**Course: Developing Strong Partnerships**

**Lesson 1: Importance of Collaboration**

**Slide 1: INTRODUCTION**  
Strong collaboration among key partners is critical to improving transition outcomes for young people with disabilities. When pre-ETS providers and schools work together effectively, students will receive more comprehensive and meaningful services. Community agencies and organizations should also be included as partners on the transition team. Many of these agencies will provide core supports for students with disabilities and their families after high school. Involving these agencies before graduation will ease the transition. Our course focuses on how all of these partners can develop strong partnerships to improve opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Slide 2: OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson, you’ll learn:

* What we mean by interagency collaboration
* What successful collaboration is vs. what it’s not
* Why developing strong partnerships is so crucial for post-school success of students with disabilities
* And key partners and agencies to collaborate with

**Slide 3: INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION MEANING**

Interagency collaboration is a term used frequently, to describe a variety of coordinative and collaborative efforts. However, many people hear this term without fully thinking about or understanding what it means. Let’s take a minute to explain what *we* mean by successful interagency collaboration.

**Slide 4: INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION PARTNERS**

While pre-ETS providers and educators are the main individuals responsible for working together to deliver Pre-ETS, many others should be involved. State agencies and community programs can help smooth the transition to adulthood for many young people with disabilities and their families. We’ll share how providers can meaningfully engage these additional partners. When we refer to interagency collaboration we’re talking about all of these partners, with an emphasis on the working relationship between providers and educators.

**Slide 5: SHARED VISION**

The entire transition team needs to develop a shared vision for their work together with students, establish long-term goals, communicate frequently, and share responsibilities. It’s important to avoid duplicating services or creating further confusion for students and families. Poor collaboration and coordination can actually have a negative impact on our students. True collaboration is a marathon, not a sprint.

**Slide 6: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION**

Let’s distinguish between what successful collaboration is vs. what it’s not. We’re going to walk you through some non-examples and briefly share key factors of successful collaboration. Our lesson on “Key Components of Strong Partnerships” will expand on these factors in greater detail, with practical examples and strategies on developing strong partnerships.

**Slide 7: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION STRATEGIEC**

Collaboration IS NOT:

A provider and teacher meeting once before the school year starts.

Collaboration IS:

Strategic and carefully designed. True collaboration involves much more than a one-time meeting. Providers and educators should meet and communicate frequently throughout the process to assess how instruction is going.

**Slide 8: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION SHARED VISION**

Collaboration IS NOT:

A provider delivering instruction and services independently, without knowing what the teacher has been doing in the classroom.

Collaboration IS:

Developing a shared vision for Pre-ETS services and building instruction together to complement what’s already happening in the classroom.

**Slide 9: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS**

Collaboration IS NOT:

Providers and educators delivering services without understanding each other’s roles in the transition process. For example, providers might not know exactly what happens in an IEP meeting. An educator might not understand how a provider bills for services. Other community agencies might be unfamiliar with what Pre-ETS actually is.

Collaboration IS:

All about relationship-building. It’s important for partners to understand one another’s roles in the transition process. Pre-ETS providers and educators should spend time in initial meetings sharing about their work, even discussing common acronyms and terms the other might not know. Similarly, any agencies that are brought into the student’s transition process should be allowed space to share about their work and learn about others. Open and reciprocal communication is essential in partnerships.

**Slide 10: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION OUTCOME-ORIENTED**

Collaboration IS NOT:

Instruction delivered regardless of student need.

Collaboration IS:

Outcome-oriented. Students’ post-school outcome goals should drive Pre-ETS. The provider and educator should think carefully about what they hope students, both as a group and even individually, will gain from Pre-ETS.

**Slide 11: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION SUPPLEMENTING INSTRUCTION**

Collaboration IS NOT:

The provider instructing students on the same topics and in the same way as educators.

Collaboration IS:

Supplementing transition instruction, not duplicating services. Sometimes it’s helpful to reinforce what students are learning from their teacher, but these topics should complement one another. Teachers and providers can work together to build instruction. For example, perhaps a provider can focus on interactive activities to add to what’s already been covered in class on a specific topic.

**Slide 12: SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION DECISION-MAKING**

Collaboration IS NOT:

A provider making decisions about Pre-ETS services independently from the teacher.

Collaboration IS:

Ongoing, shared decision-making throughout the school year about what Pre-ETS will look like.

**Slide 13: IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION**

Let’s talk about why this type of true collaboration is so essential to student’s postschool success. Interagency collaboration has long been identified as a crucial, evidence-based practice in transition. Recent legislative and policy efforts (such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) have taken concrete steps to foster interagency collaboration. The existence of Pre-ETS affirms the importance of collaboration, requiring Vocational Rehabilitation, Special Education, and Labor Departments to work collectively.

**Slide 14: RESEARCH ON STRONG COLLABORATION**

Research has shown that strong collaboration leads to successful post-school outcomes and provides students with access to outside agencies for additional support. Students learn more about community resources available to them and make connections. These connections provide them with experiences that promote successful outcomes.

Reference on slide*:* Kohler, P.D., Gothberg, J.E., Fowler, C, Coyle, J. (2016). *Taxonomy for transition programming 2.0: A model for planning, organizing, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs.* Western Michigan University. Available at [www.transitionta.org](http://www.transitionta.org).

