PROJEC ACCESS FACT SHEET #10

Missouri's educational leader in autism support

TRANSITION FOR CONTINUITY AND EMPLOYABILITY

Though transition is typically conceptualized as movement from education to work, transition in the larger sense is movement from context to context. Because people with significant disabilities experience difficulties in every transitional situation, instruction in transitioning is an educational priority. A transitioning instruction plan should be developed for such students within each IEP, beginning with the initial IEP.

Case-management

Commonly there is little connection between staffs at the different levels within schools. When a student moves from one level to the next, the new staff typically must rely solely on the student's written file for information. This can cause effective techniques, reinforcement menus, learning style information, emerging skill levels, and more to be lost each time a student progresses to a new level. And with each change, new staff members must "reinvent the wheel."

A case-management system can help alleviate this problem. The following actions can help you begin a case-management system.

- Assign a team leader. Assign someone on the team to manage the child's care. That person becomes the team leader, arranges meetings and make contacts.
- Assign a next-level case manager. At least one year prior to the student's transition to the next level, assign a case-manager from that level. That person begins immediately attending all meetings concerning the student.
- Emphasize training. Training is essential. The next level teacher should be chosen and trained during the school year prior to the student's transition. Providing the future teacher release time to attend the student's classroom at least one full day in the previous setting is essential.

Systems Learning

Educators ordinarily focus upon content -- the "what" of learning -- when considering programming for a student. For students without disabilities, the method that a student uses to learn is not an issue. For students with disabilities, however, the "how" of learning is definitely an issue and can't be left to chance.

Systems Learning, or Structured Teaching, is a highly successful method which takes the abstract and shapes it into a concrete process for learning. When Systems Learning methods

are used, behavior improves and independence increases. This is important because most employment rejections are based upon behavior problems and upon over-dependence on adult cuing.

Each individual should have an independent work system and habits established by age 10.

Visual Scheduling

Visual scheduling, a primary component of Systems Learning, presents the abstract concept of time in a concrete and manageable form. Time is represented by using full size objects, miniatures, photos, drawings or written symbols -- depending upon the student's level of understanding -- arranged in a top to bottom or left to right sequence. Most importantly, the schedule must be in the student's possession.

The following steps can help you design a successful visual schedule.

- Represent all activities. Get a representation of each activity -- no matter how minor or routine -- in the student's day. Arrange them in order. It is essential to include everything the student does, i.e., bathroom, snack, reinforcers, group time, therapies, recess, lunch, etc.
- Let students manage the schedules. Depending on the functioning level of the student, give him the whole day's schedule or a schedule of part of the day. Do not present only one item at a time. The purpose of the schedule is to give the student advance notice of upcoming activities, so that he can predict what will happen to him.
- Encourage use of the schedule. Teach the process of attending to the schedule. This involves looking at and pointing to the schedule. Use key phrases such as "check your schedule" instead of verbally cuing the next activity. Words disappear once said, but a concrete representation of activities can be processed more easily.
- Encourage acceptance of change. Teach acceptance of changes in routine by allowing expressions of anxiety while referring to the security of the schedule. While pointing to the schedule, say "Yes, something has changed, but your regular (or favorite) activity is next."
- For more on developing and instructing visual schedules, refer to Project ACCESS Fact Sheet #2, "Visual Scheduling".

Futures Planning

Futures planning is an ongoing problem-solving process. A group of persons involved with the individual agrees to meet for mutual support, brainstorming, and strategizing. Group members identify needs, set goals and commit to take action to accomplish changes for the focus person.

This process parallels that of transition planning in schools. It involves setting lifetime goals of employability and independence for a student.