



GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Best Practices in Early Childhood Transition



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Early Education and Care



DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC HEALTH




Continuing the Journey

Acknowledgements

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A Guide for Families

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Alphabet Soup | 2 |
| Agencies and organizations with their commonly used abbreviations | |
| Two Years Old! Looking Ahead | 3 |
| Important tasks to complete when your child turns two | |
| Two and a Half! Things to Do | 4 |
| Important tasks to complete when your child is 2½ | |
| Destinations from EI to... | 5 |
| Resources and programs after EI | |
| Transition Packet Checklist | 6 |
| Records which should be kept together to track transition planning | |
| Contacts | 7 |
| Format for families to use to keep track of people, programs and agencies involved with their families | |
| Assessing a New Program | 8 |
| A guide for families when visiting new programs | |
| Changes from Your Child's Point of View | 9 |
| A review of aspects of the child's routine and environment, which are likely to change during this transition | |
| Changes from Your Family's Point of View | 10 |
| A review of ways to support your child and yourself through the transition from Early Intervention | |
| Moving On... | 11 |
| Suggestions and activities for helping your child say "good bye" | |
| Where to Find out More | 12 |
| Contact information for Massachusetts programs mentioned in this Guide | |



Alphabet Soup

Like any system made up of a variety of agencies, laws and programs, the early childhood service system uses abbreviations or acronyms which are simply letters referring to the full names or titles. The following list includes abbreviations used in this guide as well as those generally used in the Massachusetts system of early education and care.

| | |
|---------|---|
| ACF: | Administration for Children and Families |
| ADA: | Americans with Disabilities Act |
| CCR& R: | Child Care Resource & Referral Agency |
| CPC: | Community Partnerships for Children |
| DD: | Developmental Disability or Developmental Delay |
| EEC: | Department of Early Education & Care |
| ESE: | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| DMH: | Department of Mental Health |
| DMR: | Department of Mental Retardation |
| DPH: | Department of Public Health |
| DCF: | Department of Children and Families |
| EI: | Early Intervention |
| EOHHS: | Executive Office of Health and Human Services |
| EHS/HS: | Early Head Start/Head Start |
| FAPE: | Free Appropriate Public Education |
| ICC: | Interagency Coordinating Council |
| IDEA: | Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act |
| IEP: | Individualized Educational Program (plan for the child in special education) |
| IFSP: | Individualized Family Service Plan (plan for families in early intervention) |
| LEA: | Local Education Agency (local school) |
| LRE: | Least Restrictive Environment (special education services should be provided in the most natural/least restrictive setting) |
| MFC: | Massachusetts Family Centers |
| MFN: | Massachusetts Family Network |
| RCP: | Regional Consultation Program |

Two Years Old

Looking Ahead...

- 1. Referral:** Check with your EI service coordinator (or Early Head Start staff) to be sure the local public school has been notified that your child is receiving services. This should be done even if you are not sure whether your child will be receiving special education in the public schools.
- 2. Playgroup:** If your child has not been in a playgroup or other group activity, this would be a good time to look for one in your community, so that your child has a chance to know what it is like to be in a group with other children.
- 3. Resources:** Ask your service coordinator about resources for young children in your community. If there is a Massachusetts Family Network or Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees, get information about these programs and what they can offer you and your child. Connect with the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency that serves your community to get information about child care and preschool options and other family education opportunities.
- 4. Time to review:** Meet with your EI service coordinator to review your child's IFSP. Now is the time to identify areas that will need to be updated when your child is 2½. If evaluations are up to date at 2½, you may be able to use them as part of the special education assessment process.
- 5. Begin planning the transition:** from EI, including your EI service coordinator and other service providers involved with your child, so you are all talking about the transition plan, and getting it in place.
- 6. Transition Packet:** Start putting your transition packet together (see checklist on page 6).
- 7. Create a story about your child:** With your service coordinator, identify areas of your child's development that can support a smooth transition. For example, if your child is very outgoing, those skills will support moving on to a new setting and meeting new people. If your child is shy, but loves to sing, think about including some musical activities as a bridge to the next setting or program. Focus on what your child likes and does well as you plan the next steps.