**Slide 15: EXAMPLE**

For example, let’s say a student and family member assume the student will lose their benefits if they start working. Therefore, the parent may feel the best option to retain benefits is for their child to stay home after graduation, and additionally not participate in early work experiences. However, if the parent is connected with the Benefits to Work program, they might understand why working will usually lead to more income than remaining on benefits. If parents feel empowered to envision a future where their child can work, they will be more likely to support career exploration and work experiences. Linking students and families to agencies can make a huge difference in improving post-school outcomes.

**Slide 16: SCHOOL PARTNERS**

While the special education teacher and transition staff are the primary education partners, other individuals within the school walls can provide support to Pre-ETS.

Here are some key individuals in the school to consider involving in Pre-ETS, and some ways they can support services:

* Many students with disabilities take classes with **general education teachers**. Let’s say you’re working with a student on self-advocacy skills to prepare for employment or further training. You might help them learn how to request accommodations. Students can practice requesting accommodations to their general education teacher. You can work with that teacher to provide feedback to the student on how they did. This will allow the student to practice this skill in a safe and controlled environment, preparing them for having this conversation with an employer.

**Slide 17: SCHOOL PARTNERS**

* **School administrators**, such as principals, can play a key role in providing support for events related to Pre-ETS. For example, let’s say you want to take students out to tour job sites but there are challenges with permission forms. In addition to the special education teacher you’re working with, administrators can help make these kind of field trips happen. If you want to partner with the teacher on a resource fair for parents, administrators can provide support for this event and help in spreading the word to school parents.

**Slide 18: SCHOOL PARTNERS**

* **School counselors** can be particularly helpful around postsecondary education. They can work with a provider to offer helpful information about things such as the admissions process for colleges or deadlines for the FAFSA.

These are just a few ideas on how different school partners can support Pre-ETS.

**Slide 19: COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Now let’s talk about community partners examples of how to engage each in Pre-ETS. Check out our partnerships downloadables for much more information about each of these partners and the services they provide to students and adults with disabilities. In these downloadables, we’ll walk through practical ways you can collaborate with each of these partners in more detail.

* **Local social security department**. These local departments are responsible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits students might receive.

**Slide 20: COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

* **State department of developmental disabilities**. In Tennessee, that’s the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (or DIDD). This agency provides a variety of programs and supports for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. DIDD is responsible for administering the ECF CHOICES program, a statewide waiver program that provides health care services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This waiver provides medical, behavioral, and employment resources and supports.
* **Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**. For students who have mental health disabilities, the state mental health agency is an important resource to connect them with.

**Slide 21: COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

* **The Arc**, an advocacy agency for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. There is a statewide Arc Tennessee, along with local county Arc offices.
* **American Job Centers**. These local job centers are run by the state labor department. They can provide valuable connections to jobs, internships, and summer work experiences.

**Slide 22: COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

* **Centers for Independent Living**. These nonprofit organizations are typically led by self-advocates and provide a variety of independent living services.
* **Benefits to Work**. In Tennessee, the Benefits to Work program is a partnership between the Tennessee Disability Coalition and Empower Tennessee. This program helps students and adults who receive benefits understand how working might impact their SSI or SSDI.

**Slide 23: INVOLVING PARTNERS IN PRE-ETS**

Let’s provide some quick examples of how to involve these partners in Pre-ETS:

* Hold a transition fair and invite community agencies to be vendors.
* Host a parent night and invite different community resources to present on how they can help students and families.
* Invite representatives from these agencies to present during your Pre-ETS time in a class.
* Help a student apply to the ECF CHOICES program
* For a student who will have mobility challenges in employment, contact DIDD to get information about work accommodations they can help provide. DIDD can be a great community partner if you think a student might need long-term services and supports.
* Help students write an e-mail or call their local American Job Center or Arc chapter to get information about services they provide. Make it a classroom activity, and consider having students present on the information they find out.

Remember to collaborate with school partners on events like transition fairs or parent nights.

**Slide 24: OTHER COLLABORATORS**

Lastly, while our focus is on how agencies and organizations can collaborate, we should recognize other important partners in the transition process. Collaborators are not just agencies and organizations. Families are a key partner. Local businesses and employers should be engaged. Check out our lessons on employers and families for extensive information on how to work effectively with these stakeholders. Most importantly, the student’s vision for themselves should drive the process.

**Slide 25: CONCLUSION**

Thanks for watching our lesson on the importance of developing strong partnerships! Strong collaboration is one of the most important factors in determining the success of Pre-ETS. Other lessons in this course address in greater depth how providers, educators, and other agencies can work together. Students should be involved in every aspect of interagency collaboration, and our lesson on person-centered planning addresses how to ensure student voices are driving transition services. Make sure to check outour supplemental resources related to this topic on the course page.

**Lesson 2: Stages and Strategies of Successful Collaboration**

**Slide 1: INTRO**

Building strong partnerships takes time. It doesn’t happen overnight, and it can be challenging to collaborate given time and resource barriers. Providers, educators, and other community partners have different systems, lingo, and priorities. So how do providers begin building a partnership with the educators they work with? What happens when you experience disagreements? How do you improve communication with partners, including those in the community? Our lesson will share practical strategies for growing strong collaboration with all partners involved in the transition process.

