

Supporting Life Stage Transitions

A Neurodiversity-Affirming, Trauma-Informed,
Developmental Model for Transitioning from
Children's to Adult Services

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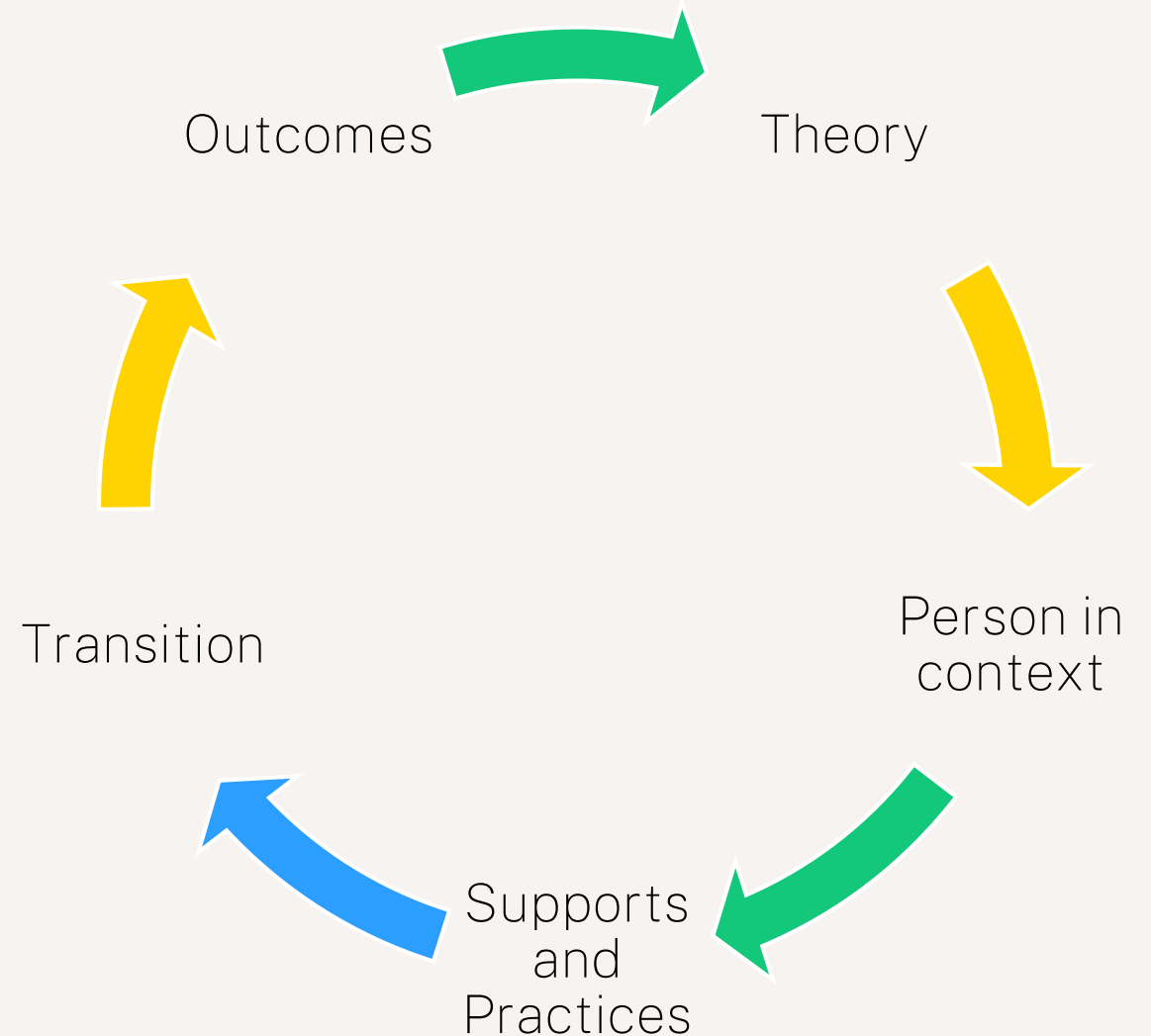


HEARTSHARE

Developmental Disability Services

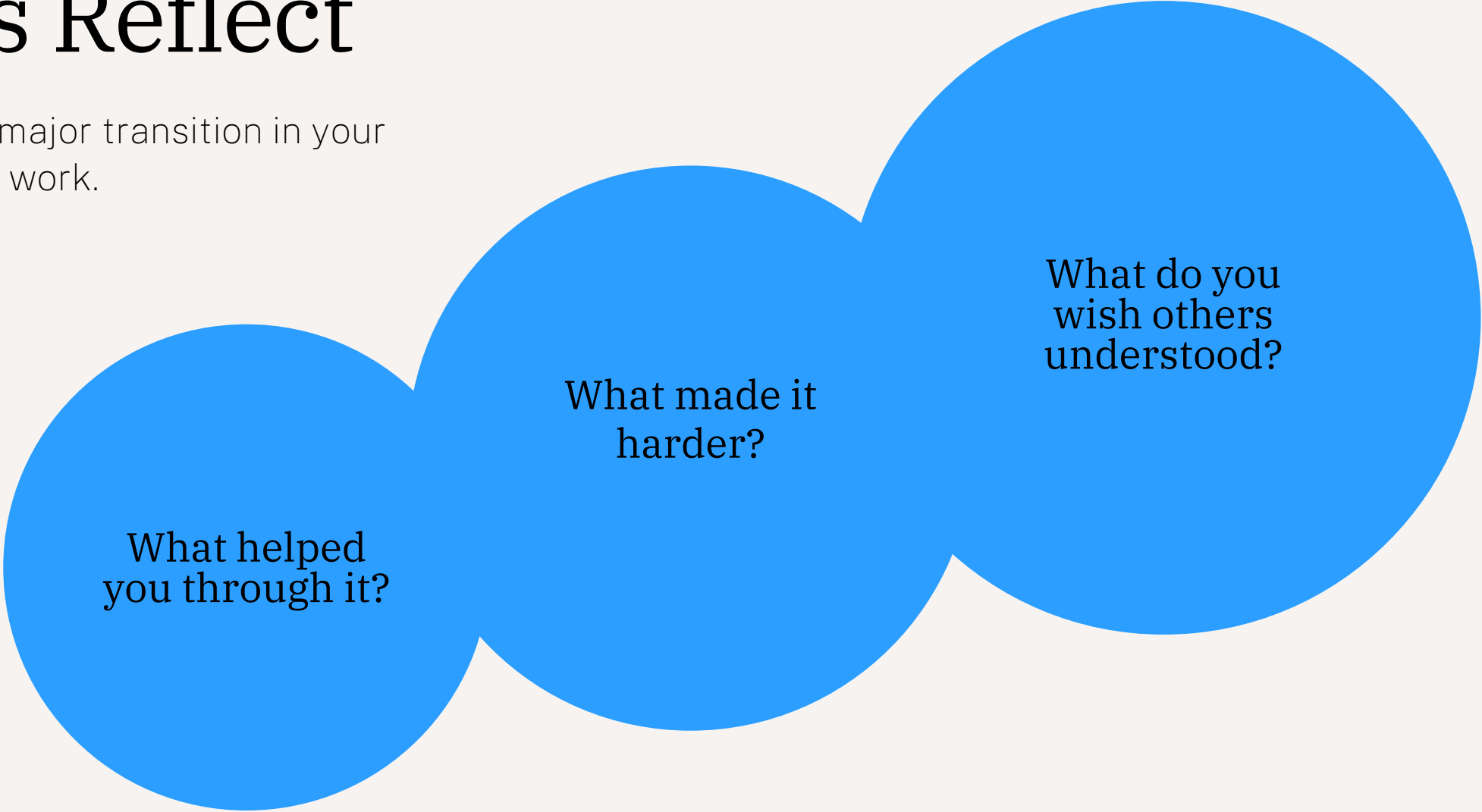
Agenda

- Development and life stage transitions
- Frameworks for understanding transitions
 - Dynamic systems
 - Trauma-informed
 - Neurodiversity-affirming
 - ABA
- Practical transition planning
- Outcomes and post-transition



Let's Reflect

Think of a major transition in your own life or work.



