What is the definition of transition services?
Transition is a movement from one state, stage, or place to another (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2015). Transitions can involve changes in daily life sequences, functional abilities, environment, or programming (Schefkind, 2015). Transition services are those interventions provided by professionals to support children and families as they move from one environment or program to the next. This document focuses on transitions experienced by American children as they move through their early years to adult life, with a specific focus on school systems.

What is the role of occupational therapy in transition services?
Transition services aim to prepare, plan, and support children and families as the child transitions from one stage to another. Occupational therapy practitioners examine the child’s current and projected occupational needs within the child’s present and anticipated contexts and environments. They then use their expertise in task analysis and environmental adaptations to provide opportunities for children and families to identify preferences, make choices, and participate in meaningful activities in the new stage in their home, school, work, and community (Handley-More, Wall, Orentlicher, & Hollenbeck, 2013).

What theoretical tenets support the role of occupational therapy in transition?
The profession of occupational therapy is known for its collaborative team approach, client- and family-centered model of practice, and promotion of engagement and participation in roles and activities that are meaningful and life-sustaining (Orentlicher & Gibson, 2015). The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (3rd ed.; American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2014), describes the scope of practice of occupational therapy. Based on a variety of occupation-based theories (e.g., Dunn, Brown, & McGuigan, 1994; Law et al., 1996; Nelson, 1997), the Framework guides occupational therapy practitioners to consider the child’s factors, performance patterns, roles, and contexts when delivering services, especially as they impact and are impacted by transitions.

What are specific practice considerations for transition services?
Occupational therapy practice in transition is guided by philosophical underpinnings that direct and impact clinical reasoning. These include:

- **Inclusion** (i.e., children with disabilities have the right to full and fair access to activities, social roles, and relationships alongside typical children, with the appropriate supports necessary for successful experiences)
- **Self-determination** (i.e., goal setting, choice making, problem solving, decision making, and self-advocacy)
- **Family-centered care** (i.e., treating families with respect and dignity, responding to their unique needs, sharing information, and providing choice)
- **Universal design** (i.e., the design of products and environments to be usable by all people without the need for adaptation or specialized design) (Dunst, 2000; Institute for Human Centered Design, 2016; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013)

### Which transition services are mandated by law?

Only two childhood transition services are mandated by law: early childhood transition from Part C (early intervention) services to Part B (school-based) services, and the transition from school to adult life. Each requires a transition plan, which is a portion of the individualized family service program (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP) that outlines the goals, objectives, accommodations, services, and activities needed to prepare the child for the transition to the next stage. It is a roadmap to follow in order to arrive at the destination determined by the individual child’s and family’s goals. However, even when a specific transition is not mandated by law, other legal mandates may be utilized to help support children during those times. In addition, individual state laws may provide differing definitions and procedures from the federal law, resulting in differences in service delivery mandates between states.

### Early Childhood Transition

#### What is early childhood transition?

There are two major early childhood transitions for children with disabilities. The first transition occurs as a child ages out of the early intervention system (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA] of 2004) and begins preschool (Part B of IDEA). The second transition occurs as a child ages out of preschool and enters kindergarten. Children typically age out of early intervention and into school-based services at age 3. This transition is characterized by a change in philosophy, location of service provision, and outcomes for children and families. In early intervention, educational services are focused on providing family training within the child’s natural environment. Services are provided where the child is expected to function, in order to support the family’s ability to function as a unit. In contrast, preschool services are typically provided during the school day in the school environment, without the daily involvement of family members. Kindergarten education includes additional formalities such as the types of snacks/lunches allowed, policies related to illnesses, and drop off/pick up procedures. Additional concerns may be curriculum modifications, adapted equipment, therapy schedules, and personnel (Myers, 2006).

#### What are the legal mandates for early childhood transition?

Early childhood transitions are governed by IDEA. Under Part C, children receiving early intervention services and their families are entitled to the creation of an IFSP, which serves as the blueprint for services provided in this system. A transition plan is included in the IFSP when the child turns 30 months old. The transition plan describes the supports provided for the child and his or her family as they prepare to leave the early intervention system on the child’s third birthday. There is no transition plan mandated in early childhood for Part B services. The law does not specify roles or responsibilities for related service providers, including occupational therapy, during early childhood transitions.