**Slide 2: OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson, you’ll learn:

* The general stages of successful collaboration
* Practical strategies to develop strong partnerships between providers and educators
* How to meaningfully involve community agencies in the transition team
* And examples of how to implement these strategies in real-world situations

**Slide 3: COLLABORATION STAGES**

Strong collaborative relationships evolve over time. Research demonstrates successful interagency collaboration builds incrementally, through several general stages:

* Networking
* Cooperation
* Coordination
* Coalition
* And collaboration

These stages provide a helpful framework to structure pre-ETS partnerships around, and we will cover each in depth. A pre-ETS provider and educator begin by learning about one another, building a relationship, developing goals for the program, implementing a program, and regularly assessing throughout. Community agency partnerships often evolve similarly. A high level of collaboration involves establishing innovative programs or strategies. Keep in mind: collaboration is a process that never fully ends. These stages are intended to be a guide to demonstrate how to grow collaboration over time, but all partnerships evolve differently and require ongoing evaluation.

Pre-ETS providers and educators are the main individuals responsible for working together to deliver pre-ETS. This lesson will provide specific strategies to build a strong relationship between these two core partners, while also highlighting strategies to strengthen community partnerships. For more information on who these community partners might be, check out Lesson 1 on the Importance of Collaboration and our Partnerships Overview, available on the course page.

*Reference: Noonan, P. (2014). Transition teaming: 26 strategies for interagency collaboration. Council for Exceptional Children. Arlington, VA.*

**Slide 4: NETWORKING PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

The first stage of collaboration is networking. During the networking stage, initial contacts are made with potential partners and information about programs should be shared.

When pre-ETS providers and educators first begin working together, they should *develop an awareness of resources and needs*. During initial conversations or meetings about pre-ETS delivery, carve out time to share information. Think about discussing questions like the ones below:

* What does a typical work day look like for you?
* Ask educators: are you familiar with provider agencies and Vocational Rehabilitation (or VR)?
* What does success look like for you?
* How do you show you’re making progress with students?
* What transition services are already being offered at the school (such as work-based learning, internships, or mentoring)?

**Slide 5: NETWORKING PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

Developing a deeper understanding of one another will help inform the development of successful pre-ETS. For example, if a provider has limited experience working in a school setting, they can ask the educators they are working with to share resources about transition in a school-based setting so they can more effectively implement pre-ETS. Providers can share examples of the reports they write, and educators can share an example IEP. Take time to explain any jargon that might come up during the partnership.

Providers could also develop a brief survey to gather information about current transition activities, student needs, and how pre-ETS services could support and build on the current classroom transition instruction. Having this information ahead of an initial meeting can help generate a more productive and efficient conversation. Use simple survey tools like Google Docs or Survey Monkey.

**Slide 6: NETWORKING COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

During the early networking stage, involvement of community partners would be limited primarily to referrals or basic information sharing. Look over our partnership overviews to familiarize yourself with some key agencies that provide supports to students after high school. Visit Tennessee Disability Pathfinder or other online resources to deepen your knowledge of all the available supports for your students. See if the school district you’re working with has a community resource map or list. At this stage, providers might begin making initial contacts, referrals, or pass along basic information about a program. For example, a pre-ETS provider could bring in flyers about summer camp programs through the local American Job Center.

**Slide 7: COOPERATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

The next stage of collaboration is cooperation. Moving beyond information-sharing, partners begin to increase communication and loosely define roles during this stage. However, they are still largely working independently.

After gaining an understanding of one another’s roles and needs, pre-ETS providers and educators increase their interactions and begin developing a *shared vision & goals*. Aligning goals is a crucial step in any collaborative relationship. Think about discussing questions like the ones below:

* What would you like students to gain from pre-ETS?
* How do we ensure we are not duplicating services? What is already being done in the classroom?
* What topics should be covered during pre-ETS?
* How should we decide what students need in relation to pre-ETS?
* When can pre-ETS occur during the school day?
* Is there a way for any services to be delivered before or after school?
* How will you ensure you have met goals?
* Which parts are each of us responsible for?
* How will we maintain communication about these?

Even if a provider is already delivering services in the classroom, it’s not too late to set up a meeting with an educator to discuss improvements. Tackling these questions involves a little more effort on each organization’s part, and meeting one another’s needs will be key in this.

Let's hear now from a provider sharing her experiences collaborating with educators on Pre-ETS.

