

Abstract

The developmental transition of adolescents with disabilities into adulthood can be difficult for families as they lack understanding of the resources available. Through our curriculum intervention, we provide parents with instruction and experience to help with effective transitions to adulthood. This strengths-based curriculum is provided through a five-unit training covering areas salient to successful transitions. Evaluation of the intervention, including parental attitude and adolescent psychosocial development will occur through a pre-and post-test design. The purpose is to understand curricular effectiveness, as well as systematic and bidirectional familial influences during this transition.



Introduction

The transition to adulthood is an important developmental process in which adolescents and young adults develop greater autonomy and assume responsibility for self-care, decision making, and future planning (Kirk, 2008). This transition can be difficult for many families of individuals with disabilities (Betz et al., 2015; Glidden & Jobe, 2007; Smith et al., 2012). Parents, particularly mothers, report tremendous amounts of trepidation, stress, and difficulties prior to their adolescent child's transition (Rowbotham, Carroll, & Cuskelly, 2011).

Adolescents and young adults with disabilities most often identify parents and family members as key contributors to effective transition planning (Trainor, 2005). Thus, we adopt a community approach whereby we provide crucial information directly to families.

While a reliable alliance between educators/providers and parents promotes successful outcomes, most service providers identify parents as a major barrier (Riesen et al., 2014). Barriers are frequently created by parents who either expect too much or fail to see the full potential of their child with disabilities. Our family-based educational program assists families in improving their knowledge base, expands their access to resources, helps them develop reasonable expectations regarding the developmental transitions from adolescence to adulthood in adolescents with disabilities.

Our goal is to provide families with the education and experience needed to help their adolescent child with disabilities transition effectively to adulthood.

Methods

We use a systems approach, where we help adolescents with disabilities and their families understand shifts from an entitlement model to an eligibility model. Froma Walsh's resilience approach frames our curricular emphases (Walsh, 2016). We focus on family strengths, resources, and potential.

The curriculum is provided through a five-week (unit) training to adolescents with disabilities, ages 14-18, and their parents. Parents and adolescents will begin each module together, followed by separation of the two groups for further discussion. At the conclusion of each module, the two groups will come back together to discuss and set goals.

While keeping the training modules consistent, there will be flexibility to allow for delivery in a variety of modalities, including face-to-face, broadcast technology, and online, asynchronous delivery.

Parents are divided into sections of ten families. This encourages questions and more intimate discussion. The intervention will be delivered six times during the year with three sections running concurrently during each five-week delivery of the curriculum.

Analysis and Evaluation

Module Assessment/Evaluation

- Adolescent and Parental attitudes will be assessed throughout each module; these will include, among others, views of friendships, family relationships and responsibilities, sexuality, employability, and academic success.
- Adolescent and Parental satisfaction with unit content.

Parent Assessment/Evaluation (Pre- & Post-Test, yearly follow-up)

- Parental Expectations, Perceptions, and Feelings about Adolescent Child's Transition to Adulthood
- Decreases in parental anxiety levels and increases in positive expectations of their child's ability to transition successfully will demonstrate the overall success of the intervention.

Adolescent Assessment/Evaluation (Pre- & Post-Test, yearly follow-up)

- Adolescent Expectations, Perceptions, and Feelings about Transition to Adulthood
- Perceptions of Helicopter Parenting
- Levels of psychosocial development (parent and peer attachment, cognitive autonomy, behavioral autonomy, identity development, and self-esteem)

Purpose of the evaluation of the intervention is to understand systematic and bidirectional influences of the transition of adolescents with disabilities into adulthood.

Module	Topics	Developmental Areas	Outcomes
1	Independent Living - Activities of Daily Living - Leisure - Community Integration	- Puberty & Biological Development - Stress - Bullying - Self-Advocacy	Parents will set goals for their learning and identify areas of greatest need. Comprehending the process of transition, including the services, systems, and shifts associated with the transition from public school services to adult services. Developing a knowledge of the functional limitations of the disability, while also encouraging and challenging the family member to achieve desired goals.
2	Independent Living - Activities of Daily Living - Recreation Activities	- Technology & Media - Sports & Activities - Psychosocial Development	Understanding organizational resources afforded families with adolescents with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood. Continued increase in promotion of achievement in the transitioning adolescent with disabilities.
3	Work - Employment	- Work	Identify family values and belief systems surrounding the ideas of adult work. Recognize the limitations of the young person's disability, accommodations necessary for success and set expectations based on what is possible and what is not.
4	Relationships - Friends & Peers - Family - Dating & Sexuality	- Development of Healthy Relationships - Family Interactions - Social Interactions	Promotion of social interaction and communication processes. These communications include, but are not limited to, parent-adolescent, parent-community, adolescent-friend/peers, and adolescent-community interactions.
5	School - Higher Ed & Technical Training	- School - Brain Development & Cognition	Evaluate values and beliefs concerning the idea of continued education. Understanding the implications and limitations of the young person's disability in regards to education and the association with what is possible and what is not.