#### What are specific practice considerations for early childhood transition?

Occupational therapy practitioners from both sending programs (i.e., early intervention program sending children to preschool) and receiving programs (i.e., kindergarten program receiving children from preschool) must validate the inherent family stress during transitions. In addition to pro-
viding education about the transition, occupational therapy practitioners should listen to the concerns of children and their families, problem-solve solutions, and provide coaching for how families can achieve satisfactory outcomes. Practitioners in sending programs can teach specific skills to children, such as managing clothing for toileting, as well as talking to the parents about the expectations for performance in the upcoming environment. Practitioners in receiving programs should attempt to establish a relationship with children and families as early as possible.

What is the role of occupational therapy in early childhood transition?
The role of the occupational therapy practitioner in early childhood transition must include addressing the needs of both the child and the family. It is crucial that the occupational therapy practitioner assist the child and family to identify skills needed for success in the next environment and provide the family with strategies to prepare the child for the move. Collaboration is a key element of the occupational therapy role in early childhood transitions. Practitioners should plan to attend all team meetings that may include transition planning, such as IFSP and IEP meetings. In both early intervention and preschool settings, the occupational therapy practitioner should be in frequent communication with team members regarding transition plans and participate in interagency communication opportunities with staff in the sending and receiving environments.

Occupational therapists have an important role in evaluating children in early intervention, preschool, and kindergarten. Therapists complete formal assessments to determine eligibility for services as well as to determine needs for intervention, develop an intervention plan, and collaborate with the family and team members to determine appropriate goals.

What evaluations and assessments can be used in early childhood transition?
Many of the standardized assessments utilized in occupational therapy, as well as interdisciplinary assessments utilized in the field of early childhood, will inform the transition planning process. Although different states may require different instruments, standardized, criterion-referenced assessments that cover the developmental domains of motor, cognitive, adaptive, social-emotional, and communication skills are routinely used to determine eligibility and functional status in early intervention. Informal observations of the environment, as well as observations of the child in the school environment, provide an understanding of how the different school contexts (social, cultural, and physical) will influence the child’s occupational performance throughout the school day. Interviews, meetings, and informal discussions with family and team members provide information about expectations for the child in the school environment, as well as uncover concerns about the child’s ability to participate in school-based occupations during the coming year.

Occupational therapy evaluation tools may be used to ascertain information for discipline-specific intervention planning and goal setting. Sensory questionnaires provide important information about a child’s sensory needs and related motor and behavioral strengths and limitations. Visual-motor assessments provide additional information about a child’s ability to write or draw—two important skills for participating in preschool and kindergarten activities. Motor evaluations provide information about overall motor performance for children entering kindergarten. Play scales give the practitioner knowledge about the child’s use of space, materials, participation, and overall play development. Adaptive behaviors in infants and toddlers may be assessed using specialized tools.

What are examples of early childhood transition interventions?
Attending school visits with families, discussing specific expectations in the new environment, assisting families to determine placement options, and collaborating with team
Transitions Throughout School

What are transitions throughout school?
Transitions throughout a student’s K–12 career occur when the student moves from elementary to middle school, as well as from middle to high school. Transition also occurs as a student moves from one grade to another within the same school environment. Transition areas include academics, self-care, moving from one physical area of the school to another, and participating in special classes such as gym, music, art, foreign language, etc.

What are the legal mandates for transitions throughout school?
Legal mandates do not specifically address transitions throughout the K–12 school system. Consequently, a child’s transitions throughout school are not always addressed as thoughtfully as those from early intervention to preschool or kindergarten, and from secondary to post-secondary options. Transition planning should begin when a child enters the school system, and it requires frequent monitoring and reassessment to ensure that the child’s educational program progresses as smoothly as possible.

What are specific practice considerations for transitions throughout school?
Successful transition from one grade level to another within an educational environment requires forethought and deliberate planning. The occupational therapy practitioner may be the only person who consistently works with the student throughout his or her K–12 school career. The occupational therapy practitioner has the opportunity to develop a rapport with the student and his or her family and prepare them for the changes that will occur. The occupational therapy practitioner is an expert in considering how the student’s environment can impact successful movement throughout the school career (Mancini & Coster, 2004). Occupational therapy practitioners also facilitate the adaptation and provision of technology to support the student’s successful access to his or her educational program and school environment.

members and across agencies are all transition practices that support families. Preparing the child for preschool or kindergarten by identifying the skills needed for success is a crucial aspect of transition planning. Occupational therapy practitioners should work with children to increase independence in school-related activities of daily living like toileting, eating (e.g., snack in the classroom), and dressing (e.g., putting on a jacket). School routines such as standing in line in the hallways, participating in circle time or large group activities with the teacher, and drinking from the water fountain should also be addressed. Adaptations to tasks and modifications to the environment should be recommended prior to the transition and in place on the first day of school in order to support the child’s success.