**[Video Interview]**

(gentle music)

My name is Donisha Simonton. I am the Program Director of Divine Intervention Center. We have a program that centered around providing pre-employment transition services to students in Tennessee and we believe that every student that enters our program they have their own set of skills, gifts, and talents and purpose and we provide career focused services to help them bring those gifts and talents out and utilize them in the workforce. Collaborating with teachers to provide Pre-ETS is very important to the success of students. Collaborating with teachers should be an ongoing process from the beginning all the way through follow through after the student has graduated. In the beginning, we sit down with teachers to come up with a working schedule for us to come in. Teachers also have the opportunity at that time to provide us with valuable information about the students. We learn about the students' abilities, areas that they may can improve upon and possibly what their interests are. We also provide guidance on best ways to work with students. So teachers can kinda give us information about what accommodations their students are using and I think that's very important because typically, the accommodations that the students are using like in high school, in the education setting, those usually transfer over into a post-secondary program. And so being knowledgeable about what accommodations to utilize in the workforce even are gonna be very important when it comes to providing Pre-ETS to your students. My experience with collaborating with teachers

to provide pre-employment instruction varies from school to school and it really depends upon the request from the teacher. For example, in the past, we've participated in IEP meetings,

assisted teachers with planning meaningful community-based initiatives. We've hosted department-wide events such as Snack and chats and Lunch and learns where we invite the parents and vendors to the school and parents have an opportunity at those events to learn firsthand information from vendors about community resources that will assist their students

with navigating adults hood. We've also hosted voter's registration drives. We facilitated college campus tours and we also have invited guest speakers into the classroom. If I was to give advice to new providers just beginning to work with teachers, I would say to flexible,

know that school activity and assemblies happen and sometimes without us always being aware. So it's good to kinda adjust and adapt to the schedule on a daily basis. So just flexible, keep that in mind. I would also say to review your IEPs to become familiar with the students

and the disability or diagnosis that they may have. You want to develop strategies, how to work with different students based on that information that's in the IEP.

**Slide 9: COOPERATION COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

In the first stage, involvement with community partners is limited to basic referrals and information-sharing. To deepen relationships with these partners, increase communication with them. Set up a meeting or phone call with representatives from the organizations. Ask questions to understand the supports they provide and the role they play in the transition process and after high school. The maze of adult disability services and supports can be complicated to navigate, even for professionals. Here are examples of questions to ask:

* What is the process of applying for or receiving services?
* Do you only serve specific types of disabilities or specific parts of the state?
* Who is the best point of contact within your organization?
* How can pre-ETS help your organization meet needs you might have?

**Slide 10: COOPERATION COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

In the previous example, a pre-ETS provider passed out flyers about summer camp programs at the local American Job Center. To move to the cooperation stage, the pre-ETS provider could call the American Job Center and ask more in-depth questions about the summer camps, invite a representative to come speak to the class, or help a student submit an application for the summer camp. These are all examples of ways to strengthen the partnership.

Remember: other individuals in the school beyond teachers can be important pre-ETS partners. For example, consider inviting a school counselor to your class to discuss postsecondary education opportunities and important deadlines.

**Slide 11: COORDINATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

The next stage of collaboration is coordination. In the previous two stages, partners are working alongside one another. During coordination, partners move beyond getting to know one another to working actively as collaborators. During this stage, pre-ETS providers and educators would begin to *clearly define roles & responsibilities,* *coordinate policies & procedures*, and *establish clear channels of communication*.

**Slide 12: COORDINATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS EXAMPLES**

Let’s think about what these strategies might look like in practice for pre-ETS providers and educators:

* Let’s say a pre-ETS provider has been visiting schools for just a couple hours on a rotating basis. However, the educator they’re working with thinks it would be a better idea for them to come to the school one day a month and stay there the entire day. This way, they could build in individual meetings with students and more easily bring community partners in as guest speakers. After rearranging their schedule, the provider thinks this is a great idea and they begin implementing the new schedule.
* Let’s think about another example. A provider and educator don’t interact with one another much. The provider comes in to teach a class and the teacher works on preparing other activities during that time. In order to improve the delivery of pre-ETS, they decide to set up a call every week to discuss the previous week’s progress and plan the upcoming week. They also developed a report together to compile at the end of the month tracking content being delivered and the impact of activities. These simple strategies can help increase buy-in and maintain commitment.

Let's hear from Donisha again sharing advice on communicating with educators.

**[Video Interview]**

**(**gentle music)

There are several strategies to maintain communication with teachers. You can start by exchanging email addresses, phone numbers any other contact information that you have

where you can be reached, just, you wanna be accessible for the teachers. Throughout the school year, we have attended monthly and quarterly meetings that consists of the entire Sped Team to kinda help us stay informed and updated on pertinent information as it relates to our students. Also, when you're at the school, even when you're not providing services

to a certain group of students, you can just kinda stick your head in and say hi to the teacher and just let them know that you're there for added support, if they need you. I think all of these things kinda help with creating an open line communication and develop collaborating

with the teacher on an ongoing basis.

**Slide 13: COORDINATION COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

While there are numerous examples of collaborative activities in pre-ETS, a transition night is a great example of collaboration that brings together all key transition partners. Let’s say a pre-ETS provider and educator are planning to co-host a transition night at the school for families and students receiving pre-ETS. They plan to involve agencies and organizations who can provide support to students after leaving high school. The goal of the transition night is to have agencies share information about their supports.

The easiest way to accomplish this task is to just invite these partners to speak and hope they can make the date/time set. However, if this transition night is to be truly collaborative, they need to involve these partners in the planning stages. Through email and phone communication, they could share goals for the night, and ideas on date, time, and location. They could gather feedback from the agencies about what they would like to share. Even if it’s not realistic to bring everyone together for a phone or in-person meeting, they could develop a short survey of questions about the event to email to all potential partners.

