIATRICS

AMERICAN PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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Definition

According to Section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Amendments of 2004, transition services are defined as:

"a coordinated set of activities for a student, with a disability, that: (A) is designed within a results-oriented process that promotes function and achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the student's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation."

Essential Elements of Transition

In order for physical therapy services to enhance the essential elements of transition, physical therapy intervention should:

- be based on student strength needs and preferences. The student needs to be involved in meaningful ways in any intervention.
- be results oriented. Intervention should help address post-school goals.
- demonstrate a coordinated set of activities. Teamwork and communication among the student, family, and all professionals are critical to the success of all therapy interventions.
- promote movement to postsecondary environments. Intervention should be aimed at students' ability to succeed in typical community environments.^{1,2}

Common Themes of "Best" Practice in Transition

- Student self-determination (social skills training and advocacy).
- Ecological approaches in determination of supports needed.
- Individualized person-centered planning process.
- Service coordination and interagency collaboration.
- Access and accommodation (Assistive Technology).
- Postsecondary educational supports and employment supports.
- Systems change strategies (vocational career education, secondary curriculum reform, and inclusion).
- Family involvement all along the way.^{1,2}

New Requirements of IDEA 2004

- Age changed to 16 years.
- Changed from an outcome-oriented process to a results-oriented one.
- Local education agencies will be required to provide students with a summary of their academic and functional skills upon exiting from school (Section 614(C)(5) (A)(ii) - see Section Web site at www.pediatricapta.org under "Legislative Issues" for sample form).

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- Requires measurable post-secondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills (Section 614(d)(1)(III)).
- Progress toward these measurable goals must be tracked and reported (Section 614(d)(1)(A)(VIII)(aa)).
- Section 602 requires transition services to be focused on both academic and functional achievement.

Who is involved in the transition process?

- Student and family: Students and families in general have historically not been active members of the “team” up through the school years, even though this participation is mandated by IDEA. Attendance at the IEP, and more importantly, participation in the IEP is critical in ensuring “best” practice as above.
- School personnel: Includes teachers, paraprofessionals, work study coordinators, and related service providers, including physical and occupational therapists.
- Adult service provider agencies: Vocational rehabilitation, developmental disabilities agencies, employers, and other community resources requested by the student.^{1,2}

When does the transition process begin?

- Formally at age 16, yet it is never too early to plan for adulthood. The process is started when children are very young as they learn about and experience their place in the world. Informal transition training is handled through career awareness, expectation of chores, and other typical home and school routines in elementary grades.
- Informal career training is introduced through volunteer experiences and association with teams and other groups through middle into high school. Formal career development and focus on independent living occurs in high school. Students may take either an “academic or postsecondary educational” track or a “job training and on-the-job experience” track in high school. Paid work experiences may be included.^{1,2}

Why are collaborative transition services important?

- To identify needed supports for students in their postsecondary choices.
- To facilitate the students’ active involvement for their future.
- To increase family expectations for their child’s future employment, education, independent living, and community participation.
- To increase the team’s awareness of adult agency policies and differences from school services.^{1,2}

How do PTs affect a student in transition?

- Evaluate students using an ecological approach in specific and relevant environments (present and future).
- Provide input and intervention for mobility, biomechanics (positioning), materials access, public transportation, and assistive technology.
- Assist with job development and job placement options through intervention to improve personal management, job supports, or use of assistive technology to negate the effects of impairment on the job.
- Consider the need for intervention from a perspective of future inclusive community living and work rather than segregated living and work.
- Educate students and promote lifelong fitness, optimum health, and prevention of secondary impairments associated with developmental disabilities.
- Collaborate with other professionals through the school, as well as other community-based agencies, job support staff, etc, to ensure success of the student after leaving high school.^{1,2}

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Related Services Process

Physical therapists (and occupational therapists) may provide consultative services during IEP/ITP meetings. They also may provide services during the times of the day that the student is on the job or at a postsecondary school, or during times of the day when the student is not on a job. Therapists also may provide services at community fitness centers.