Eligibility for Preschool Special Education

There are two important areas where Special Education eligibility differs from Early Intervention eligibility. The first is the risk of developmental delay. Special Education eligibility requires the existence of a disability or developmental delay rather than the "risk" of developmental delay. Special education regulations clearly define the ten disability categories.

The second difference is whether the disability keeps the child from progressing effectively in the general education system without specially designed instruction and/or

related services. For preschool age children this means the ability to participate effectively in age appropriate activities.

This aspect of eligibility is assessed individually for each child and determined through the evaluation process which identifies the disability and the effect the disability has on the child's educational needs. This evaluation is often referred to as a "Team Evaluation." When the evaluations find that the child is eligible, a team **including the family** writes a plan for the child's education. This is called the Individualized Education Program, or IEP.

Two and a Half!

Things to Do

- 1. Now is the time for a transition meeting.** This is a required meeting that will be arranged by your EI program. If your child is potentially eligible for special education services, a representative from the LEA must be invited to the meeting. Even if your child will not be eligible for special education services, this meeting will help to identify all possible transition options and prepare you to leave EI. Be sure that everyone you wish to be invited, such as child care providers, service providers, or your relatives or friends, is included. Anyone who is involved in providing services for your child, or who may be involved after you leave EI, should be aware of the meeting and involved.
- 2. Review your plan for supporting your child's transition skills.** The transition meeting is a good time to do this, since there will be professionals currently working with your child and those who may be in the near future. Develop a plan to support your child's transition skills, and a specific plan for preparing your child for new experiences. Focus on ways to help your child experience success.
- 3. Ask as many questions as you have, or can think of.** Request information about all the programs in your community that are available for young children. Whether or not your child needs special education services, you may want to attend a parent group, a playgroup or recreation program in your community. Be sure you receive contact information so that you can call with any questions you have after the meeting.
- 4. Plan visits to programs & activities that are of interest to you and you think may be appropriate for your child.** These may include recreation programs, library groups, child care settings and public preschools. They may or may not be something you want to include in an IEP, or they may be in addition to an IEP.
- 5. Keep your transition packet up to date. See the checklist on page 6.**



What's Next?

After EI

For many families, this is the age when they look for more organized and formal opportunities for their children. Some children are already included in infant and toddler settings, and are now ready to transition to preschool.

There are many local community programs that may be appropriate for children and families leaving Early Intervention. Many are community-based and provided at no cost to families, such as library groups, parent-child playgroups, family support and home visiting programs. Others, including nursery schools, Head Start and high

quality licensed child care programs, and public school preschools may have associated costs and eligibility criteria. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) offers financial assistance to many families based on income and activity guidelines.

A variety of programs that address the needs and desires of individual families are available across the Commonwealth. Information about assessing high quality early childhood programs can be found on page 8. Help to identify these options is available from your EI Service Coordinator, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, EEC website, local Parent Information Centers, and local public school Early Childhood Coordinators. Contact information for these resources is available on page 12.



Remember Community Programs and Resources:

- Playgroups
- Libraries
- Head Start
- Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees
- Mass. Family Networks
- Child Care Centers
- Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

Transition Packet

Checklist

A transition packet is a record-keeper for all documents and information about your child. It is a good idea to keep medical, developmental and evaluation records in one place, along with names and phone numbers of service providers, and records of your contact with them. This may seem difficult, but once you begin to develop the habit, you will save time in trying to find documents or needed information. It is a good idea to use a three-ring binder, with plastic sheet protectors, or a plastic file folder that has a clasp or elastic closure. On the next page is a form that you may copy as often as needed and use for keeping track of names and phone numbers. Keep that information, along with the following items in your transition packet:

- Copies of your child's latest IFSP or IEP
- Immunization records
- A copy of identification such as a social security card, passport or birth certificate
- Medical evaluation summaries

- Developmental evaluations
- Information about programs and resources in your community
- Photograph of your child
- A summary of information about your child, such as words or signs your child uses, activities your child enjoys, likes and dislikes, ways to soothe and calm your child. Think about including information about your hopes and vision for your child – think about the future as well as today's needs.
- If your child has any allergies, copies of a notice to give to service providers
- List of medications, dosage and frequency for your child

In addition, if you find you are often asked for a particular piece of information, include that in your packet to have handy.