**Slide 14: COORDINATION COMMUNITY PARTNERS OTHER EXAMPLE**

In addition to events like transition nights, consider enhancing visits of community partners in your class. Link their topic of conversation to what students are studying. In our previous example, a provider passed out information about the American Job Center to students and then invited a representative to come speak to the class. Perhaps in this next stage, the provider could invite the representative to come quarterly and link their visits to classroom activities on workplace readiness skills. Or you could invite the school counselor to speak about postsecondary options, combining this visit with a role-play exercise encouraging students to practice requesting accommodations from a disability services office.

**Slide 15: COALITION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

The next phase of collaboration is coalition. Many of the same strategies discussed above continue during this stage, but deepen. Partners need to have defined roles & responsibilities and establish shared decision-making processes. During this time, there is also *shared data collection & progress monitoring.*

Pre-ETS providers and educators need to discuss how to assess the success of the pre-ETS program. What are the metrics they will use? Although they have their own evaluations from schools, Vocational Rehabilitation, and provider agencies, they can work together to develop what their own evaluation of the program would look like. What assessments can they use to determine if students have improved skills, knowledge, or have been provided access to other opportunities?

**Slide 16: COALITION COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Likewise, community partnerships should strengthen during this time, and involve some level of data collection & progress monitoring. Think about the transition night example from earlier. We talked about providing a survey to gather community partners thoughts. Take it one step further. Involve them directly in the planning, and host several calls and in-person meetings. Figure out exactly what each partner would like to get out of this experience. Remember: a true partnership is about everyone’s needs.

Additionally, consider contacting partners to provide direct services to students. For example, schedule travel training with your Center for Independent Living for students who will need to use public transportation for jobs after high school. Or consider partnering with a benefits organization to work directly with students who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

**Slide 17: COLLABORATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS**

We’ve shared many examples along the way, but let’s spend a few moments discussing highly collaborative events (such as the transition night) that can result from developing strong partnerships.

**SLIDE 18: JOB SHADOW MONTH**

* **Establish a job shadow month.** Set up a job shadowing month for students with disabilities. Some of the community partners, such as American Job Centers, will have more direct contact with local employers and business organizations. They can help identify potential sites. Consider if there is a way to include some virtual job shadowing opportunities as well. Encourage students to practice self-advocacy skills by presenting on their job shadow experience.

**Slide 19: SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM**

* **Develop a summer jobs program.** Summer is one of the most important times for students to gain early work experience.Partner with organizations involved in employment for people with disabilities, such as the American Job Centers or the Arc, to develop a summer jobs program for students. Providers and schools can identify students for the program, work on transportation training, and prepare students for adulthood. The community partners can identify employers.

**Slide 20: VIRTUAL TRANSITION FAIRS**

* **Virtual transition fairs.** Transition fairs are a great way for families and students to learn about supports provided after high school. However, it can sometimes be difficult for families to attend in person. A virtual transition fair can supplement an in-person transition fair, and be offered numerous times to reach as many parents as possible. Consider recording the fair to be as accessible as possible. Engage all your community partners to share briefly about their organization and then utilize chat and discussion features to encourage interaction.

**Slide 21: CO-TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

* **Design co-training opportunities.** Help community partners understand the importance of employment for students with disabilities. Providers are an expert in this area. Hold a presentation sharing what you know about the importance of work for students with disabilities to community partners who might need more understanding. For example, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services provides a crisis helpline and counseling services to youth and adults with mental health disabilities. However, not all these counselors are well-versed in transition services. Present to them on how employment is impacted by mental health and what pre-ETS is trying to accomplish. Likewise, ask to attend training of these other professionals to learn more.

**Slide 22: RELATIONSHIPS**

Remember: these relationships will not be built overnight and the groundwork will need to be laid early. However, if you’ve already established positive relationships with partners, planning for these larger initiatives and activities will become easier. Consider picking one of these as a goal and working on it over the course of a school year with the support of teachers and community partners.

**Slide 23: CONCLUSION**

Collaboration is crucial to improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. These partnerships are developed gradually over time. Laying the groundwork in early stages will lead to positive collaborative efforts overall. While pre-ETS providers and educators are the core partnership, effective pre-ETS delivery involves other community partners as well. Through successful collaboration, pre-ETS providers, educators, and others will be able to address the complex transition needs of students and contribute to opportunities that will improve post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities.

**Lesson 3: Collaboration and Person-Centered Planning**

**Slide 1: INTRODUCTION**

Students with disabilities should be at the forefront of decisions made about their futures. It’s important to provide them the opportunities and supports they need to have an active voice in their own transition services. Person-centered planning describes a collaborative process or approach aimed at empowering individuals with disabilities to make decisions about their own life. Pre-ETS providers can incorporate the core principles of person-centered planning into their collaborations with educators and other community partners. Keeping student voices at the center of each partnership will improve the effectiveness of pre-ETS and post-school outcomes for young people with disabilities.

