Advanced Training 2013

Collaborative[&]Proactive Solutions

The Next Generation of
Solving Problems Collaboratively

Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.

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"A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimension."
Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Man masters nature not by force but by understanding."
Jacob Bronowski

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."
Benjamin Franklin

"I hope that someday we will learn the terrible cost we all pay
when we ignore or mismanage those people in society
who most need our help."
The Hon. Judge Sandra Hamilton,
Provincial Court of Alberta, Canada

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Solving Problems Collaboratively

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Lives in the Balance

Important Themes

- Emphasis is on solving problems rather than on extinguishing or replacing behaviors
- Problem solving is collaborative rather than unilateral (something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* him)
- Problem solving is proactive rather than emergent
- Understanding comes before helping...indeed, understanding is the most important part of helping

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Most Important Theme

Kids do well if they can

If they're not doing well,
we adults need to figure out why,
so we can help.

Important Questions

Why are challenging kids challenging?

When are challenging kids challenging?

What are we going to do differently now that
we know why challenging kids are challenging?

A less important question:

What do challenging kids do when they're
challenging?

Traditional Answer to Why?:
Challenging Behavior Is Working

Because of passive, permissive, inconsistent, non-contingent parenting, the kid has learned that challenging behavior is an effective means of getting something (e.g., attention) and escaping or avoiding something (e.g., homework).

"First pass" definition of function: It's working

Leads to interventions aimed at ensuring that kids know that maladaptive behavior is not going to work and incentivizing the performance of adult-conceived replacement behaviors.

Important Questions

If the kid had the skills to go about getting, escaping, and avoiding in an adaptive fashion, then why would be getting, escaping, and avoiding in such a maladaptive fashion?

Doesn't the fact that the kid is getting, escaping, and avoiding in a maladaptive fashion suggest that he doesn't have the skills to go about getting, escaping, and avoiding in an adaptive fashion?

(We all get, escape, and avoid...but why is the kid getting, escaping, and avoiding in such a maladaptive fashion?)

Another Important Theme

Doing well is always preferable
to not doing well
(prerequisite: skills)

Unconventional Answer to *Why?*:
Challenging Kids are Lacking Skills

Challenging kids are challenging because they're lacking the skills not to be challenging...they are delayed in the development of crucial cognitive skills, such as flexibility/ adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving.

"Second pass" definition of function: challenging behavior communicates that the kid doesn't have the skills to respond to problems more adaptively

Leads to interventions aimed at identifying the skills kids are lacking and the specific conditions (unsolved problems) in which those lagging skills are making it

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What Skills Are Behaviorally Challenging Kids Lacking?

- **Executive skills**
- **Language processing/communication skills**
- **Emotion regulation skills**
- **Cognitive flexibility skills**
- **Social skills**

Unconventional Answer to *When?*:
The Clash of the Two Forces

Challenging episodes occur when the cognitive
demands being placed upon a person outstrip the
person's capacity to respond adaptively (best
conceived as "incompatibility episodes").

Lagging
Skills

Demands of
Environment

When in a Child's Development Do
Incompatibility Episodes Begin to Emerge?

When incompatibility between the child's
characteristics (i.e., skills) and characteristics of the
environment (i.e., demands) starts to emerge.

Lagging
Skills

Demands of
Environment

The Clash of the Two Forces

Unsolved Problems: the specific conditions in which
the demands being placed upon a person exceed the
person's capacity to respond adaptively

Unsolved Problems

Lagging
Skills

Demands of
Environment
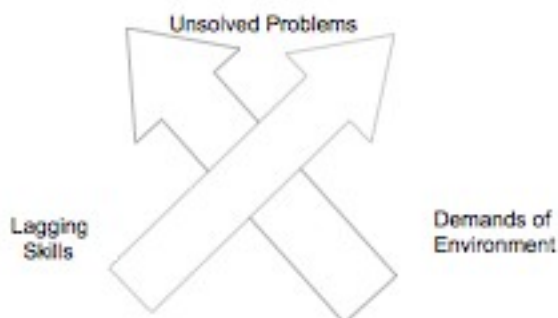
New Adult Roles in the Lives of Behaviorally Challenging Kids

- Lenses come first:
    - Identify lagging skills

- What are you working on?
    - Identify unsolved problems

- Get started:
    - Solve problems (collaboratively and proactively) and simultaneously teach skills

The Little *What?*:

The Spectrum of Looking Bad: a person may exhibit any of a variety of challenging behaviors when the clash of forces occurs, distinguished primarily by their severity

Identifying Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems

How are all these lagging skills and unsolved problems identified?

The Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)

- The ALSUP is meant to be used as a discussion guide for achieving a consensus - not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying (quantification comes in third)
- The ALSUP helps caregivers focus on things they can actually do something about (if we only focus on things we can't do anything about, we are likely to come to the conclusion that we can't do anything to help)
- We're looking to avoid the "correlation equals causation error"
- In a meeting, this discussion usually takes about 50 minutes...but only if we stop theorizing, hypothesizing, and telling stories

Using the ALSUP

- One section contains a representative list of the skills frequently found lagging in challenging kids
- Middle section is where unsolved problems are identified
- Goal is to have a meaningful (not perfunctory) discussion about the degree to which each lagging skill applies to a particular child (don't just check and move on), along with the unsolved problems associated with the lagging skills
  - Discussion of a kid's strengths isn't a bad idea, though identification of lagging skills is what typically leads to a more compassionate understanding of the kid's difficulties
- Unsolved problems are examples of times when a child's lagging skills are making it difficult to respond adaptively to specific expectations
  - Wording: Often start with "Difficulty..." and then the

Using the ALSUP:
Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

Unsolved Problems should be:
- Free of challenging behaviors
- Free of adult theories (no need to explain anything yet)
- Split, not clumped
- Specific (who, what, where/when...NOT why)
  - If you're having difficulty being specific, ask "What expectation is the child having difficulty meeting?"

Another Crucial Strategy:
- Ask the kid (and other caregivers)
  - "What are people bugging you about?"
  - "What are people giving you a hard time about?"
  - "What are you getting in trouble for?"

Using the ALSUP

- Expect light bulbs to go on
    - When caregivers come to recognize that a kid is, indeed, lacking many skills
    - When caregivers come to recognize why prior interventions have been ineffective
    - When caregivers begin to regret the manner in which they've been interacting with a kid based on incorrect assumptions
    - When caregivers become aware that unsolved problems occur under highly specific conditions
    - When caregivers recognize that unsolved problems are predictable and therefore be solved proactively
    - When caregivers begin pondering how they're going to create mechanisms for changing practices given what they now know about a kid's difficulties

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Lagging Skills + Unsolved Problems:

INCOMPATIBILITY EPISODES
ARE HIGHLY PREDICTABLE

- so we can intervene proactively

- "predictable" doesn't infer 100% reliability

    it means that an unsolved problem heightens the likelihood of an incompatibility episode

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Next Goal: Prioritizing

- You can't work on everything at once
- Focus on the "big fish" first
    - Severity: those unsolved problems contributing to the kid's worst moments or safety issues
    - Frequency: those unsolved problems contributing to incompatibility episodes most often

Keeping Track: The Problem Solving Plan (Plan B Flowchart)

- Specify high-priority unsolved problems
- Designate person primarily responsible for solving the problem with the child
- Follow the remaining sequence to a successful resolution
- Add new unsolved problems as old ones are solved

Options for Handling Unsolved Problems

Plan A: solve the problem unilaterally
(involves imposition of adult will, often accompanied by adult-imposed consequences)

Plan B: solve the problem collaboratively

Plan C: drop it for now (prioritizing)

Options for Handling Unsolved Problems

Plan A: Solve the problem unilaterally
- "I've decided that..."

- Plan A is unilateral
- Plan A causes incompatibility episodes in challenging kids
- Plan A provides no information whatsoever about the factors making it difficult for the kid to meet a given expectation
- Thus, solutions arrived at through Plan A are "uninformed solutions"

Timing is Everything

INCOMPATIBILITY EPISODES ARE HIGHLY PREDICTABLE

Crisis Management: Intervention is reactive and occurs emergently, in the heat of the moment

Crisis Prevention: Intervention is planned and occurs proactively, well before highly predictable incompatibility episodes occur again

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Options for Handling Unsolved Problems

Plan C: Drop it for now (prioritizing)
- Emergency C: "OK"
- Proactive C:
    - don't bring it up
    - an agreed-upon interim plan for tabling the problem for now

Dropping expectations (even temporarily) can be hard!

