

# Ready or Not...Here They Come

*Transitions occur throughout your child's life. Here's how to prepare for some big ones.*

**C**hange, as they say, is the only constant in life. The better you are at anticipating it and adapting to it, the more smoothly things go.

If you have a child with a disability, you may have some specific changes to manage at certain times. As your child moves from infant to preschooler or preschooler to kindgartener, for example, you may face transitions in early intervention or education services.

Each of those transitions brings special challenges. Knowing when to expect them and how to prepare for them can make the changes more positive for you, your child, and your family.

## What's Coming When?

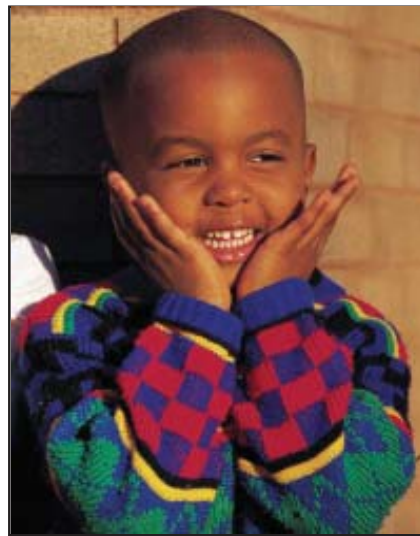
Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all children who qualify may receive special education services. Different services are available at different ages. The first step to being prepared for transitions is to know when they will occur.

Up to age 3, children are covered by Part C of IDEA. The focus of Part C is on helping the family meet the developmental needs of their

child, such as learning to sit up, walk, or talk. These services are called early interventions.

You face your first transition a few months before your child's third birthday. At that point, Part B of IDEA begins, and the focus shifts from family-centered developmental services to child-centered education services.

Preschool services are covered in Section 619 of Part B of IDEA; the rest of Part B addresses the services that will be provided from kindergarten until your child turns 21 or graduates from high school.



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As your child moves from Part C to Part B, services and supports may change. Your child may go to a different program or location—from home to preschool, for example. Members of the team who helped you develop the outcomes specified in your child’s education plan may change.

### **What to Expect at Transition Meetings**

Prior to your child’s third birthday, you and your education team will



call one or more transition meetings to discuss your child’s needs and early childhood special education program options. You and the team will address a variety of topics, such as goals, timelines, team members’ responsibilities, your concerns, the need for any further evaluations, and your special education legal rights.

In addition, you may want to discuss:

- Differences between early intervention and preschool services.
- Options for where your child may receive early childhood special education services, such as community preschool, child care, Head Start, or pre-kindergarten.
- Issues such as student-to-adult ratio, teaching philosophy, length of day, and family involvement.
- How special education services will be provided in the preschool program you select.
- Development of a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) for special education services or an Individual Inter-agency Intervention Plan (IIIP) if your child also receives county or health services in Minnesota.
- Ways to help professionals understand your child.

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## **Did You Know...**

Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), each state must have policies and procedures in place that describe the transition process for young children with disabilities as they move from Part C to Part B services on their third birthday.

The transition steps are written in your child’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). As a member of the team, you are included in this discussion. If you disagree with what the school district proposes, the law provides procedures that include a formal complaint process, mediation, or due process.

Details are available through your school district. You also may call PACER Center at 952-838-9000 (voice) or 952-838-0190 (TTY). In Greater Minnesota, call 800-537-2237 (toll free) or log on to [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org).

Many decisions are made during the transition meetings. Feel free to ask questions then or anytime during the year. You might, for example, want to know:

- For what kinds of services will my child and family be eligible and who will be responsible for providing them?
- How will safety or behavior issues be addressed?
- When will my child make the transition to a new program?
- Who will arrange for me to visit the proposed program?
- Who is my contact person if I have other questions?

If you have questions about the process, attend a PACER Center workshop or call PACER at 952-838-9000.

### How to Prepare Your Family and Child for the Changes

Making transition decisions with your team is just the first step. The next step is to prepare your family and child for the new teachers, children, schedules, routines, classroom activities, and expectations. To help make the transition easier, try these tips:

- Plan ahead. Allow enough time to make decisions and adjust to the changes that will occur.
- Realize that it's normal for transitions to create stress and anxiety.
- Talk with other families about what the process was like for them.
- Learn how to advocate for your child.

- Make sure your child's medical, educational, and assessment records are up to date.

Be sure to include your child in the preparations. Knowing what to expect can help any child feel more confident going into a new situation.



You might want to:

- Talk to your child about going to a new program and visit that setting.
- Read books about going to preschool or kindergarten.
- Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children.
- Encourage your child to communicate with others.
- Encourage your child to ask for help when needed.
- Teach your child to follow simple directions.