What helped
you through it?

What made it
harder?

What do you
wish others
understood?

Development and Life Stage Transitions

Development and Transitions

Contributing Factors

Children to Adult Services

Case example

01

Development

Human development is change over time

It includes ongoing changes in:

- Physical/biological
- Identity
- Roles and independence
- Relationships
- Regulation
- Adaptation to environment

Development occurs across the lifespan.

Development is not a straight line.



Human Development



Identity



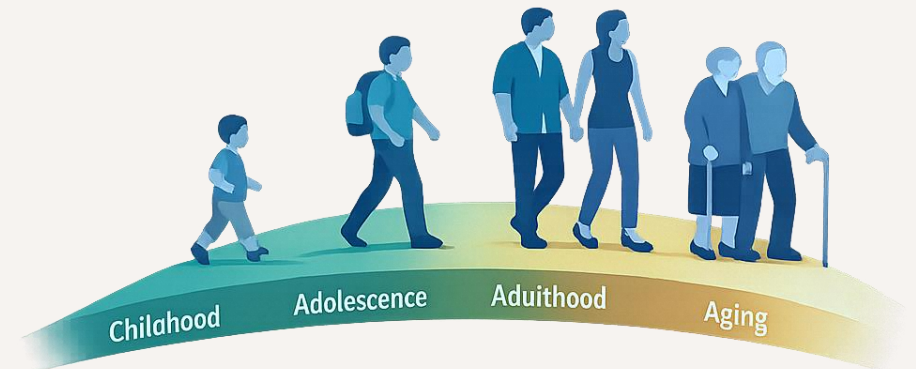
Functioning



Relationships

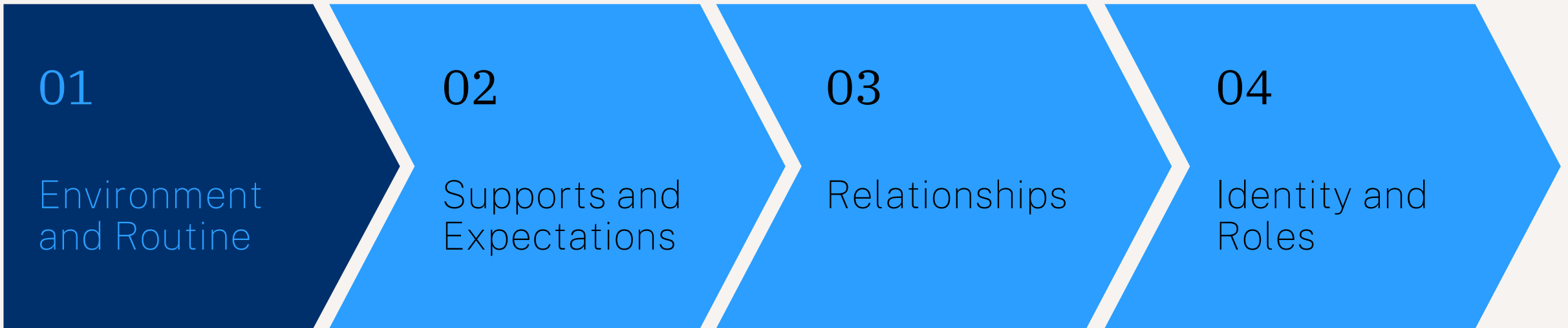


Regulation



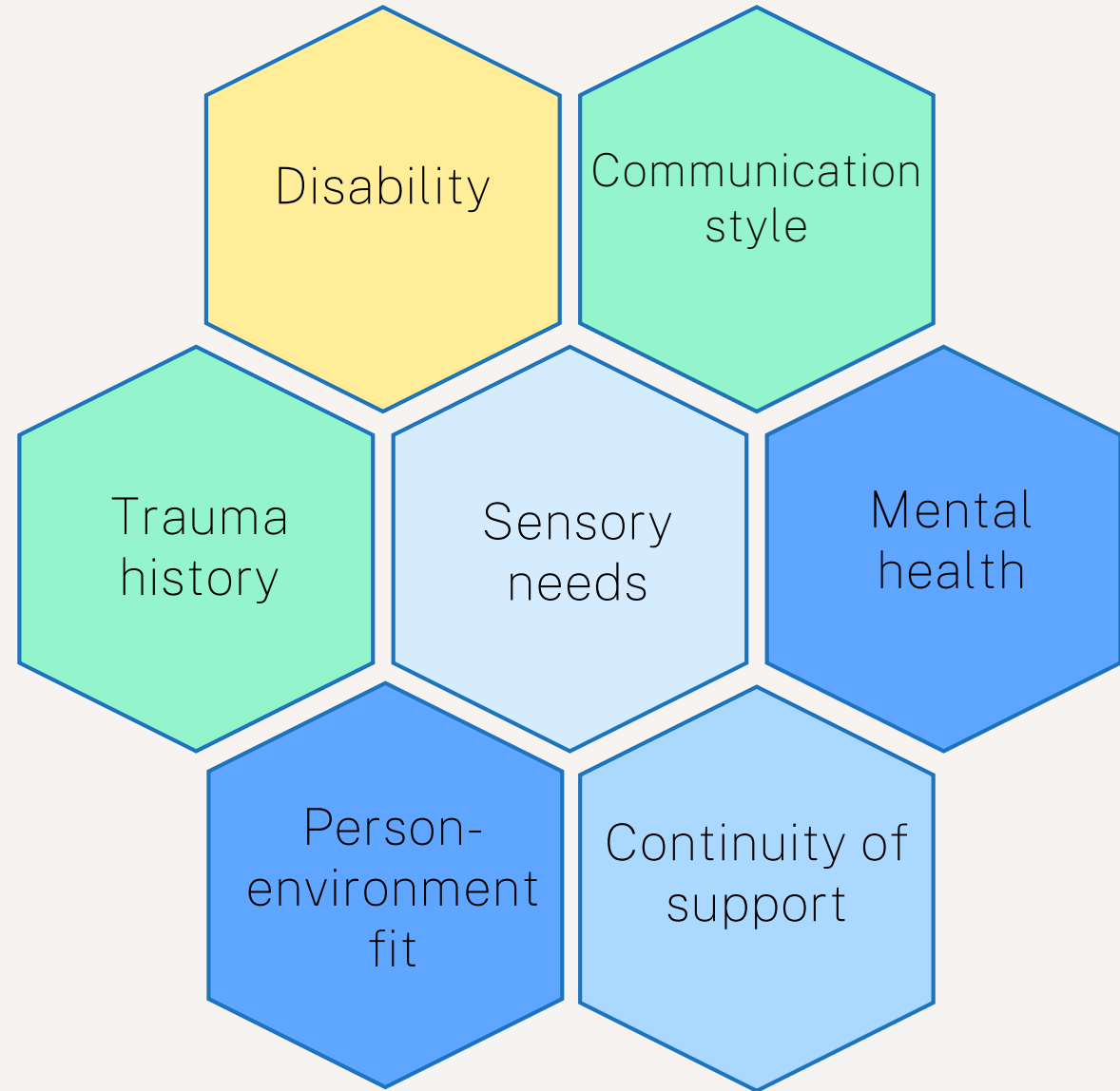
Life Stage Transitions

Are a period of concentrated change
Occur during shifts in development during critical stages
Involve change across systems