Options for Handling Unsolved Problems

Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively
- Emergency B: more useful for de-escalation (durably solving problems isn't likely in the   heat of the moment)
- Proactive B: more useful for working toward   durable solutions (creating TIME)

The Three Steps of Plan B

1. **Empathy Step**
2. **Define the Problem Step**
3. **Invitation Step**

The Empathy Step

Fundamentally Simple Part:

The goal of the Empathy step is to *gather information so as to achieve the clearest possible understanding of the kid's concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem*

What's Hard:

Introducing the Unsolved Problem to the Kid: The Empathy step begins with the words "I've noticed that", followed by an unsolved problems and an initial inquiry ("What's up?")...though this isn't very hard if you've be careful to word unsolved problems in accordance with the guidelines

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The Empathy Step of Plan B

Especially Hard:

What happens after "What's up?"
- The kid says something
- The kid says nothing or "I don't know"
- The kid says, "I don't have a problem with that"
- The kids says, "I don't want to talk about it"
- The kid responds defensively ("I don't have to talk to you!")

The Empathy Step (cont.):
The Kid Says Something

Drilling for Information is Really Hard:

- Key Theme: Don't run with the first thing the kid says
- Here are some strategies:
  - Reflective listening and clarifying statements ("How so?" "I don't quite understand" "I'm confused" "Can you say more about that?" "What do you mean?")
  - Asking about the who, what, where/when of the unsolved problem
  - Asking about why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others
  - Asking the kid what s/he's thinking in the midst of the unsolved problem (more important than feeling)
  - Breaking the problem down into its component parts

- Getting to your "aha" moment is hard...don't be a genius

The Empathy Step (cont.):
The Kid Says Something

Also Hard:
- You not thinking about solutions yet
  - The Empathy step is a "Solution-Free Zone"
- Remember, "drilling" isn't "grilling"...it involves "listening," not "lessoning" or "lessening" (dismissing, trumping)
- Stay neutral, non-defensive throughout
  - suspend your emotional response...the Empathy step isn't about you
- Don't rush
  - the Empathy step is not a mechanical formality...you're really curious...you really want to know!
- You're not ready to leave the Empathy step until you have a clear understanding of the kid's concern or perspective

The Empathy Step (cont.):
More Drilling Strategies

- Disparate observation
- Summary (and asking for more)
- Tabling

The Empathy Step (cont.):
I Don't Know/Silence

What to Do:
- Don't freak
- Keep drilling

If He's Still Not Talking, Figure out Why:
- You used Plan A or Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
- The Introduction wasn't specific, free of theories, free of maladaptive behaviors, split
- He doesn't trust you and/or the process yet (he has a lot of experience with Plan A)
- He really doesn't know
    - Maybe he's never thought about it before
    - Maybe you've never asked before
    - Maybe he hasn't thought about his concerns for a very long time
- He needs the problem broken down into its component parts

The Empathy Step (cont.)
Other Responses to "What's Up?"

- "I don't have a problem with that"
    - that's the beginning of his concern or perspective...start drilling!
    - the kid almost certainly has a problem with all the conflict surrounding the unsolved problem

- "I don't want to talk about it"
    - first, assume he has a good reason
    - next, give him permission not to talk
    - see if he'll talk about why he doesn't want to talk about it
    - don't do anything today that will reduce the likelihood of the kid talking to you tomorrow

- Defensiveness ("I don't have to talk to you!")

The Define the Problem Step

Fundamentally Simple Part:
•The goal of this step is to ensure that the adult's concern or perspective is entered into consideration (possibly beginning with, "The thing is..." or "My concern is...")