Children need time to adjust to the new school environment (Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007). The occupational therapy practitioner should observe the child and discuss progress with the teacher to provide collaborative consultation during the adjustment period.
What is the role of OT in transitions throughout school?

Occupational therapy practitioners are experts in activity and participation. The occupational therapy practitioner’s role is to consider how environmental, cultural, programmatic, emotional, and social factors can facilitate or hinder students’ transitions as they move from one grade level to another. Looking holistically at each student, occupational therapy practitioners prepare students for transitions by helping them develop the skills necessary for participating in the forthcoming environment. Occupational therapy practitioners can proactively recommend changes to school and classroom routines and adapt tasks and environments to facilitate each student’s successful participation. The occupational therapy practitioner can also assist the student in developing self-advocacy skills to inform others about his or her disability and any associated needs.

What evaluations and assessments can be used in transitions throughout school?

Occupational therapy developmental assessments, task analyses, and environmental inventories can be used to assess the student’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to the demands of the transition and the future environments, identify which resources and expectations the environment can provide to support the student’s transition, and determine task and environmental adaptations that will facilitate successful participation (Case, 2015). Alternative strategies such as MAPs (making action plans) provide an alternative means of thinking about evaluation by expanding the view of the student’s life through highlighting the student’s desired future activities, strengths, and available supports.

What are examples of transitions throughout school interventions?

Interventions to facilitate successful transitions throughout school include teaching the student to use restroom facilities that may be different from those previously utilized. The occupational therapy practitioner can consult with classroom staff about the student’s placement within a room. The occupational therapy practitioner can also facilitate transition discussions and written information that can be shared between a student’s current and future teachers.

Secondary Transition

What is secondary transition?

Secondary transition is a process in which students and families work with school personnel to establish a written plan for life after high school. Services to achieve this plan are documented in a student’s IEP and include developing measurable postsecondary goals in employment, adult living, training, and education. An effective and comprehensive transition service plan also includes a list of high school courses a student will take that pertain to his or her postsecondary goals; activities (action steps) the student will complete toward attaining the postsecondary goals; documentation of supports that will be provided by family, school staff, and outside agencies; and assessment data to demonstrate that the transition service plan is sound and the goals are achievable based on the student’s interests, preferences, and strengths.

What are the legal mandates for secondary transition?

Transition is specifically defined in IDEA 2004 with the intent of preparing children with disabilities for “further education” as well as for employment and independent living (Section 601(d)). According to IDEA, eligible students with disabilities should receive instruction, related services, community experience, and opportunities for development of employment and adult living skills while in high school. By a child’s 16th birthday, the annual IEP must include additional documentation of transition planning and services.

Additional legal mandates also support students during secondary transition. Students’ rights to educational access are protected by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which mandates reasonable accommodations so that education is accessible and usable for individuals with disabilities, and by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which authorizes programs for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 supports the development of academic, career, and technical skills among secondary and postsecondary education students enrolled in career and technical education programs. The Improving Access to Assistive Technology for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 promotes awareness of and access to assistive technology devices and services for the purpose of participation in education, employment, and activities of daily living.
What are specific practice considerations for secondary transition?

Transition is a process that builds on itself each year, and goals evolve and change as the student gets older and gains new insights. Transition planning should focus on assessment specific to preferences, needs, strengths, and interests in the areas of employment, education and/or training for employment, and independent living skills. Services may include instruction, related services, community experiences, vocational evaluation, daily living skills, and connecting with community agencies. It is essential that students are actively engaged in the development and implementation of their transition plan and that the family and service providers are designing activities, lessons, and experiences that will help the student in the process of self-discovery and self-determination.

What is the role of OT in secondary transition?

Occupational therapy practitioners are experts in task analysis and environmental adaptations and apply them to daily living, education, work, leisure, and community participation. Recognizing the environment as a predominant factor that can enable or hinder occupational performance, occupational therapy practitioners holistically consider areas of occupation within context and setting to promote participation (AOTA, 2014). Transition services provide an opportunity for occupational therapy practitioners to apply the full scope of practice in the school setting (AOTA, 2011). But the influence of occupational therapy does not stop at the conclusion of public education; not only can occupational therapy practitioners help students prepare for transition, but they have an essential role to play in community-based adult services as well.