Therapists may be involved in training other support staff, providers, or coworkers directly on the job. Services must be easily implemented and integrated into the daily routines of the student, teachers, and/or coworkers. Therapists should keep the transition timeline and processes in mind as they provide meaningful intervention for students with disabilities as they grow up.¹

Where do transition services occur?

Anywhere that a student lives, learns, works, or plays, including community, job sites, home, postsecondary educational facilities, and fitness centers.

Evidence Base for Physical Therapy in Transition

Although there is a paucity of empirical data regarding physical therapists and transition, some authors in related disciplines have established guidelines for practice in the transition process, to improve outcomes for high school students with disabilities.³ To date no known studies exist to determine the role of physical therapists in the transition process or to assess their attitudes regarding therapy services into transition programming for students with severe disabilities.

There is minimal information available regarding community-based instruction for high school students with severe disabilities and the role of the physical therapist.³ Expanding this empirical base would be useful in determining the roles that physical therapists identify for themselves and in assessing their attitudes toward best practice in transition. This would provide insight to the degree of involvement of physical therapists in the transition process. The assessment of self-reported training needs would provide useful information to programs that provide entry-level and continuing education for physical therapists.³

A study conducted in Virginia also found that occupational and physical therapists may not be participating fully in the transition process for students with severe disabilities.⁴ In reviewing the attendance at IEP meetings, this study found that occupational and physical therapists rarely participated in the meetings, although students received specific services such as material adaptations and assistive technology from these disciplines.

Guide to Physical Therapy Practice: Support for the Therapist's Role in Transition

Physical therapists evaluate:

- Current/potential barriers in a variety of environments
- Ability to perform self care with and without assistive devices
- Safety in home/work/post-secondary environments
- Ability to gain access to work/post-secondary education
- Ability to assume work/post-secondary education
- Ability to assume leisure/fitness activities
- Device and equipment use

Physical therapists provide intervention and collaborate with other team members the areas of:

- Functional training in work (job/play/school)
- Functional training in self-care and home management
- Prescription, application, fabrication of devices and equipment

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Physical therapists have much to offer students as they prepare for adulthood.³ There may be many reasons why physical therapists are rarely involved in the transition process, yet these reasons or solutions are not discussed or investigated by the current literature. It appears therapists need education in the area of transition and a shift to community-based interventions in order to become more involved. As long as students are underserved by physical therapists, it appears unlikely that they will fully achieve their transition outcomes.³

References

1. Flexer RW, Simmons TJ, Luft P, Baer RM. *Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities* (3rd ed). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc; 2007.
2. Baer R, McMahan R, Flexer R. *Transition Planning: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Kent, OH: Kent State University; 2004.
3. Inge K, Shepherd J. Occupational and physical therapy. In: DeFur SH, Patton JR, eds. *Transition and School-based Services: Interdisciplinary Perspectives Enhancing the Transition Process*. Austin: Pro-ed; 117-165;1999.
4. Getzel E, DeFur S. Transition planning for students with significant disabilities: implications for student centered planning. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*; 12(1):39-48;1997.

Useful Web Sites

www.onestops.info: National Center on Workforce Disability/Adult

www.ncwd-youth.info: National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth

www.apse.org: Association for Persons in Supported Employment

www.worksupport.com: VCU Rehab.Research/Training Center on Work Supports & Job Retention

www.ncichy.org: National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities

www.canchild.ca: Center for Childhood Disability Research

www.ldantl.org/aboutld/adults/docs/sop_Template.doc: sample Summary of Performance

www.pediatricapta.org: for information on the Adolescents and Adults with Developmental Disabilities SIG, click on "Special Interest Groups"

How Can I Order a Copy of the Guide?

To order the *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice*, contact the Service Center at the American Physical Therapy Association at 800/999-2782, ext 3395, or visit APTA's Web site at www.apta.org.

For More Information

If you have additional questions, would like to order additional copies of this fact sheet, or would like to join the Section on Pediatrics, please contact the Executive Office of the Section on Pediatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association at:

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