Contributing Factors

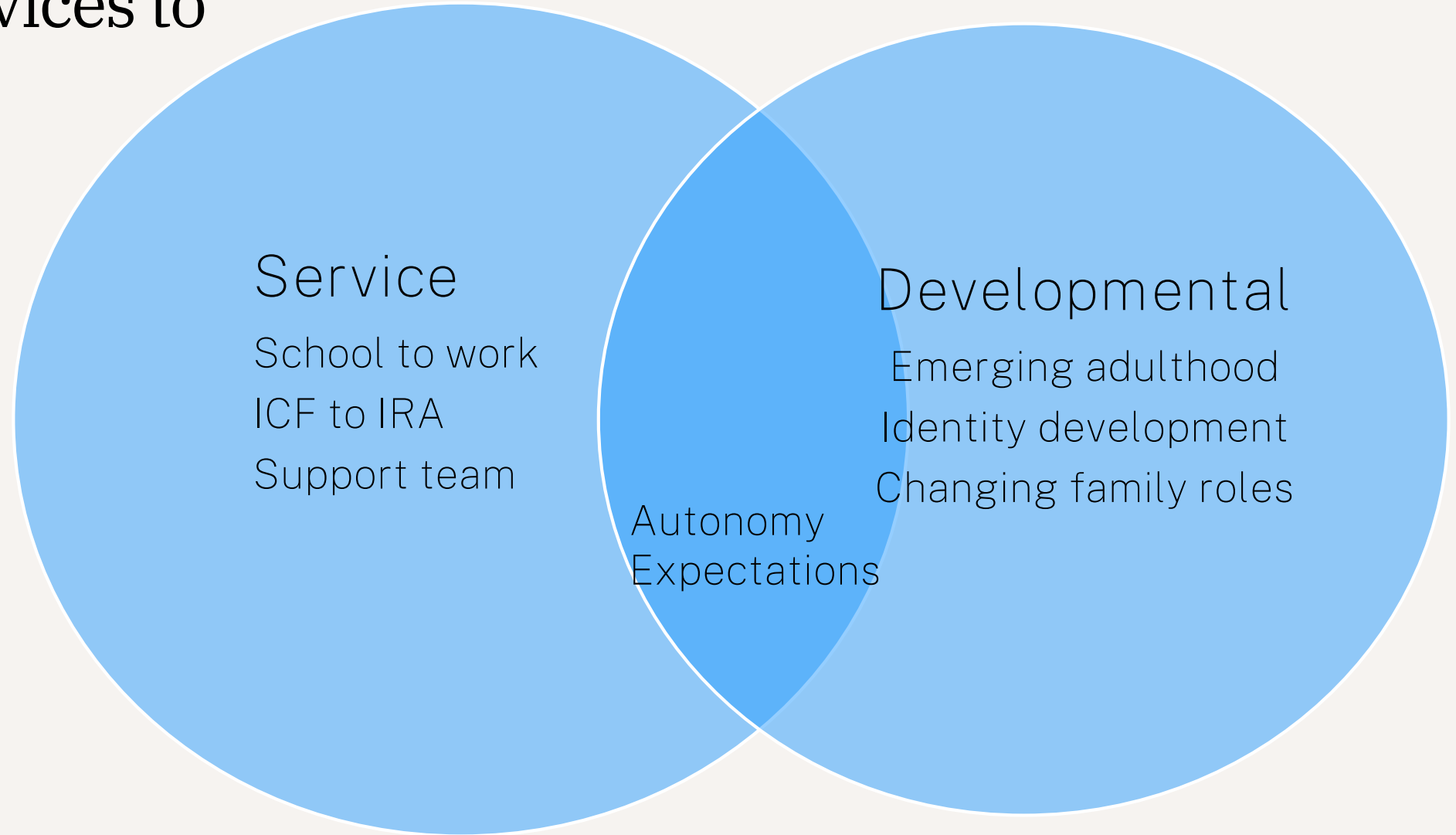
Transitions, like development, is shaped by multiple interacting factors



Children's Services to Adult Services

This service change occurs during a critical period of developmental changes.

Some changes include:



Case Example

Young Adult

- Children's Residence since he was 8 years old
- Communicates through gestures, pictures, and Proloquo
- Enjoys music, stores, playgrounds, restaurants, and walking
- Sensitive to hot environments
- Over stimulated by fast prompting
- Close relationships with family and support team
- Observes religious practices
- History of self-injurious and aggressive behaviors



What changes with changes?

Thinking of *Young Adult's* transition,
let's discuss:

What is changing
in his everyday
life?

What changes are
obvious — and
which are easy to
miss?

What ripple
effects might one
change create?

Theory Informs Practice

Developmental Dynamic Systems

Trauma-informed Approaches

Neurodiversity-affirming Practices

02

Dynamic Systems

NON-LINEAR

Development is not a straight line.

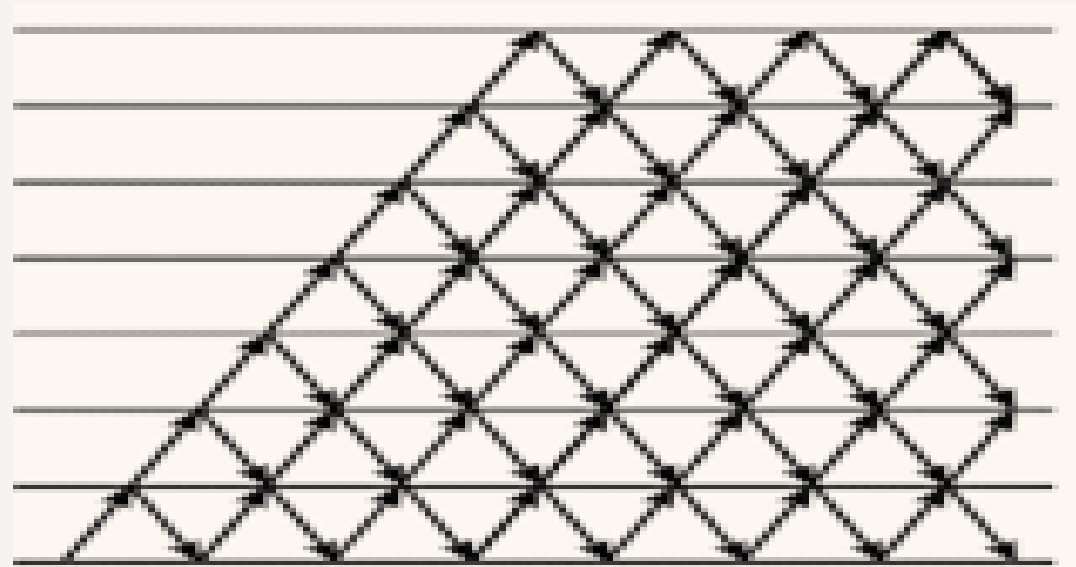


It emerges through the ongoing interaction of many factors that affect one another.

MULTIPLE SYSTEMS

A system is an organized network of influences: biological, social, cultural, environmental, service-related experiences

Systems interact and affect one another



Dynamic Systems

CONTEXT- DEPENDENT

Development is influenced by the environment

Outcomes are context-dependent

Development take multiple pathways and unfolds through multiple dynamic interactions between systems.

During transitions, systems become destabilized.

CONSTANTLY CHANGING

A person develops through ongoing change and is always adapting over time.