**Slide 2: LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson, you will learn:

* What person-centered planning is and why it’s important to the transition process
* Why a person-centered planning approach is critical for strong collaboration
* How to infuse person-centered planning practices into pre-ETS collaboration
* And where to find additional resources on person-centered planning

**Slide 3: IMPORTANCE PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING**

For decades, people with disabilities were excluded from making decisions about finances, healthcare, or other things many of us take for granted. Even the most basic decisions about what to eat or wear for the day were too often made for them. We have made great efforts in moving away from physically isolating people with disabilities at home, school, and work. But empowering people to make their own decisions about their lives has been a more recent focus.

**Slide 4: OVERVIEW PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING**

Person-centered planning describes an approach aimed at empowering individuals with disabilities to make decisions for themselves about their future. It is a highly collaborative effort, involving bringing together important stakeholders and individuals in the person’s life to support them. There are multiple different methods and ways to implement a person-centered planning process. However, all methods involve a team supporting the person with a disability to have an active voice in their own life, recognizing that future planning is a highly individualized process. It’s built around community engagement, choice, and respect for the individual. Throughout this lesson, you'll be hearing from Emma Shouse Garton on person-centered planning. In addition to working with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Emma has experience participating in person-centered planning meetings with her brother who has autism. Let's hear from her on the importance of person-centered planning.

**[Video Interview]**

(gentle music)

Hi, my name is Emma Shouse Garton, and I am the public information specialist at the Tennessee Council on developmental disabilities. The council's role is to really look across the service system and across the lifespan and find ways to improve services and supports for Tennesseans with disabilities and their families. I also get to help lead a statewide sibling support chapter called TABS, Tennessee Adult Brothers and Sisters. And I am passionate about that work because I myself have a younger brother with autism and intellectual disabilities and other diagnoses. I have two younger twin brothers, so Evan, one of the twins is 24 years old and has autism. And our family has just really benefited from being a part of the disability advocacy community. For students with disabilities and families thinking about what life will look like in adulthood after high school, I think person-centered planning is a great philosophy and approach for educators and students and families to take. It really encourages the student with a disability to take ownership and practice self-advocacy and thinking about what they want their future to look like. I think so often families has spent so many years speaking up for their child with a disability. It can kinda be a new experience to really try to take a step back and let the young adult with a disability speak for themselves and practice those self-advocacy skills,

and really think what does a meaningful future look like for me? And person-centered planning is all about placing the goals and dreams and desires and needs of that person with a disability at the very center of what a circle of support or a team of supporters will be focusing on. It's not about what services are available, or people thinking well that may or may not be possible

with the resources we have. Start where the person with the disability is and what they want their future to look like. Person-centered planning encourages families and supporters

to stay solutions oriented, and to figure out how we can all work together as a team to make someone's dreams happen.

**Slide 5: PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING MEETING**

At a typical person-centered planning meeting, the team will meet in the person’s home or somewhere they are comfortable. A facilitator will lead the group through reviewing a personal profile, sharing visions for the future, identifying obstacles to this goal, and developing action steps. The individual with a disability plays a central role in shaping the conversation. The goal of person-centered planning is to ensure they are the ones leading the decisions. We're going to hear from Emma again, who will share several common ways to structure a person-centered planning meeting.

*Reference: https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/person-centered.asp*

**[Video Interview]**

(gentle music) So in person-centered planning, there's a whole host of specific strategies and tools and concepts that are frequently used to help guide the flow of these meetings. One is to really always start a person-center planning meeting with what we like and admire about someone. So we're not just talking about someone's support needs or behavior issues or areas of deficit, but we're starting the meeting, we're framing the entire conversation with a strengths-based approach to talk about what we all really appreciate about the person with the disability.

Another really common concept to guide these conversations is to look at what is important to the person, and what's important for the person. I think often in these meetings, families and professionals can maybe default to thinking about that important “for” piece. How do we make sure that someone stays healthy and safe and potential problems of accessing services that they need or that sort of piece. But we know it's equally important for a true quality of life. So talk about what is important to the person, what's gonna really help them feel respected and happy and safe, and like they have a meaningful role in their community. So addressing both the important two and the important four is a really standard approach in person-centered planning. Another one is to really talk about in detail what does a good day look like for that person? And what does a bad day look like? And really trying to get down on paper all of the things that help someone really have a satisfying day and what we can do as a team to make sure that those factors and those supports are present. And what makes a bad day, and how do we make sure that we avoid those pitfalls or circumstances? And then another standard person-center planning concept is pretty basic just to talk about what is working right now in terms of helping someone achieve their goals and dreams and contributing to their quality of life, and what's not working? What do we need to address as a team? And then next steps for how we're gonna address any issues.

**Slide 6: COLLABORATION AND PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING**

A person-centered approach is critical for any collaboration efforts. When bringing together numerous agencies, programs, and individuals who will be providing services or supports, the student’s own vision can be lost. Throughout this course, we’ve highlighted what true collaboration looks like in pre-ETS. We’ve focused on strengthening the relationship between pre-ETS providers and educators, while sharing ideas on how to meaningfully engage community partners. However, it’s crucial to keep in mind that students are the most important partner in pre-ETS. Collaboration will not be successful without meaningfully including their voice and approaching services with respect for their perspectives.