What's Hard:
Adults frequently don't know what their concerns are (though they do often know what their solutions are)
•Adult concerns typically fall into one of two categories:
    - How the problem is affecting the kid (e.g., health, safety, learning)
    - How the problem is affecting others (e.g., health, safety, learning)
•The Define the Problem step is a Solution-Free Zone, too...the first two steps are reserved exclusively for concerns

The Define the Problem Step (cont.)

Also Hard:

• Sometimes there are two solutions instead of two concerns on the table at the end of this step
- that's a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)
- Collaborative Solutions are win/win propositions

• Some kids say they "don't care" about your concern

What you're thinking: "Have I clearly articulated my concerns? Does the kid understand what I've said?"

The Invitation Step

Fundamentally Simple Part:
Goal of this step is to brainstorm solutions that are realistic and mutually satisfactory

What's Hard:
- Proving to the kid that you're as invested in getting his concern addressed as you are in getting your own concern addressed
- The wording is hard:
  • Should recap two concerns so as to summarize the problem to be solved (Starts with: "I wonder if there's a way....")
  • The concerns are the reference point against which all solutions are weighed
  • The kid is given the first opportunity to generate solutions

The Invitation Step (cont.)

• Not being a genius is hard
- you don't know where the plane is landing
- don't "embed" solutions in the Invitation!

• Coming up with a good solution is hard
- A good solution meets two criteria
  • Realistic
  • Mutually Satisfactory

• Goal is to come up with a solution so the problem doesn't come up again...not to come up with a solution for what to do in the heat of the moment when the problem recurs

The Invitation Step (cont.)

- What you're thinking:
  - Early: "Have I summarized both concerns accurately?
  - Later: "Have we truly considered whether both parties can do what they're about to agree to? Does the solution truly address the concerns of both parties?"
  - Prior to Signing Off: "What's my estimate of the odds of this solution working?" (if the odds are below 60-70 percent, figure out why and modify/refine the solution or continue brainstorming)

- The Invitation ends with an agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

You're Ready!

Additional Pointers

- Solving problems tends to be incremental
- The first solution seldom solves the problem durably... most problems require more than one discussion
- Solutions that don't stand the test of time:
  - weren't as realistic and mutually satisfactory as first thought
  - didn't address concerns that hadn't yet been identified
- Your first Plan B: just do the Empathy step (save the next two ingredients for the next day)
- You don't get good at Plan B without practicing Plan B (the first 20 are for practice)

How are the Skills Trained?

Mostly Indirectly

- Some skills can be trained directly
  - some social skills
  - language processing/communication skills
- There really isn't a technology for teaching (directly) most of the lagging skills on the ALSUP
- By collaboratively solving the problems associated with a given lagging skill, you're simultaneously (but indirectly) training that skill...you're building a "problem-solving repertoire"
- There are also skills being taught in each of the three steps of Plan B

Implementation in Schools and Facilities
(Start Small)

- Leadership commitment
  - Time, continuity, participation

- Formation of Core Group (start small)
  - Ensures that structures that support the model are in place before full-scale implementation
  - Practice using ALSUP and Plan B
  - Integrate paperwork into existing systems
  - Create new mechanisms for communication, follow-up

- Create a plan for spreading, training, coaching
  - Helping those who are having trouble
  - Revisiting/revising existing policies/procedures

Outpatient Settings:
Types, Sequence, and Focus of Sessions

Type 1: Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
Type 2: Describe three Plans and three steps of Plan B
Type 3: Demonstration of Plan B (with narration)
Type 4: Practice/Coaching (technical factors)
Type 5: Interfering Factors*

Is Plan B Relevant for Kids with Very Limited
Communication Skills?

- Reference point is infants
  - Identifying unsolved problems (requires excellent observational skills)
  - Identifying concerns
  - Collaborating on solutions

- Important Questions:
  - Does the child need additional training on the basics?
    - The relationship between problems and solutions
    - Basic concepts of problems and concerns
  - How is the child communicating now? Can we build on existing means of communication?
    - How can we help the child communicate more easily (pictures) about the basic components of problem-solving (problems, concerns, solutions)?