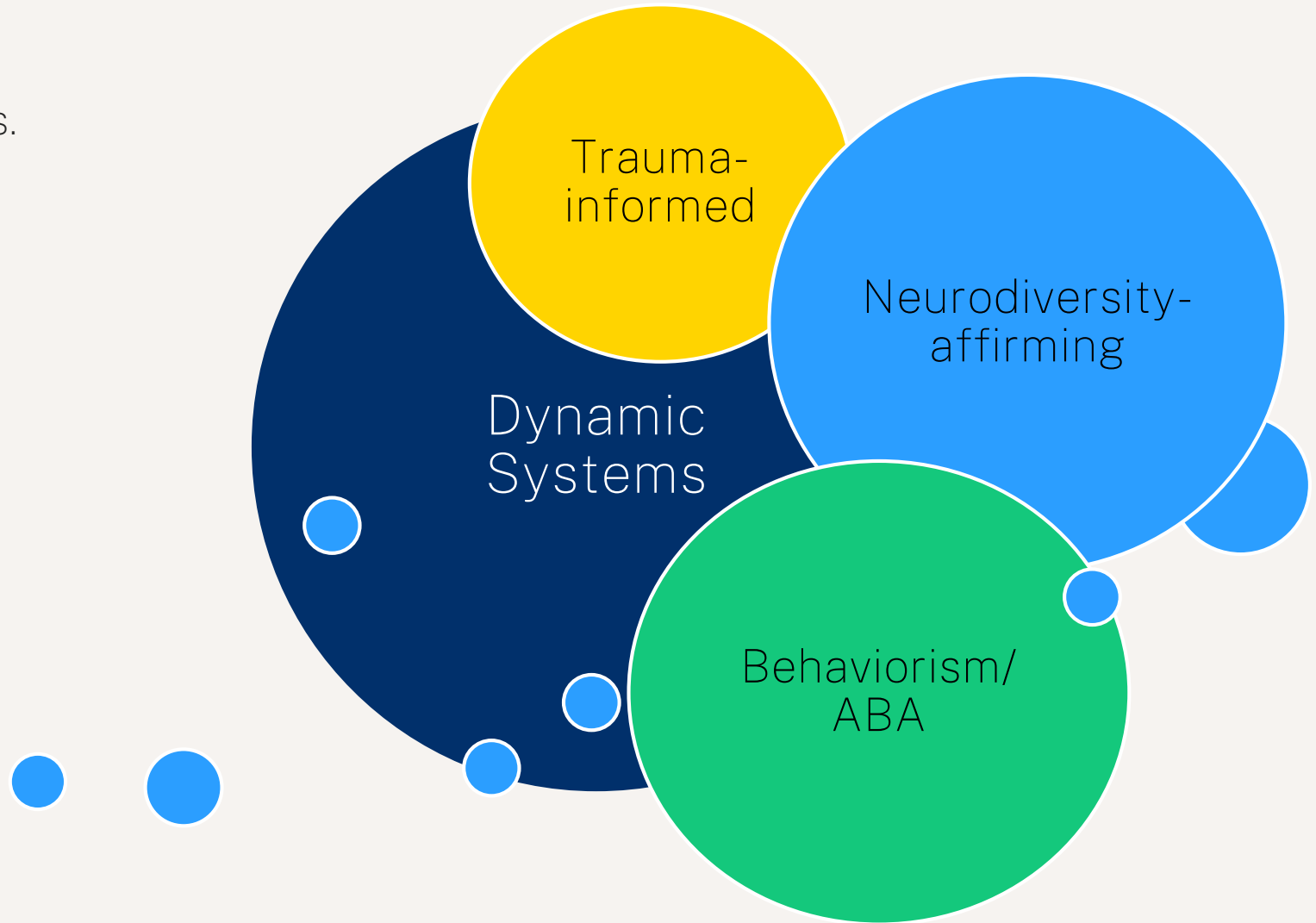
Theory Informs Practice

Transitions are not just individual events.

They are system-level developmental experiences.

One change can have a ripple effect.

We look through multiple lenses to understand and plan for those effects.



Trauma

An emotional, psychological, and physical response to experiences or events that overwhelm the person's ability to cope

The person may feel powerless or helpless

The body and mind go into survival mode

Trauma triggers a *fight or flight* reaction

Trauma can shape behavior, communication, relationships, and regulation



Trauma-Informed Approaches

Ask: “What happened to this person?”
Not: “What is wrong with this person?”

Avoid re-traumatization

5 Guiding Principles:

Safety

Prioritize
predictability and
emotional safety

Choice

Person-driven
process, avoid
power struggles

Collaboration

Provide
communication,
regulation supports,
and consent

Trustworthiness

Clear, consistent
approach, respond
to distress

Empowerment

Understand “behaviors”
as possible stress
responses
Support resilience
Shift control to the
person

Trauma-informed Plans

What parts of transition might feel threatening or destabilizing?

Transitions can involve:

- Loss of familiar people, routines, and environments
- Uncertainty and reduced control
- New expectations, providers, and systems
- Fear of abandonment, failure, or change

Plans should include:

- Emotional support before, during, and after transition
- Preparation and predictability
- Choice and participation
- Attention to grief, stress, and regulation needs
- Individualized identification of stressors and responses

Neurodiversity- Affirming

Everyone's experiences are different but the way people experience is also different.

Neurological differences impact the way we experience the world.

Neurodiversity is a natural part of human variation.

Differences in the way we:

- Think
- Communicate
- Process sensory information
- Learn
- Emotionally regulate



Neurodiversity-affirming Transitions

Why do neurodiversity-affirming practices matter during transition planning?

Transitions can disrupt:

- Routine and predictability
- Sensory familiarity
- Trusted relationships
- Communication systems
- Autonomy and preferred ways of doing things

What Does Neurodiversity-Affirming Support Look Like?

Focuses on support, access, and dignity rather than normalization

- Honor communication in all forms
- Reduce demands for masking
- Support sensory needs and regulation strategies
- Build on strengths, interests, and preferred routines
- Adapt environments before expecting the person to adapt

Ask: “How do we create a better fit between the person and the environment?”

Not: “How do we change the person?”

Approaches Work Together

One helps us understand the map; the others help us navigate it.

These approaches inform theoretical, empirical, and practical questions on transition planning.

Dynamic Systems

Why human behavior and transitions are complex

Trauma-informed

Why we need to understand a person's past and their current responses

Neurodiversity-affirming

How we should think about a person's fit to their environment

Applied Behavior Analysis

How we operationalize support in observable, practical ways

Applied Behavior Analysis

03

How we practice ABA

We support dignity, safety, autonomy, and fit — not just task completion

We do:

Promote autonomy

Accept refusals

Understand behaviors in context

Affirm neurodiversity

Value connection

We do not:

Use forced compliance

Use punitive readiness criteria

Applied Behavior Analysis

Evidence-based, systematic way of understanding variables responsible for behavior change

Applied Behavior Analysis focuses on:

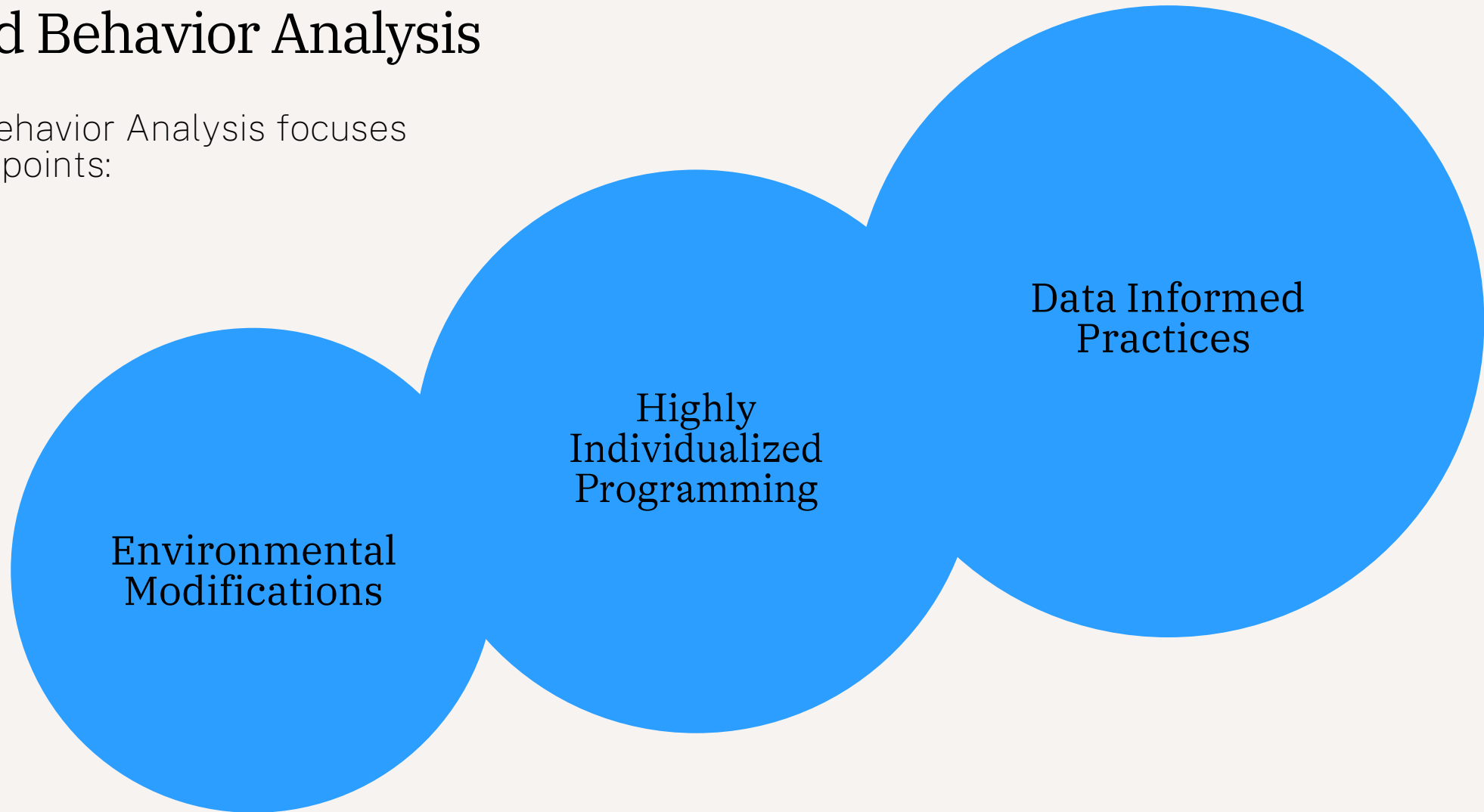
- Teaching adaptive behaviors
- Increasing independence
- Teaching coping strategies



BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

Applied Behavior Analysis

Applied Behavior Analysis focuses on 3 main points:



Systematic Applied Behavior Analysis

Assessment

Functional Behavior
Assessments

Plans

Include skill-
building, proactive,
and reactive
strategies

Generalization

Skills that are used
across multiple
people, places, and
times

ABA is most useful when it is contextual, person-centered, and function-based.

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

Procedure of collecting data and analyzing it to determine the function of behavior

01

Escape/Avoidance

02

Automatic

03

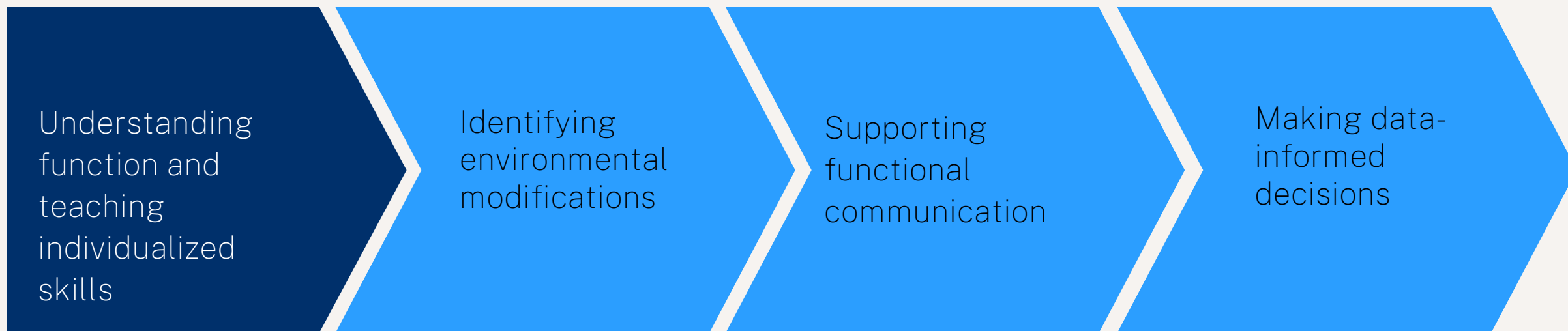
Tangible

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Attention

ABA Supports Transitions

Ways ABA is useful practically, during transitions:



Practical Transition Planning

04

Plans in Everyday Life

Plans should include:

- Individualized accommodations
- Teaching methods
- Daily opportunities for practice
- Ongoing reassessment

Everyday support should:

- Involve the person
- Maximize independence
- Reflect sensory and communication needs
- Prioritize safety and connection

Timeline

Transition Is a Process, Not a Single Event

Strong transitions are planned, supported, and revised over time.

Prepare	Coordinate	Support	Reassess	Stabilize
Identify upcoming transition	Train staff	Monitor stressors	Adjust skills and methods	Introduce to new residence
Begin transition plans	Implement plans	Adjust supports	Update plans	Introduce to new supports
Assess skill development areas	Establish routine			
Team planning meetings				

Planning Tools

Collaboration between residence, school, family, and the person to develop goals and objectives

Assess:

- Preferences and interests
- Sensory needs and sensitivities
- Communication style
- Behavior function
- Behavior support needs
- Trauma history
- Skill development support needs

CRP In-house

Adult Transition Plan

This plan provides a guideline to support *Young Adult* as he transitions from children's services to adult service models. It details goals/objectives, focus areas for adult skill development, instruction methodology for skill development, and timelines. Skills and methods are individualized according to his learning style, preferences, abilities, and sensory sensitivities.

Goals	Objectives
Learn how to create and maintain a daily routine	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify preferred skills2. Learn to sequence events3. Create daily schedule4. Use embedded schedules
Learn independent living skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify skills needed for adult service models2. Acquire identified skills
Participate in transition to adult services	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Learn about adult services2. Participate in screenings/meetings3. Provide feedback on services

Transition Readiness Checklist

Key Planning Areas

- Daily living
- Vocational
- Literacy/academic skills
- Emotional regulation
- Communication/self-advocacy
- Community and recreation

Use the checklist:
Before, during, and after the transition

Helps prepare across systems –
not just logistics.