Contacts

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Agency: _____

Address: _____

Cell/Pager: _____ E-Mail: _____ Fax# _____

Nature of this provider's involvement with child:

Contacts: (Note dates of visits; phone calls)

Follow-Up: (Note responses you expect to get, when you expect to get them, and when you actually receive them)

Assessing

A New Program

Visit any program you are thinking of for your child. Providers should welcome your visits and your questions. Arrange a visit for you and your child at a time when you can observe the normal routine, and perhaps your child can “try out” activities. Since all programs have different schedules and routines, always call ahead to find the best time for visitors. Once your child is enrolled in a program, you should be welcome to visit at any time. Here are a few items to think about when visiting:

- Is the program licensed (for child care and Head Start) or approved by the Department of Early Education and Care (for public school programs and private special education programs)?
 - What is the staff to child ratio (how many adults for how many children of what ages and needs)?
 - Check for safety and cleanliness, both inside and outside – don’t forget to check outside play areas.
 - Inside and outside, look at things from your child’s eye level – they will look very different.
 - Are toileting and washing areas clean and safe?
 - Look at the toys and materials – are there enough for all the children with a range of items, with different sizes, textures, colors and uses. Can your child use and practice all of his or her skills and learn new ones?
 - Ask if you can meet or talk with parents of other children.
 - Spend time at the new setting. Watch how snacks and transitions are handled and imagine your child as part of the action.
- Observe staff and child interactions – see if they match your values and goals.
 - Arrange for your child to spend some time at the new setting with you.
 - Take photographs, or, with your child, make a picture of the new setting, which you can refer to when talking about changes. (Always ask before you photograph!)
 - Will any changes need to be made to the physical layout and environment in order for your child to be safe and comfortable? If so, start action on those now.
 - Find out what the daily routine is. If you can, incorporate some of that routine at home to give your child practice.

For additional guidelines on assessing the new setting in view of your child’s special needs, visit the DEC (Division of Early Childhood) web-site at www.dec-sped.org.



Changes

From Your Child's Point of View

In moving from a toddler program to a setting for preschoolers, many things will change in your child's routine and environment. You can help your child move with ease through these changes by thinking about them ahead of time. When you know what will change, you can identify areas where your child's skills need support and areas where your child's skills will promote success. You can develop strategies with your service providers to make the new setting and routine familiar and support your child's adjustment.

Here are a few things to think about:

- There may now be both "big" and "little" children in the playground or school building, where before your child may have only been around other young children.
- Transportation may be very different – some children may be picked up by a big yellow school bus, or a van, others may still be brought to school by a parent.
- The route to the new setting may be different from the route to the old one. Try it out and help your child become familiar with the changes.
- There will be new teachers and other adults, and perhaps more children in the classroom or group.
- There will be new toys, songs, tables, rooms, smells, sights and sounds.
- There may be "school" every day instead of one or two times a week.
- The day may be longer, or shorter, with group activities and transitions embedded in the routine.
- Children may be expected to try to do more tasks for themselves, such as putting on coats, zipping, pouring juice at snack time and following more adult directions about things on which three year olds can be working.



Changes

From Your Family's Point of View

When your child moves from Early Intervention to another community setting, there will also be many changes for you and your family. You may have been receiving Early Intervention services for a short time, or for several years and are used to services being delivered in a particular way. The transition period is the perfect opportunity to ask questions and get information about how the new program will be different. Remember, you are leaving Early Intervention because your child has achieved a milestone. Although, the paperwork and mandates may change, there will be people who want to help your child succeed. Here are a few things for you to think about:

