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EDUCATION INFORMATION SERIES

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

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School days are filled with many different kinds of transitions often a student will act out for ...“no apparent reason” but the reality is that you may have asked that student to manage just one more transition than he could cope with.

Transitions take place when students change what they are currently doing or when they move from one activity to the next. This change could entail:

Macro changes: change of staff, change of location (either in the classroom or in the school), change of subject, moving from individual work to group work, working with a different student and change of school

Micro changes: change of activity or expectation within a class such as changing from reading to writing, changing from writing to putting things away, changing from listening to responding to questions or telling a story. Also includes changing the pace of work, the amount of work or the materials to be used within a single lesson.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO MANAGE CHANGE:

INTERNAL FACTORS:

1. Perception of the situation: The student may perceive the change as harder, less pleasant, or less understandable. On the other hand, if the student sees the change as positive he will have less difficulty with cooperating with the change.
2. Motor planning: Students with Down syndrome tend to need more time to process requests, both at a physical and at a cognitive level. If they are rushed they will not manage transitions successfully.
3. Attention/fixation on the task at hand: Some students do not want to leave the task they are working on; especially if they are achieving success with the task.
4. Attention to the next task: Other students will rush to the next task without properly finishing up on the previous task.
5. Motivation: Some students don't care about getting through "your" schedule, they may not understand why you are asking them to do yet another task. They may not want to cooperate because they do not understand the routine.

6. History of this situation: If a student has had difficulty in a certain class/task he is less likely to cooperate with the transition to that task. If he has had success, the transition will be smoother.
7. Communication skills: Students with Down syndrome tend to have communication challenges that affect their ability to negotiate for more time or to ask for an explanation about why the change is happening. Often a refusal to cooperate is communicating that the transition is causing stress of some kind for the student.
8. Health: Some students attend school with ailments that they may not be able to name or when they are coming down with something. In both these cases, they may be less cooperative with transitions. Many students with Down syndrome suffer from Obstructive Sleep Apnea which impedes their ability to cooperate. (see information on O.S.A at www.cdss.ca)
9. Sensory challenges: Some students who have sensory integration challenges, will have difficulty with any change as they are using all of their energy to cope with their sensory challenges. These students will have difficulty with transitions until they feel less overwhelmed within the classroom setting.

EXTERNAL FACTORS:

1. Environment: Many students are affected by the noise and activity level in a classroom.
2. Who's requesting the change: Some students will respond to some people better than others; this includes all staff and peers.
3. How the request is made: If a student feels threatened or embarrassed with a request or does not understand a request, he would not respond.
4. Why the request is made: Some requests "come out of the blue" and may not make sense to a student who is quite happy doing what he is currently doing.
5. What the task looks like: If the task "looks" hard, the student may not cooperate with the change.
6. Who else is doing the task: Most students will look around to see who else is doing the task, if he feels singled out with the task, he may resist.

Ways to help students manage transitions. Make PLANS for successful transitions.

P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prepare for changes in routines using visual and/or verbal systems ✓ Provide reinforcement for successful transitions ✓ Peers may assist the student ✓ Plan structured recess activities ✓ Photograph activities and create booklets to help students "see" the day or activity (videos would also be helpful) ✓ Practice transitions (walking to another classroom, getting books out of the locker) ✓ Provide alternative activities or routines when necessary (a student may go ahead of others or follow up, a student may need more time for some routines).
L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ List the things a student needs to do to be successful and teach to these skills ✓ Lay out the steps to complete a task in the order they are to be done ✓ Lead the student through the activity before it happens and while it is taking place ✓ Leave enough time for the student to complete the work or to change activities ✓ Limit the interruptions of a routine, watch for too many changes in a short period of time ✓ Limit distractions which may affect the student when making a transition ✓ Let the student have control over one aspect of the transition (how fast, how long)
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Anticipate what will happen in new or unstructured situations and plan accordingly ✓ Acknowledge that a situation may be "stressful" and find ways to make it less threatening by pairing a positive experience to the new experience (listening to music while changing locations) ✓ Arrange for visits to new or unfamiliar places, take pictures ✓ Allow the student to take photos home to "study" ✓ Arrange for visits from new staff in a familiar environment (in your classroom)
N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Note kinds and types of changes that bother a student and plan for that transition time ✓ Negotiate what is acceptable or not acceptable in a situation, ✓ Number the steps in a sequence of events, teach to each step at a time ✓ Notify parents of any macro changes that may take place or have them notify you if things change in the home
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Signal to indicate the activity is coming to an end or a new activity will be starting ✓ Supply a substitute with information about the classroom activities and routines ✓ Study the appropriateness of a change in routine in relation to the student's overall needs ✓ Stay away from competition if it creates stress for the student

PLANNING FOR TRANSITIONS

Name of Student: _____

Grade: _____

Age: _____

1. List factors that affect this student's ability to manage change

2. List things/people that help this student to manage change

Complete the checklist based upon a general consensus of how the student manages each of these transition times. Your plan should specify what supports you will put in place to teach the student how to manage transitions. Punishment, (time out, detention) is not part of a supportive plan.

ACTIVITY	No plan needed	Plan (be specific)
Before the bell rings (am)		
Getting ready for the day		
Changing activities within classes (list each class if needed)		
Changing classes in the room		
Changing classrooms		
Changing teachers		
Changing other staff		
Recess Before During Coming in		

Lunch break Before		
During		
Coming in		
Dismissal time		
Packing up for the day		
Leaving the school		
On the bus		
Other transitions:		
Assemblies		
Substitutes		
Fire Drills		
Field trips		
NEW YEAR CHANGES		
Changing schools		
Changing routines		
Changing staff		