

Scenario for Facilitating Transitions

Amy and Sam Chen have two children. Their oldest child Sandy is in kindergarten in their neighborhood school. Their youngest, David, receives services from the Stepping Stones early intervention program. David has complicated needs around feeding and his care can be very intensive at times. He will be three in four months and plans for his transition to the public schools for early childhood are in process. Amy and Sam recently attended their first meeting with staff from the school district and their early intervention service coordinator, Janice O'Brian. We join Amy and Sam as they discuss what happened at the meeting.

Amy: Was that a tough meeting! I'm so glad we've started this now. The people all seemed nice enough, but I'm so confused. Maybe by the time David turns three I'll figure out what is going on. They talked about so many things that I didn't understand. I know Janice gave us written information a couple of weeks ago and even talked to me about the purpose of today's meeting. Still, I couldn't keep track of everything. Who were all those people? They probably thought I was really out of it; I was so quiet. Besides, why do we need to go through such a big thing to get David into school? We all know he has problems and that he has gotten services since he was three months old.

Sam: Yes, I know what you mean. I was hoping for more information about when he would be in school so you can start looking for that job you want to get when he goes to school. All we heard was that the program runs mornings and afternoons four days a week. We don't know whether he'll go in the morning or afternoon or which days.

Amy: At least Janice said she'd help us find child care or a preschool program to extend his day if we need more child care. Even so, I just

can't imagine someone else caring for David all day. You know as well as anybody, I spend half of my days just keeping him fed and comfortable.

Sam: Yes, it is hard to think of someone else giving David the care you do. Are you sure you want to go back to work? I know we talked about this a lot, and that we could use the money, but....

Amy: That's a whole different conversation for another time! Not now.

Sam: O.K., another time. The other thing I didn't like hearing is that David and Sandy may or may not be in the same school. That would be terrible. It's hard enough thinking of David going off to school, especially on a bus. I'd like it a lot better if both kids were in the same school. You know how much David lights up when Sandy's around, and how Sandy looks out for him.

Amy: Yes, I thought about that too. It never occurred to me they wouldn't be in the same school. There's so much I don't get. I didn't know this transition would be so complicated. Why does it feel so hard?

Sam: So what are we going to do?

Amy: I don't know. Maybe we need time and more information. It sounds like we don't have to decide anything for a while, but we both know how quickly three or four months can pass. I didn't get a chance to talk with Janice after the meeting. Maybe she can help us sort things out and give us more information before the next meeting with school people.

Sam: I know school is the place for David to get help and I want to make sure we get things worked out right for him. Starting with Janice sounds like as good a place as any. Are you going to call her?

Amy: Sure. I'm home tomorrow with David, as usual.

Janice also left the meeting feeling uncomfortable. She couldn't figure out why Sam and Amy were so quiet. They are usually much more talkative. She thought she had prepared them for the meeting. She gave them the program's transition booklet and talked with Amy about what was going to happen. She asked her if she had any questions and did not get any. Maybe they did not read the materials or could not make sense of them. Why didn't they ask? Janice also wondered if there was something specific that happened to make the meeting so stressful for them. She hadn't talked to Amy or Sam since the meeting and decided she'd better call. Maybe she can find out what happened and do something before the next meeting. Janice barely had a chance to write "Call Amy and Mark" on her "To Do List" when Amy called her.

Janice: I'm so glad you called me. I've been thinking about you. I had a feeling something happened at the transition meeting, but I don't know what. What's going on?

Amy relates her concerns about what the transition may mean for her family. Janice listens and responds as follows:

Janice: I'm sorry this has been so hard for you. Perhaps I can talk to someone at the school to get more information and share your concerns. Do you and Mark want to be part of that discussion? Maybe that will help us get back on track for the next meeting. Maybe we can talk some more before that.

Amy: Do you think any of this will help?

Janice: It's always helpful to get more information to understand what we're working with.

Activity 1

This conversation gives us an idea about the impact transitions can have on a family. Use the problem-solving approach outlined in the introduction to consider the next steps to take in this scenario (see Appendix A for an outline of the problem-solving framework).

Discussion Questions or Points for Reflection

How might transition information be presented to families in a way that reduces the confusion and bureaucracy of the process?

Think of some ways you might explain the roles of the school and staff involved in transition in a person friendly way.

Where can you direct Amy and Sam to get more information about early childhood special education?

How might you help Sam and Amy find other parents to talk to who have been through transition or are currently dealing with similar issues?

What other options are available to Sam and Amy? Develop a plan for evaluating these options.

Families have very legitimate concerns about changing service systems and its impact on their child. Generate a list of benefits to the child and family of transition.

Organizations

The Parent Education Project of Wisconsin (PEP)
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