**Slide 7: PROVIDERS AND PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING**

Pre-ETS providers can support a person-centered planning approach in a variety of ways. Through their collaborations with educators and community partners, they can infuse the principles of person-centered planning: enhancing community engagement, building in opportunities to make choices, and individualizing services as much as possible. In some cases, an individual student and their family might be pursuing a formal person-centered planning process. The pre-ETS provider can attend meetings and support this process in their work with the student. Let’s highlight what all these person-centered planning practices might look like in pre-ETS.

**Slide 8: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The importance of enhancing social support and connections is a core component of person-centered planning. When preparing young people with disabilities for life after high school, it’s important to get them out of the school building and provide them with learning opportunities in the actual settings where they will live, work, and spend time in their communities. Helping students grow their network of resources and supports will increase their ability to live a self-determined life. They will have more opportunities for finding jobs or internships, developing friendships, and discovering interests and hobbies.

**Slide 9: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLE TRANSITION FAIR**

Here are a few examples of how pre-ETS providers can increase community engagement for students they work with:

* **Transition or resource fairs.** Collaborate with the educator to host a transition or resource fair with agencies that can provide supports to students after high school. Here are a few tips to make these transition fairs successful and include students in a meaningful way:
  + Ensure a wide variety of vendors are included. For example, invite community recreation centers such as the YMCA, in addition to traditional disability organizations.
  + Discuss with the teacher how to tie the fair to students’ IEP and transition plans.
  + Think about how to include students in the event. Can they volunteer at the fair? They could help with registration or hand out snacks.
  + What incentives can encourage them to interact with vendors? For example, students could be required to complete interviews with at least two vendors and talk about what they learned.
  + Consider designing an in-class assignment tied to the transition fair, such as creating the program or a map of the vendor locations. Students could

**Slide 10: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLE COMMUNITY OUTING**

* **Community outings.** Schedule community outings with students when possible. Build in opportunities for them to reflect on what they learned after the community outing. Even if the provider is not the one leading community outings, collaborate with the educator to learn about future field trips or activities. The provider might be able to spend their time developing creative ways for students to reflect on or plan for these experiences. Some examples of community outings could include trips to a local fitness center, art studio, performance venue, or museum.

**Slide 11: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLE MAPPING**

* **Community resource mapping.** Students can create a map of places in their community, such as recreational facilities, nonprofit programs, restaurants, businesses, stores, banks, and more.Here are some tips for a community resource mapping activity:
  + Tailor resources around a student’s interest
  + Students can choose to label a printed map or use a software program to develop an electronic map
  + Students can use photo collages or PowerPoint presentations to showcase community places they have found.

Make sure to check out our Self-Advocacy course for much more information on community resource mapping.

**Slide 12: CHOICE**

Choice is another key component of person-centered planning. This means allowing the individual the opportunity to make both everyday decisions and larger decisions. People with disabilities might need support making choices, but they should not be prevented the opportunity.

Providers should keep student choice a focus of pre-ETS collaboration. What might this look like in practice?

**Slide 13: CHOICE EXAMPLE PRE-ETS ACTIVITIES**

* **Brainstorm with the teacher ways to embed choice into pre-ETS classroom activities**. The teacher knows the students well and can provide helpful advice. Perhaps students can choose an activity, how they want to complete an activity, or who they work with.

**Slide 14: CHOICE EXAMPLE GUEST SPEAKER**

* **Involve students in choosing a guest speaker for class**. Don’t just pick the same guest speaker you’ve always used. Provide options and have the class vote. Additionally, ask the guest speaker to build choice into their actual presentation. For example, let’s say you’re bringing in someone from a local YMCA. Ask them to provide opportunities for students to vote on what they would like to hear more about throughout their talk. Give students the opportunity to come up with questions ahead of time or a personalized checklist of things they want to know more about. They can check off this list during the guest speaker’s presentation.

**Slide 15: INDIVIDUALIZING**

One of the hallmarks of person-centered planning is individualizing how information is presented or how decisions are made. For example, if an individual cannot communicate verbally, how can we still support them to understand and communicate their preferences? We always want to respect their ability to make decisions about their own life.

When developing partnerships with educators and community partners, providers can include discussions on how to communicate information in a variety of ways to meet student needs. Let’s talk through some examples of when these discussions might come up during pre-ETS.

**Slide 16: INDIVIDUALIZING PROVIDING INFORMATION**

* **Providing information.** Whenever a community partner is providing materials, ensure they are accessible for your students. Do they need to be in large print or Braille? Do they need to include a format that uses visuals instead of words?

**Slide 17: INDIVIDUALIZING COMMUNICATION**

* **Supporting student communication.** For students who need support communicating or are nonverbal, work with the educator and community partners on how to allow them the opportunity to ask questions during community outings, fully participate in pre-ETS instruction sessions, transition fairs, early work experiences, or guest speakers. Prepare any community members ahead of time so they know what to expect if they have not interacted much with students with disabilities.

**Slide 18: INDIVIDUALIZING**

* **Making language accessible.** In some cases, providers might help a student (and/or their family) apply to a program like Employment and Community First (or ECF) CHOICES. These applications can be dense and confusing. Explain each section at a level the student understands. Read aloud any sections or directions as needed. Include visuals to explain sections of the document or application.