### Reap the Rewards

Making changes can be hard for anyone—child or adult, with or without disabilities. Children with certain disabilities, such as autism, may find it particularly difficult. Changes are, however, part of life. As a parent, you can help make them as successful as possible by being actively involved in the planning process.

Transition planning can bring great rewards for you, your child, and the professionals who work with you. You can learn new skills and strategies that may help with future transitions; your child can learn to adjust to new people, programs, or settings; and professionals can gain insight into your child and the materials, equipment, and techniques that will benefit your child most.

Remember, you're not in this alone. As a parent and member of the education planning team, you can request a meeting at any time to discuss your concerns. Change may indeed be both inevitable and constant, but with experience and support, you can make it positive.

—Linda Skaaren,  
PACER advocate,  
contributed to this article.

## What's in a Word?

If your baby or toddler has a severe or obvious disability, it probably doesn't come as a shock that your family may need early childhood special education (ECSE) services. If, however, your child has a subtler issue—delayed language or motor skills, for example—such services may still apply.

The term ECSE can be confusing to parents whose children just need extra help catching up to their peers. They may think it means their child has more serious problems. In fact, however, early childhood special education is part of the early intervention system that includes many services—such as instruction, service coordination, occupational therapy, and the like.

Anne Doyle and Kim Isley know that the “special education” terminology can sometimes upset parents. Doyle, an early childhood speech and language pathologist, and Isley, an early childhood special education teacher, work in New Prague area schools and meet with families whose children have qualified for services.

When they talk to parents, they avoid jargon and simply explain that they just want to support the child's development. After all, that's what early intervention is all about.



“Early childhood special education”  
includes many services that can  
help you help your child.



“Kids are learning and growing from birth,” Doyle says. “What we want to do is empower parents to know what to look for, and give them ideas to try and encourage development. We want them to enjoy their child's progress and help it to happen.”

Isley agrees. “We say, ‘let's talk about the positive and where we can go.’”

“Using the term ‘early intervention’ is just a more nurturing way to tell the parent that their child is doing great, but we want to support the family and help them to help their child,” Doyle says.

## Early Intervention in a Nutshell

Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), children from birth to age 3 who qualify are entitled to early childhood education services. States are required to make services available. Families can choose to participate in Part C programs.

After a family is referred for an evaluation and agrees to participate, a team comes to the family—at home, day care, or wherever the family chooses. Depending on the child's age and issues, the team may include an early childhood educator, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, or other education professional.

If you are considering early intervention services, you should know:

Early intervention is:

- free
- provided by the Minnesota Department of Education
- an assessment of abilities and needs of children from birth to age 3
- a variety of services and supports for children and families who qualify

Families may:

- choose to participate or not
- ask questions, such as “why is an occupational therapist looking at my child?”
- use the early intervention team as a resource to find other services, such as parent programs, social workers, adaptive equipment, and community resources
- involve the whole family—siblings, grandparents, or others.

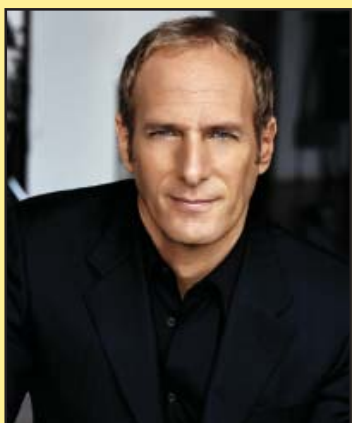


## Interagency Coordinating Council Seeks Members

If you've ever wanted to help families and children with disabilities, here's an opportunity to have an impact statewide.

The Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) on Early Childhood Intervention is seeking members. This group, which includes parents, advises and works with state agencies to provide the necessary services to young children with disabilities and their families.

You can make a difference. To learn more and find out how to apply, visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org), or e-mail Jan Rubenstein, Part C coordinator. Reach her at [jan.rubenstein@state.mn.us](mailto:jan.rubenstein@state.mn.us).



## Michael Bolton Headlines PACER Benefit May 6

With hits like "When a Man Loves a Woman" and many others, singer-songwriter Michael Bolton garners praise from across the globe.

Join us at the Minneapolis Convention Center for an extraordinary evening with an exceptional performer.

Call 952-838-9000 or visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) for ticket information.

## The Invisible Safety Net

You can't see it, but it's there. You hear it in the friendly phone call from your neighbor. You feel it in your aunt's offer to baby-sit. You sense it when you are inspired by another parent of a child with a disability.