- You can expect that you and your child will have feelings—excitement, confusion, anxiety, sadness, accomplishment—as you transition from Early Intervention. Families may experience some, none or all of these emotions. Whatever you and your child are feeling, it is important to acknowledge these feelings and find ways to support each other.
- Children cannot always express their feelings verbally or in ways that adults understand. Be alert to changes in sleeping, eating or play that may be your child's way of expressing feelings about the changes he or she is experiencing so that you can provide comfort and support.
- Early Intervention supports and services are family-centered. Services are designed to meet families' priorities and are provided in families' natural environments. Programs for preschoolers and older children are often referred to as child-centered. Parents are involved, but supports and services are designed to meet the individual needs of the child.
- It is a typical and important stage of development for children to begin to have social experiences with other children their own age. Three year old children benefit from having safe and nurturing opportunities to learn and grow outside of the family home.
- There are many opportunities for you to be involved in the activities or program your child is joining. Family involvement is a key aspect of early childhood education. You can plan ahead of time how you will be involved and help your child make adjustments.
- It is important to become adjusted to the new program and people, but it is equally important to say "good bye" to the staff and program your child is leaving. Help your child to have a concrete way of saying good bye to the Early Intervention staff he or she had been working with (It is also important for adults to say good bye to each other).

Some suggestions for activities to help say "good bye" are included on the following page.



Moving On...

Some suggested activities for helping your child say “good bye” include:

- **Make a good bye book or chart.** Include photos or drawings of the people and experiences you have had in EI. Write down your child’s thoughts or feelings about what they will miss and how they are feeling. Include a “moving on” page that has pictures or drawings of the new setting or program.
- **Try a “count down” calendar to the start of the new program.** You can make a paper chain representing the days until the new program or activity begins. Taking off a link each day can make the passage of time real to your child, or simply use a regular calendar and mark off each day.
- **Consider any logistical changes the transition will create.** Will your child need to leave earlier or later in the morning? Will there be a bus? Will you need to prepare clothing, diapers and nap time blankets to leave at the new program? How will these changes fit into your family’s existing schedules? Any information you can gather about the logistics, before the transition actually happens, allows more time for you to prepare.
- **Practice new routines.** These routines could include getting up earlier or traveling a new route to the new program, before the change happens. Look out for new landmarks to point out to your child. The new route will soon feel familiar.
- **Learn as much as you can about the new program before your child begins.** Talk with the staff. Ask for information from the teachers as well as giving them all the necessary information to help them care for your child. Ask for and read the parents’ manual. If possible, get to know the parents of other children in the program. Networking with other parents can be helpful in finding resources.
- **Request opportunities to visit the program with your child.** You may want to visit the classroom when it is not in session, or your child may benefit from seeing the program with children there. If possible, try to visit more than one time. Even though many programs are closed over the summer, staff take a few days before the official opening to prepare the room. Ask if you can stop in for a brief visit during that time.
- **Once your child begins, get involved in the new program.** Ask about family involvement opportunities in the new program. Volunteer to help out in the classroom. Attend workshops or family nights. Join the parent association, if there is one. If not, ask if you can start one.

Where to find out more

MA Department of Early Education and Care

51 Sleeper St. 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02210
617.988.6600
www.eec.state.ma.us

MA Department of Public Health

250 Washington St.
Boston, MA 02108
Early Intervention: 617.624.5070
www.state.ma.us/dph/bfch/shn/early/ei.htm
www.mass.gov/dph/fch/eiintm

MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

350 Main St.
Malden, MA 02148
www.doe.mass.edu/
<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>

Head Start

Administration for Children and Families
Referrals to Head Start programs for
Children 3 – 5 years old &
Early Head Start for Children 0 – 3
617.565.2482
www.massheadstart.org

Early Intervention Training Center

(EDC)
617.618.2335
www.eitrainingcenter.org

Federation for Children with Special Needs

1135 Tremont Street, Suite 240
Boston, MA 02120
800.331.0688

Satellite Offices

Worcester: 508.798.0531
Northampton: 413.585.8140
www.fcsn.org

Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network

www.masschildcare.org

Family TIES of Massachusetts

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
800.905.8437
www.massfamilyties.org

Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils

(MASSPAC)
P.O. Box 167
Sharon, MA 02067
www.masspac.org

National Head Start Association

www.nhsa.org

Early Head Start National Resource Center

www.ehsnrc.org

Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
877.353.4757
www.eiplp.org