What evaluations and assessments can be used in secondary transition?

Evaluation and assessment tools used to gather information in preparation for secondary transitions should be selected to match the needs of the individual student. Transition evaluation can include personality profiles, fine motor tests related to employment, learning style inventories, functional capacity evaluations, and more. Observations and interviews best guide the selection of appropriate measurement tools. Regardless of the instruments chosen, important information to be gathered includes the current level of occupational performance, student and family goals for life after high school, and the intended postsecondary environment. While standardized and observational screenings can be used to assess the student’s abilities, intrinsic factors and environmental conditions may impact the desired transitions. Therefore, the occupational therapy practitioner’s ability to analyze tasks is one of the greatest contributions to successful transition planning, as task analysis helps determine the performance demands of desired or anticipated activities and the necessary supports.

What are examples of secondary transition interventions?

Occupational therapy practitioners can use data obtained from the transition evaluation to create interventions such as specific skill training to promote competence, environmental modifications to promote participation, strategies to promote self-determination to increase independence, and working with families to help them navigate the adult benefit programs, support their son or daughter through the transition, and reestablish habits, routines and hobbies for the new stage of their lives when the young adult leaves home. For example, occupational therapy practitioners are in an excellent position to teach instrumental activities of daily living, social skills, and work readiness skills to students. When a student has an opportunity to participate in an internship, or when he or she is employed, occupational therapy practitioners can use the data obtained from the ecological inventories and task and activity analyses to provide specific training or activities, task and environmental adaptations, and modifications.

Occupational therapy practitioners can also focus on increasing students’ social competence. For example, occupational therapy practitioners can help students learn how to modulate their emotional states by using their emotions as cues and guides in social interactions.
What is a next recommended action step?

Occupational therapy practitioners should identify, advocate for, and document the role of occupational therapy in transitions in order to enhance services to students with disabilities. They should become familiar with the current transition research and language used in education, mental health, assistive technology, and health care in order to participate effectively as members of collaborative interdisciplinary transition teams. Via environmental analysis and student-centered activity, occupational therapy can assist with facilitating the transition team’s consideration of the student and his or her family’s vision for the future, determine potential roadblocks, and develop alternative routes to the successful completion of that journey.

Additional resources

The American Occupational Therapy Association’s website provides resources on transition under the Children and Youth Practice Area.
https://www.aota.org/Practice/Children-Youth/Transitions.aspx


Center for Parent Information and Resources: Includes resources to teach student participation in the IEP meeting, academic skills, functional life skills, and more.
http://www.parentcenterhub.org/?s=transition

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center: Funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to improve state early intervention and early childhood special education service systems, increase the implementation of effective practices, and enhance the outcomes of these programs for young children and their families.
http://www.ectacenter.org

The IDEA Partnership: Reflects the collaborative work of more than 50 national organizations, technical assistance providers, and organizations and agencies at state and local levels.
http://www.ideapartnership.org

I’m Determined Project: A state-directed project funded by the Virginia Department of Education, focuses on providing direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determined behavior.
www.imdetermined.org

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT): A Technical Assistance and Dissemination center that provides assistance to schools and VR service providers in implementing evidence-based practices in transition specifically to postsecondary education and employment. The website includes a wide variety of resources and toolkits on transition.
http://www.transitionta.org

A webinar on the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition’s website for OT: “Occupational Therapy Participation in Transition Services and Planning” by Linda Q. Rudd, M.Ed., OTR/L and Emily Kertcher, PhD, OTR/L.

The PACER Center: Provides information, resources, and technical assistance to parents of young adults ages 14 through 21 with disabilities and the professionals who work with them, on transition-related topics, such as post-secondary options, housing, employment, and recreation. Also see Transition Parent Briefs developed by PACER in collaboration with other national technical assistance centers.
http://www.pacer.org/publications/transition.asp


Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology Transition Planning Worksheet for AT users:
http://www.qiat.org/docs/resources/Transition_Planning_Worksheet.pdf

The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): Implements systems change efforts to increase community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. This is in support of Employment First, which is a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. ODEP’s Integrated Employment Toolkit offers information on this topic for a variety of audiences and a video highlighting integrated employment success stories.
https://www.dol.gov/odep/ietoolkit/
References


