

IN THE CLASSROOM

MOVING ON: TRANSITION ISSUES FOR YOUTH WITH BRAIN INJURIES

For many students with brain injury, the future that had been planned is now in limbo. New plans might need to be made or old plans adjusted. Students might resist such efforts because they want the life they had always planned. Transition for students with brain injury presents some unique challenges. The family and student might continue to hold onto previous goals in the hope that recovery will permit the student to still achieve them.

OVERVIEW

Whether their injury occurs in high school or earlier, TBI can often mean a significant change in the future plans for adolescents. Following TBI, a student might need to think differently about their graduation and post-school plans. Goals for college and career might need to shift. Because TBI can affect students' awareness of their abilities, engaging a student in the transition process can be complicated.

ALIGN YOURSELF WITH THE STUDENT.

Direct confrontation or arguing about the presence of an impairment is unproductive. The student will benefit from having a supportive, encouraging adult to help her navigate the transition process.

HOW?

- Work with the student to figure out what will help her be most successful at school.
 - Make a list of attributes that were not affected by the injury.
- Introduce alternative ideas. Students don't always know what alternative options are out there or how to make changes that will help them.
 - "Your life has taken a detour – let's come up with a plan to get you back on track."
- Reframe problems in positive terms.
 - Stubborn becomes determined, angry becomes feisty or willing to stand up for herself, asks too many questions becomes curious, slow at processing becomes careful or deliberate with her work, struggles become a willingness to work hard.

ENGAGE IN COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

Teens need to be able to talk about their plans and concerns with adults, but it can sometimes be difficult for adults to get out of the driver's seat and let the teen take charge. Sometimes teens can be very talkative; other times they can be quiet and in need of encouragement. Parents and teachers need to be able to draw out concerns, goals, and hopes to help teens with this important transition. Whether it's a formal transition planning meeting or just informal conversations, these strategies can promote meaningful collaborative conversations.

HOW?

- Use open-ended questions.
 - **Instead of asking this:** "Have you thought of the kind of work you'd like to do?"
Try asking one of the following: "What kind of work would you like to do?"
"What jobs can you see yourself doing?"
"What are some jobs you don't like?"

“What jobs have you seen that look interesting to you?”

HOW?

- Ask permission to give ideas, information, or advice. Asking permission to share information allows you to give advice in a respectful way.
 - **Instead of saying this:** “I don’t think this schedule is working well for you.”
Try saying one of the following: “May I suggest how you might rearrange your schedule?”
“Can we take a look at your schedule together and see if we want to consider any changes?”
“Can we look at what’s working in your schedule and what’s not working?”

HOW?

- Use positive language/affirmations. Affirmations should be used sparingly. If they are overused, they can sound insincere or forced.
 - Don’t say, “You do this better than anyone I’ve ever met,” if it isn’t true.
Instead of saying this: “Your grades aren’t as bad as they were last term. Better keep studying so they don’t slip back.”
“You turned in your homework every day this week. That’s amazing compared to last week.”
Try saying this: “Your grades in your writing class are improving. Looks like the extra studying is helping.”
“Nice job getting all your homework turned in this week. Your reminder plan worked.”

HOW?

- Show you are listening by reflecting the meaning or feeling in what your student has said to you. Take a reasonable guess about what your student means or is feeling, and then state that guess clearly.
 - The student said, “I don’t think it’s fair that I lost my place writing for the school paper just because I was out for two months.”
Instead of saying this: “They couldn’t wait for you. You’ll have another chance — maybe next year.”
Try saying one of the following: “I can hear that writing for the school paper is important to you.”
“It sounds like you miss writing for the school paper.”

HOW?

- Be concise.
 - **Instead of saying this:** “I’d like to follow up on our last meeting. You wanted to start applying to college, so it would be good to look at your grades and see what classes you might need to take to get ready. You see, it will be easier for you if you can get your writing skills up. Having good writing skills will get you through some of the classes you’ll be taking in your first year. So, how do you think your writing skills are now?”
Try saying this: “At your last meeting you said you want to start applying to college. Can we talk about how you might prepare?”