1	Select	Focus Area	Skill	Status
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Self-care/grooming/oral hygiene	Achieved
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Bedroom maintenance	Ongoing
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Meal prep/cooking	Not Started
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Selecting daily outfit	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Laundry/sorting/folding	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily Living	Sorting/labeling paperwork	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Shredding	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Stocking supplies	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Kitchen maintenance: dishes, wiping tables	
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Sweeping/mopping	
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Typing/computer skills	
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Volunteer worksite	
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vocational	Money Management	
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic/Literacy	Paper based reading	
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic/Literacy	Paper based math	
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic/Literacy	Tasks boards/work systems	
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic/Literacy	App-based reading IXL, Lexia	
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic/Literacy	App-based math IXL, Magrid	
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional Regulation	Emotion Charts	
21	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional Regulation	Mood Meters	
22	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional Regulation	Emotion Scales	
23	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional Regulation	Emotion Scales	

Plan Development

Trauma-Informed Strategies

- Build predictability
- Empower active participation and offer meaningful choices
- Accept refusals as communication
- Avoid abrupt changes
- Include trusted support team
- Provide safety anchors-objects, coping tools
- Identify triggers and stress responses

The goal is collaboration, not compliance

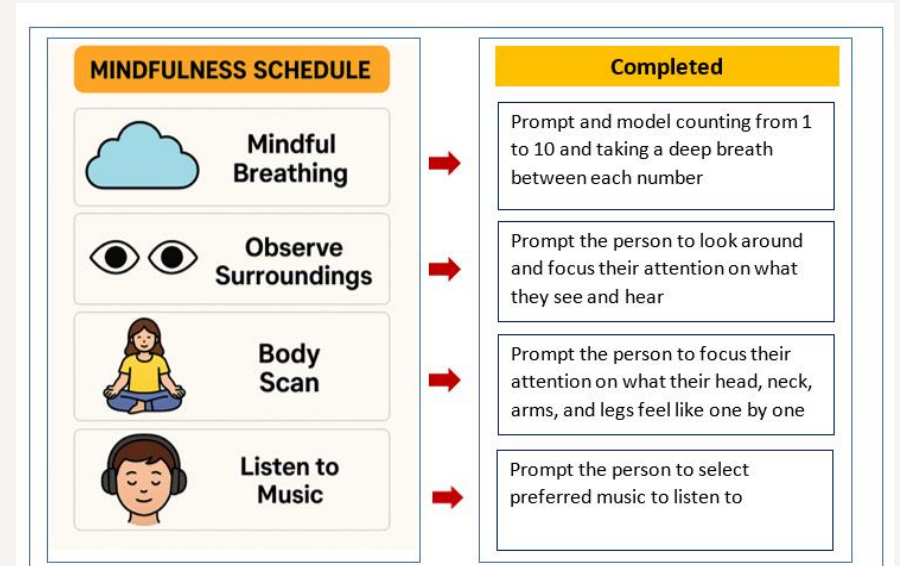
YA's Daily Schedule		
8:00am	Get Ready	✓
9:00am	Breakfast	✓
10:00am	Writing/Math	✓
11:00am	Go to Store	
11:30am	Clean Bedroom	
12:00pm	Lunch	
1:00pm	Mindfulness	
2:00pm	Volunteer work	
4:00pm	Relax	
5:00pm	Prep Dinner	
6:00pm	Dinner	
7:00pm	Video games	
8:00pm	Shower	

Plan Development

Neurodiversity-Affirming Strategies

- Identify the person's processing style for establishing a routine: objects, pictures, written, digital schedules
- Accommodate the person's sensory and communication styles
- Plan for sensory needs
- Provide regulation strategies
- Encourage their interests
- Avoid enforcing normalization or masking

The goal is acceptance, belonging, and participation



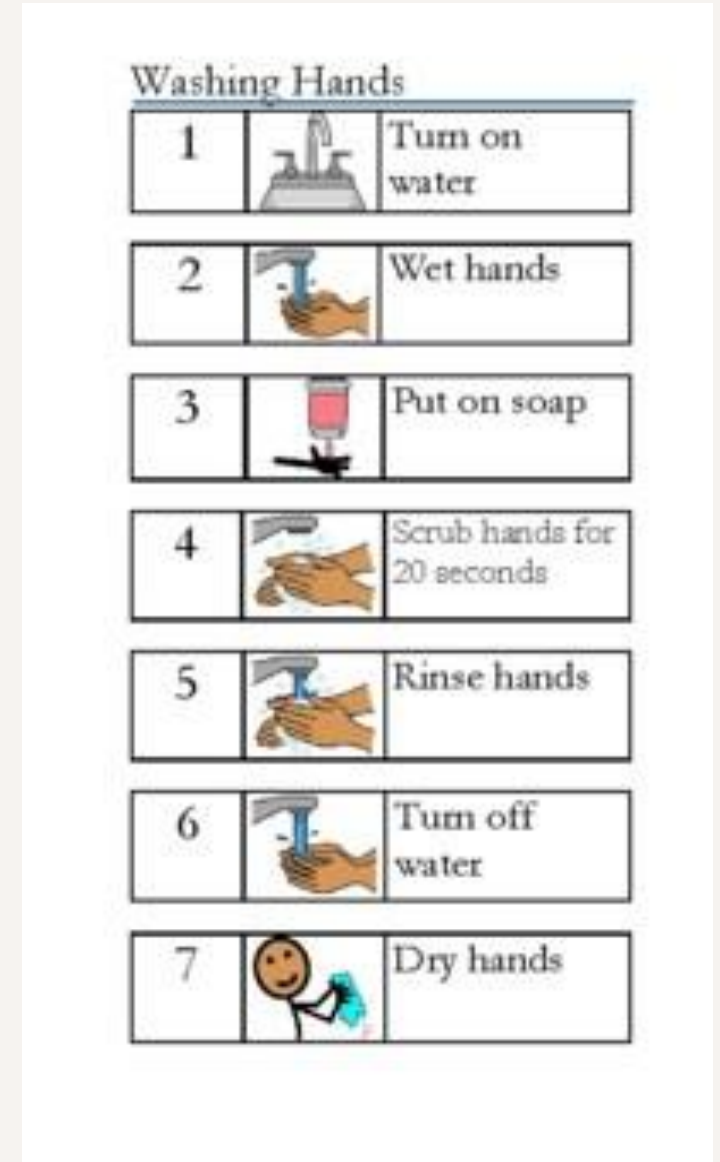
ABA Methods

1. Shaping

Reinforcing small steps (successful approximations) until the person reaches the final goal

2. Task Analysis

Used to break a complex skill into small teachable steps



Functional Communication Training

Teach ways to communicate in a way that are functionally equivalent to the behavior.

- Words
- Signs
- Gestures
- Communication cards
- Break cards
- Picture exchange communication system
- Assistive technology devices



Assistive Technology

Technology Can Support Successful Transitions

- Visual schedule apps: Pictello
- Communication apps: Proloquo
- Video models

More effective when:

- Introduced before the transition
- Used across settings
- Matched to the person's needs
- Easy to use



Data Collection and Reassessment

Data is collected and used to assess:

- Person's participation
- Progress
- Need for change

FREQUENCY CHECKLIST

For each skill/task, circle if *Young Adult* **attempted (A)**, **completed (C)**, or **refused (R)** and then write your initials below. Every day, include these skills in his schedule and provide support and assistance as needed.