Now let's hear again from Emma who will share how she supports her brother's communication needs during person-centered planning meetings.

**[Video Interview]**

(gentle music)

At Evan’s very first vocational rehabilitation meeting, the VR counselor started out very respectfully talking directly to Evan, but because Evan doesn't verbally answer back,

I think it's totally understandable and natural that all of a sudden all the other adults in the room, the VR counselor, mom and dad, his support staff start talking amongst themselves

about what they think employment might look like for Evan. Often during these meetings, I try to kind of play a communication support role for Evan and taking down notes in plain language. Now we're talking about what kinda job you might like to have. Do you know where you would like to work? So at this meeting I'm trying to furiously translate some

of the complex stuff that they're talking about with specific employment VR services

and service definitions, and really, really complex stuff in a way that makes sense to Evan,

but conversation was moving really fast. And so I noticed that there was a whiteboard in the room. So I asked the group if we could stop and really try to meet Evan where he's at.

So I started writing on the whiteboard. If I had a job, I would like to work at? And if I had money from a job, I'd like to buy? Or some places I think would be fun to work at are?

Just trying to really creatively think through different prompts and handed Even the marker.

And I think it was such important modeling for all of the other people in the room.

They all got quiet and listened and watched, and Evan wrote down park. So then that led to the conversation of, is there some kind of job at a state park or a local park that he might be able to do? For me as a sibling, I've always felt really privileged to be at these meetings

because I know I bring a really unique perspective to the table in terms of what Evan is capable of, what he's good at, the reciprocal roles within our sibling relationship

and the gifts that he has to offer me. And those can be really different than kind of the parent child relationship that my parents have with Evan, and how they see him or people in Evan's life that only see him 30 minutes a week in a speech therapy session, or occupational therapy session. They may have a really great window into all sorts of skills and abilities that as families, we may not have necessarily gotten to observe. And so, yeah, I think the more people that you can bring to the table for a person-center planning meeting, the richer the discussion will be.

**Slide 19: ATTEND PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING OR IEP MEETING**

In some cases, students might be part of a formal person-centered planning process. Pre-ETS providers can attend these meetings if the student invites them to be part of their circle of support. Even if they are not part of the student’s formal team, providers can discuss the plan with the student so they can better understand the student’s vision for their own life. Attending a person-centered planning meeting is an authorized pre-ETS activity for providers.

IEP meetings are also a great opportunity for students to share their perspectives. Through actively participating and leading their own IEP meetings, students develop lifelong self-determination, self-advocacy and leadership skills. The transition plan will be one that accurately reflects the preferences and interests of the student. It helps the entire team see the plan as connected with a real person, and think about their future differently when they hear why it matters to the student. It’s valuable for pre-ETS providers to attend IEP or 504 meetings, particularly with any students they work with individually.

**Slide 20: TOOLS/RESOURCES**

There are numerous tools and resources to learn more about person-centered planning. Even if you are not participating in a formal person-centered planning approach with a student, consider sharing these resources with students, families, and educators as good models to map out a meaningful future. Additionally, some of the activities included within these approaches could be used during pre-ETS. We’ll highlight a few briefly and a downloadable resource available from the course page that goes into more depth on each of these approaches.

**Slide 21: TOOLS/RESOURCES**

* **Making Action Plans (or MAPS)**: a creative planning process built around a life story and history. Two facilitators lead the process. One facilitator helps focus the conversation and make sure the individual is at the center. The other facilitator works on creating the graphic representation of the conversation.
* **Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (P.A.T.H.):** a results-oriented planning tool where team members imagine and detail the future for the individual with a disability. If an individual has a specific vision for their future, this can be a really useful tool since the emphasis is on establishing action steps.
* **Charting the LifeCourse Tools:** created by families and caregivers to develop a vision of a good life and the supports needed to achieve this. The family plays a key role (along with the individual) in the development of goals and supports.

Emma will now share more about the life course tools.

**[Video Interview]**

(gentle music)

So another approach that I really appreciate that goes hand in hand with person-centered planning is the life course framework and tools. These are tools created by families for families.

They're not disability specific at all. So really anyone can use them, but especially for people with disabilities and families wanting to have conversations about what supports someone needs, what their goals and dreams are, what supports are available in their community

and their families and relationships through technology, any sorts of supports that somebody could use to help meet their goals. I think the life course framework, again, it goes hand in hand with person-centered planning. Often when I'm talking about the life course, people may say, 'cause it's really family-centered and values, the perspective that the family members of the person with the disability brings to the table. And folks may say, well, what about person-centered thinking? Is this a clash between the two? Absolutely not. I think the life course framework is a really accessible way for families to have these challenging conversations,

not just once a year in an IEP team meeting or a person-centered planning meeting, but to really be a resource for parents, for siblings, anyone in a person's life to be thinking in any situation

to be problem-solving and goal-setting as often as is needed. The Life Course tools, I think really support families in doing that.

**Slide 22: CONCLUSION**

Thanks for watching our lesson on collaboration and person-centered planning! Students need to be at the center of pre-ETS partnerships. Providers, educators, and community partners can adopt a person-centered planning approach to empower students. In collaborating with others, think about how to infuse respect for student choice, community engagement, and individual needs throughout all services and activities.