Individually, each of those encounters may seem like just a pleasant moment. Together, however, they form something important, even essential for families of children with disabilities. Such connections become an informal support network that provides encouragement, strength, information, and practical help. Whether you seek it out or it just unfolds, such a network can make a world of difference in your family's daily life. How you create those connections is as individual as you are.

Two years ago, Jessica Broyles found herself dealing with an unexpected turn of events. She went into labor 6 ½ weeks early, then was told that her newborn, Sam, had Down syndrome. With 21-month-old Maggie at home, she and her husband were faced with keeping the family on an even keel while adjusting to life with a child with a disability.

"The first month, when Sam was still in the hospital, we didn't go beyond family for support," Jessica says, noting that her parents, mother-in-law, brother, and sister

were nearby. "They helped tons. They always stopped by, so we didn't become isolated.

"We learned about PACER Center right away," Jessica says. "John Hoffman, PACER's early

The circle soon expanded to include Sam's pediatrician, who provides both practical and emotional support. Then it encompassed physical, speech, and occupational therapists. "They take a genuine interest in Sam," Jessica says. She notes that they share lots of encouraging stories about other children who have

Down syndrome and talk about possibilities for the future. "They are so positive about everything," Jessica says.

Eventually, friends and other families of children with disabilities became part of their world. The family was surprised and delighted when two aunts joined in enthusiastically. "They totally zeroed in on Sam and are so attached to him," Jessica says, noting that they are always eager to baby-sit.

Other families have found different ways to build their networks. Some without relatives in town have turned to disability-specific organizations or to support groups where they can meet others in a similar situation. As connections develop, occasional phone calls or weekly e-mails become supportive touches as parents share observations about their children's milestones and challenges.



*Rowan and Jessica Broyles with their children, Maggie and Sam.*

childhood coordinator, gave us an overview of early childhood special education and sent us useful advice on everything from setting up an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) to working with doctors. PACER has been an invaluable resource in helping us to set expectations and understand Sam's educational rights."

*Safety Net  
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For many families, PACER Center becomes a major support. Through workshops, consultations with advocates, written materials, and more, parents receive the information and tools they need to advocate for their child.

Parents agree that when you have a child with a disability, it's a different world and culture.

Whatever your needs, it can be a world rich with support, says PACER's Hoffman. Just look around to the family, friends, neighbors, doctors, therapists, support groups, and organizations that surround you, and you can build a network that suits your style.

## Build It, and They Will Come

Whether it simply evolves or you actively build it, a support network can provide the unconditional love, emotional encouragement, and practical help that makes life easier when you have a child with disabilities.

Parents suggest the following tips to help build a support network:

- Contact organizations such as PACER Center or a group that focuses specifically on your child's disability. You'll find resources, support, and practical information.
- Ask questions, learn about your child's disability, and follow up on leads. Doing so will connect you with others who can provide information and support.
- Reach out to others. You'll be surprised at how many people know someone who has a child with a disability and have something to offer.



## Free Puppet Show for Kids!



**It's free!**

**It's fun!**

**It's for everyone!**

**Come meet PACER's  
child-size puppets  
with disabilities and  
learn about inclusion!**

**Saturday, May 13  
11 to 11:30 a.m.**

**Creative Kidstuff  
1074 Grand Ave.  
St. Paul, MN**

*Questions? Call PACER  
at 952-838-9000.*



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Save the Date! May 6  
PACER Benefit  
with Michael Bolton

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PACER is a coalition of organizations founded on the concept of parents helping parents. PACER strives to improve and expand opportunities that enhance the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families. This Early Childhood Project is partially funded with training funds provided by the Minnesota Department of Education.

*(Alternate format is available upon request.)*

## RESOURCES

### The Play's the Thing

For children, playing is more than fun. It's also serious business. Playing is how young children learn about the world, themselves, and their abilities. It is vital to helping them gain critical life skills—and it can be a gateway to inclusion.

Finding toys that are accessible and appropriate for children with different skills, disabilities, and learning abilities is well worth the effort. Playing with toys can set the foundation for reading, writing, mathematical reasoning, social interaction, and creativity.

PACER's Simon Technology Center ([www.pacer.org/stc](http://www.pacer.org/stc)) offers two publications that can help parents choose appropriate toys:

- *Let's Play: A Guide to Toys for Children with Special Needs* is a free 32-page pamphlet.
- *Toys: Universal Tools for Learning, Communication, and Inclusion for Children with Disabilities* is a 12-page guide on what types of toys build different skills at various ages. One copy free to Minnesota parents of children with disabilities. Others: \$3.

To order, call PACER at 952-838-9000 or visit [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org).