Daily Skills	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Bedroom maintenance: make his bed, wipe surfaces	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R
Staff Initials							
He will select clothing/outfit	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R
Staff Initials							
Assist with 1 meal prep	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R
Staff Initials							
Kitchen maintenance: washing his dishes, wiping table	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R
Staff Initials							
Practice emotion chart/visual cues	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R	A-C-R
Staff Initials							

Preparing for Transition Day

Participation, collaboration, and flexibility are key for a successful move-in day

01

Before Transition

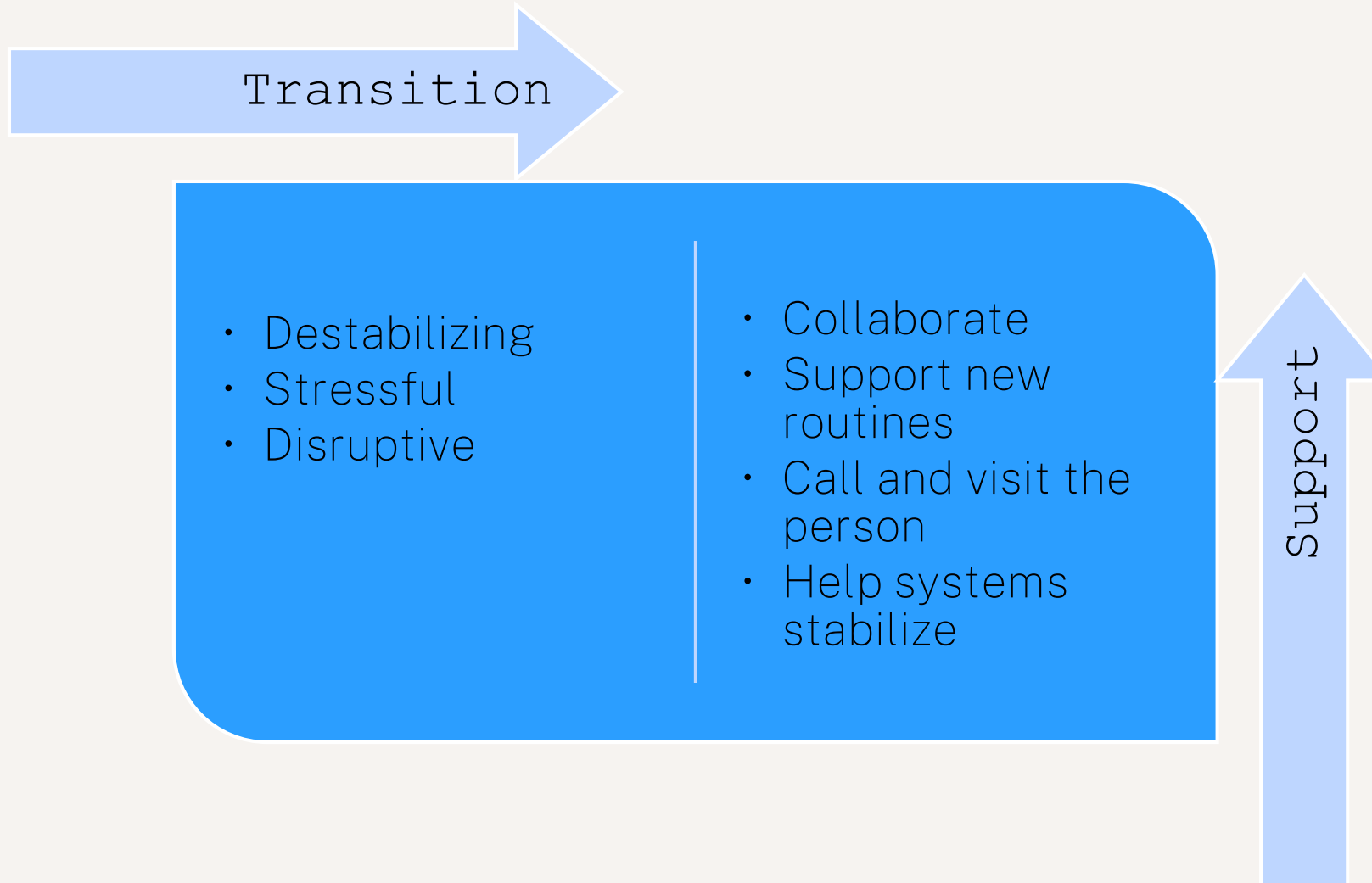
- Review visuals or videos of new residence
- Visit new residence, decorate new room
- Meet new support team, participate in meetings
- Team collaboration for continuity of practices

02

During Transition

- Prioritize feelings of safety and empowerment
- Presence of familiar support staff, family, personal and comfort items; validate feelings
- Provide communication tools

The Move is Not the Finish Line



Outcome Measures

How do we know the transition worked?

Success?:

- ✗ the move happened
- ✗ paperwork was completed
- ✗ there were no immediate incidents

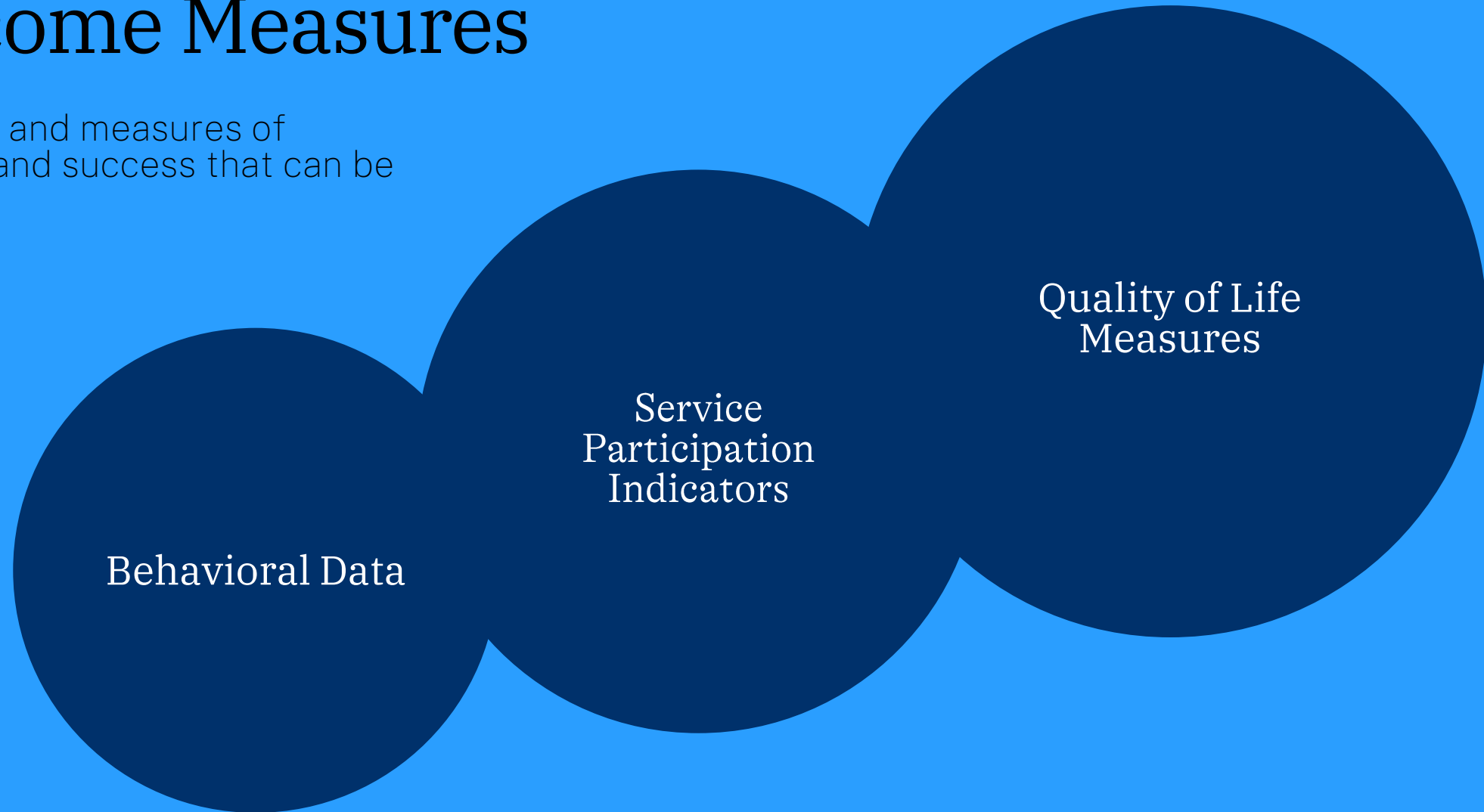
What actually matters:

- ✓ adjustment
- ✓ participation
- ✓ choice
- ✓ relationships
- ✓ psychological safety
- ✓ quality of life

A completed transition is not always a successful transition.

