

Fact Sheet:

Person Centered Planning for Students with Disabilities

What is Person-Centered Planning?

Person-Centered Planning is a facilitated process which uses graphics to help families, friends and others assist students with disabilities in preparing for their future. This process emphasizes empowerment and self-determination by encouraging students to take an active role in planning for their future. By sharing their interests and dreams, they can help create a personalized plan that turns their goals into reality.

Why is Person-Centered Planning Important for Students with Disabilities?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a student's Individual Education Program (IEP) include transition planning by age 16 or earlier, if determined by the IEP team. Person-Centered Planning helps identify the information and resources needed to create a meaningful transition plan. This plan reflects the student's interests, preferences, accomplishments, and skills. It also highlights what they still need to learn and what they hope to do after leaving school. The content from the outcomes in these sessions can be used in the creation and implementation of the transition components of the IEP.

What is the First Step in Creating a Person-Centered Plan?

The first step is to have a pre-meeting to design the planning process. The pre-meeting can include key participants such as the student, the family and a teacher. Decisions made during this pre-meeting will include:

- Who do we invite to be part of the team?
- Where and when will the meetings take place?
- What does the student need so that they can fully participate in the meeting?
- Which person-centered process will be used?
- Who will be the facilitator?

What are the Different Types of Person-Centered Planning?

There are many different ways to do Person-Centered Planning. This fact sheet addresses Making Action Plans (MAP) and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH).

MAPS (Making Action Plans)

The MAP process uses graphics focusing on access to the educational, employment, and community environments, relationships and the individual gifts of the student. Working together, the team answers questions related to the student's past experiences, future dreams and fears, the student's current situation and preferences and the student's community and home life. The team then uses this information to come up with actions that will help the student move towards their dreams. A step-by-step plan is developed that includes team responsibility and completion dates.

PATH Model (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope)

The PATH process uses graphic illustration or drawing to help plan a future for the student. It identifies long-term and short-term goals and helps to identify specific steps for reaching these goals using a backwards planning method. The PATH starts with the Dream (called the North Star) and a goal for the next year. Then, plan is developed to get the student to the desired goal.

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How Do I Choose a Facilitator?

A facilitator, whether a family member, friend, school staff member, or other professional, plays a vital role in Person-Centered Planning. They should be an attentive listener and able to think creatively to help uncover the student's dreams and aspirations. A strong facilitator also fosters collaboration, ensuring that every team member actively contributes to the planning process.

Although a facilitator does not need to be formally trained in Person-Centered Planning, they should have a basic understanding of the process to implement it effectively. To find someone with the right experience, check with your school district to see if a staff member is available, or contact Parent to Parent of Georgia for a list of trained person-centered facilitators in your area.

Key Points You Should Know about Person-Centered Planning:

- It is an ongoing process, not a one-time event.
- It is grounded in the values of community involvement and inclusive access.
- It emphasizes the individual's strengths rather than focusing on their deficits.
- It encourages creative, out-of-the-box thinking from all participants.
- It involves collaboration with both traditional and non-traditional service providers.
- It centers on the student's own goals and desires, not what others believe they should pursue.
- It considers all areas of the student's life, not just their educational experience.
- It aims to create new opportunities and pathways for the student's future.

Tips for Families:

- Individuals with all types of disabilities, regardless of the severity, can benefit from and should be involved in Person-Centered Planning.
- Allow your child to be involved in whatever way they can. For example, if your child is hesitant about speaking in groups, have them meet team members individually before the meeting.
- Include siblings and other family members in the process.
- Invite your child's friends and classmates to be involved.
- Include adult service providers (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, day service providers, health care professionals, potential employers, etc.)
- Meetings should occur periodically to review the plan and update the status of the goals.

An additional Person-Centered Planning strategy is **Charting the Life Course (CILC)**. It originated as a grassroots initiative through the Missouri Family-to-Family Resource Center, with input from families and stakeholders across the country. The CILC framework is designed for individuals and families of all abilities and all ages, from prenatal and infancy through aging and senior citizen years. It supports people in identifying what they need to know, do, and access to reach their goals. The framework emphasizes strengths, life experiences, and integrated supports across all life domains—such as daily living, employment, health, and relationships—while promoting inclusion, self-determination, and community engagement.

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Watch These Short Videos to Learn More:

- [What is Person-Centered Planning](#)
- [MAP: Making Action Plans](#)
- [PATH: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hopes](#)
- [Charting the LifeCourse](#)

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia
770-451-5484 or 800-229-2038
<https://www.p2pga.org>

Georgia Department of Education, Division for Exceptional Children
404-656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education
<https://gadoe.org/special-education/>

Special Education Help Desk:
SPEDHelpdesk@doe.k12.ga.us
404-656-3963

Additional Resources: Ask the **Transition Specialist** or **Special Education Director** for your school system about these strategies.