

Considering transitions within an EHC Plan

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No matter how old your child is now, it's never too early to plan for the future!

Transitions are something that we all experience throughout the course of our lives. For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, transitions may be particularly challenging, but can also provide great opportunities. So, whilst it is entirely normal for both a young person and their family to feel anxious about transitions, having a voice that is central to the planning of any transition can be extremely positive for your child and can make the transition smoother and more successful.

The word 'setting' is used here to encompass the variety of places that the child may experience along their journey, including childminders, nurseries, playgroups, schools, specialist provision, colleges and so on. It is also worth bearing in mind that transitions may sometimes involve a 'sideways' step from one school to a different school, as a result of a house move, changing family circumstances or changing educational needs.

The Annual Review of your child's plan will consider how he or she is progressing with the support outlined in the plan and will assess whether that support is still appropriate and effective. As your child moves through school, this could naturally include a transition between key stages or from, for example, a primary to a secondary school or possibly to a different educational setting.

Therefore, the annual review meeting will need to plan for a successful transition.

So, what makes for successful transition? Any new setting needs to know the strengths and needs of your child. They need to know about their strengths as well as their needs. When such information is shared in a timely way, the new setting and the people who work there have the opportunity to make any necessary adjustments to ensure that the young person is included. To ensure continuity of academic and personal progress, it is essential that any setting is prepared, and that provision is put in place from the outset.

The way in which such information is passed from setting to setting varies enormously. You and your child may encounter documentation titled; Student Passport, My One Page Profile, All about me, My Learning Journey, to name but a few. Any such documentation should have been produced by the young person, with assistance where required, in order that the process is truly person centred. This can require skill and time but is well worth the investment!

There may be a host of other activities and documentation that settings have put in place to ensure that key information about the young person is captured in a way that ensures that they have had opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings and provide vital information to inform the receiving setting of how their needs can best be met. The on-going involvement of the family and their views is also essential in the planning of transition, often providing useful insights into aspects of the young person and their life which may not be captured otherwise.

To ensure that any transition is as successful as possible, a transition meeting is often essential. This meeting should focus on the child or young person as an individual. The child/young person should have opportunity to express their interests, strengths and achievements so far at the meeting. Such meetings provide an opportunity to develop their understanding of themselves as well as being able to practice expressing their thoughts, needs and wishes to others. Consideration may need to be given to the best way for your child to communicate with others, whether they attend for all or part of any transition meeting and how your child might react to the views of other people, especially if they are not the same as their own. These meetings, conducted in a person centred way, may include discussion about the best ways that a child/young person can be supported with staff from the new school. Such meetings also provide opportunity for the young person to gain more information about the setting; the day to day practicalities, what a typical day looks like as well as opportunity to meet key staff who will be important to them.

Looking at the school/college website can also be a useful source of information when discussing a new school or college with our young people and parents may wish to enquire about their child accessing taster days, gradual transition, meet and greet sessions or social/informal links with other students, to enable their child to make a successful, anxiety free transition to the new setting.

A meeting focusing on Key Stage 4 and beyond, will often take place in Year 9 for young people who have special educational needs. Unlike previously, when transition planning may have been part of the Annual Review, a specific meeting may take place to plan for what will happen after the age of 16. This may involve careers advisors and college staff. It is important that the young person and their families have opportunity to ask about all possible avenues for Post 16 training and education. In the past, the approach to getting a job may have focused on what vacancies or apprenticeships were available at the time of the young person leaving school or college. A much broader approach is now adopted which puts the young person at the centre of the process. Career advice is built into the review process earlier and this usually focuses on the interests and aptitudes of the young person, their personal and social skills, their values, and attitudes to work.

However, the young person and their family may have experienced many transitions prior to this, and it is just as important that earlier transitions are managed in a person centred way if maximum progress and achievement of goals are achieved along the journey.

To ensure that our children with special needs and disabilities have the best chances of achieving paid employment, independent living, maintaining good mental and physical health, experience positive relationships and be involved in the community, in their adult lives, we need to think about the steps that need to be taken to achieve this today. This may seem overwhelming. But it's worth remembering that parents are not expected to do this alone, or to have all the answers. It's also worth bearing in mind that the aspirations of the young person and plans for the future may change - and often do!

Useful links

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/>

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/news-opinion/news/transition-getting-it-right>

<https://inclusive-solutions.com/>

'Planning Transition for Young People with Special Needs and Disabilities - A Workbook for Parents and Students' by Dr Alison Doyle, published by Amazon.

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About Alison Halliwell

Alison has worked with children and young people aged between two and twenty five years in both mainstream and specialist settings, during a career in education that spans more than 30 years. She has held positions as an advisory teacher/consultant for SEND and Inclusion in a number of authorities. As the SEND Assessment Team manager in a local council, she implemented the SEND reforms from 2014. Alison is passionate about keeping the child or young person and their family at the centre of SEND processes.