Outcome Measures

Indicators and measures of progress and success that can be quantified



Future Planning

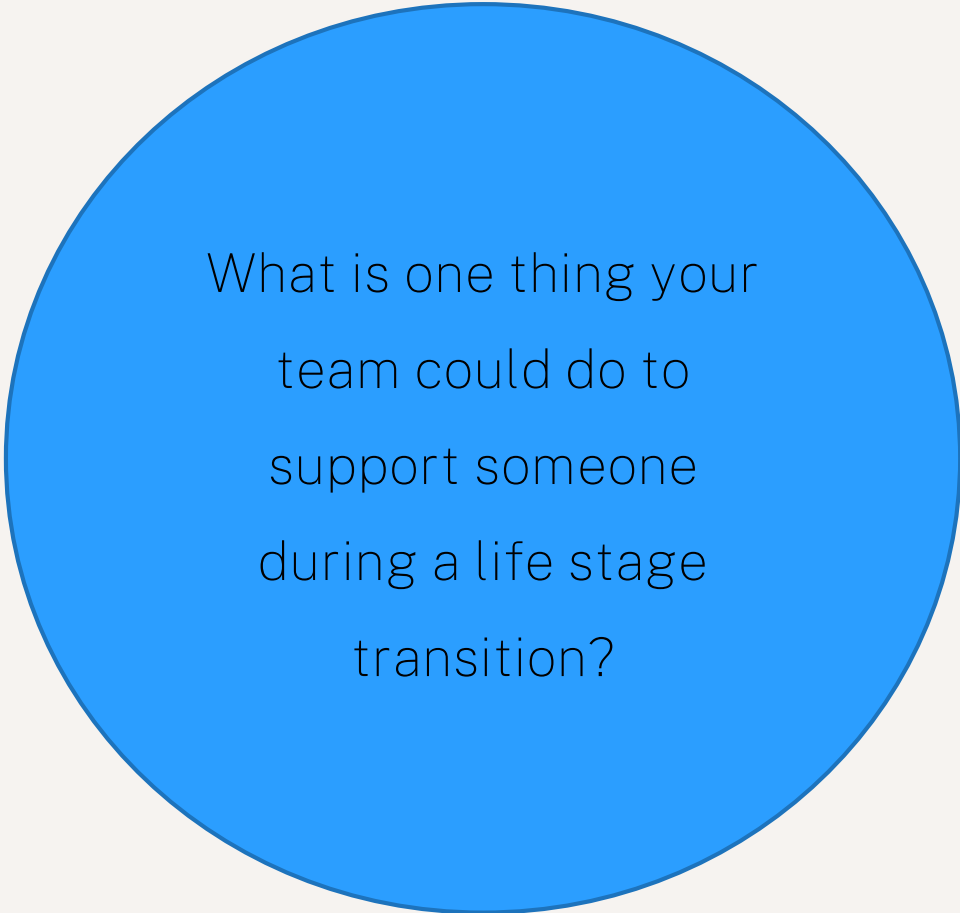
Transitions continue across the lifespan

Transition planning is useful for:

- Moving between residences
- Changing service models
- Retirement; aging-related changes
- Shifts in support needs

Transition planning is not a one-time event.

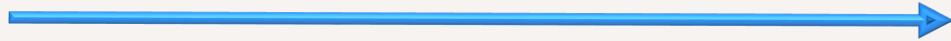
It is a lifelong support practice.



What is one thing your team could do to support someone during a life stage transition?

Closing Thoughts

Development is not a straight line.



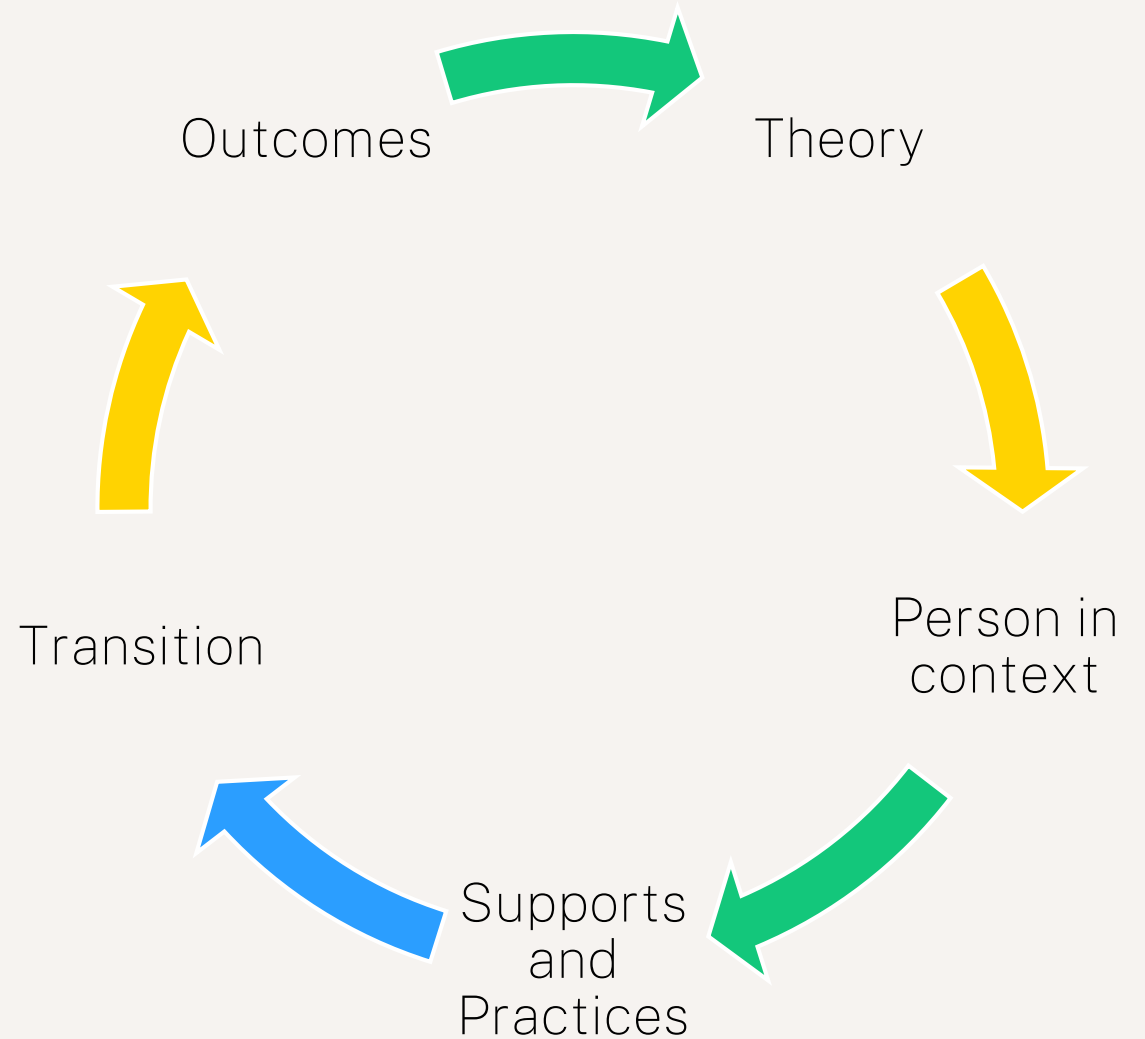
It does not happen in isolation and neither do transitions.

How people move through change is influenced by:

- the systems around them
- the supports available to them
- the meaning those changes hold in their lives

Transitions are not just logistics.

They are shaped by context, relationships, systems, and supports.



Transition planning is not about getting ready for where the person is going.

It is about how we support the person in who they are becoming.



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