Dealing with Resistance

- "I don't have time for this"
- "I'm not a social worker"
- "He does well when he wants to do well"
- "He's just not motivated"
- "This is not about me"
- "Have you met his mother?"
- "He needs to know who's the boss"
- "The other kids need to know we take this behavior seriously"
- "I'm not dropping all my expectations just so he doesn't blow up"

Additional Information/Resources

www.livesinthebalance.org
Advocacy/support/Care Packages/Bill of Rights
Action Plan *B*
Web-based radio programs/Listening Library
Streaming video

www.cpsconnection.com
Advanced and certification trainings

www.cpsinitiative.com
Consultation
CPS Store

ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS & UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (Rev. 11-12-12)

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: The ALSUP is intended for use as a *discussion guide* rather than as a freestanding check-list or rating scale. It should be used to identify specific lagging skills and unsolved problems that pertain to a particular child or adolescent. If a lagging skill applies, check it off and then (before moving on to the next lagging skill) identify the specific expectations the child is having difficulty meeting in association with that lagging skill (unsolved problems). A non-exhaustive list of sample unsolved problems is shown at the bottom of the page.

LAGGING SKILLS	UNSOLVED PROBLEMS
__ Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another	
__ Difficulty doing things in a logical sequence or prescribed order	
__ Difficulty persisting on challenging or tedious tasks	
__ Poor sense of time	
__ Difficulty maintaining focus	
__ Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)	
__ Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem	
__ Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words	
__ Difficulty understanding what is being said	
__ Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally	
__ Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration	
__ Difficulty seeing the "grays"/concrete, literal, black-and-white, thinking	
__ Difficulty deviating from rules, routine	
__ Difficulty handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty	
__ Difficulty shifting from original idea, plan, or solution	
__ Difficulty taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action	
__ Inflexible, inaccurate interpretations/cognitive distortions or biases (e.g., "Everyone's out to get me," "Nobody likes me," "You always blame me, "It's not fair," "I'm stupid")	
__ Difficulty attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances	
__ Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills	
__ Difficulty seeking attention in appropriate ways	
__ Difficulty appreciating how his/her behavior is affecting other people	
__ Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person's perspective or point of view	
__ Difficulty appreciating how s/he is coming across or being perceived by others	
__ Sensory/motor difficulties	

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS GUIDE: Unsolved problems are the specific expectations a child is having difficulty meeting. Unsolved problems should be free of maladaptive behavior; free of adult theories and explanations; "split" (not "clumped"); and specific.

HOME: Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning in time to get to school on time; Difficulty getting started on or completing homework (specify assignment); Difficulty ending the video game to get ready for bed a night; Difficulty coming indoors for dinner when playing outside; Difficulty agreeing with brother about what television show to watch after school; Difficulty handling the feelings of seams in socks; Difficulty brushing teeth before bedtime; Difficulty staying out of older sister's bedroom; Difficulty keeping bedroom clean; Difficulty clearing the table after dinner

SCHOOL: Difficulty moving from choice time to math; Difficulty sitting next to Kyle during circle time; Difficulty raising hand during social studies discussions; Difficulty getting started on project on tectonic plates in geography; Difficulty standing in line for lunch; Difficulty getting along with Eduardo on the school bus; Difficulty when losing in basketball at recess

PLAN B FLOWCHART (7-12-10)

Child's Name _____   Date _____

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #1	**UNSOLVED PROBLEM #2**	**UNSOLVED PROBLEM #3**
Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B	Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B	Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B
Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step) Date _____	Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step) Date _____	Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step) Date _____
Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step) Date _____	Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step) Date _____	Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step) Date _____
Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step) Date _____	Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step) Date _____	Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step) Date _____
Problem Solved? Yes _____ Date _____ No _____ Comment:	Problem Solved? Yes _____ Date _____ No _____ Comment:	Problem Solved? Yes _____ Date _____ No _____ Comment:

Plan B Cheat Sheet

EMPATHY STEP

Ingredient/Goal:
Gather information about and achieve a clear understanding of the kid's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem you're discussing.

Words:

Initial Inquiry (neutral observation): "I've noticed that…(insert unsolved problem)… what's up?"

Drilling for Information:
usually involves reflective listening and clarifying questions, gathering information related to the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem, and asking the kids what they're thinking in the midst of the unsolved problems and why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others.

More Help:

-- If you're not sure what to say next, want more info, or are confused by something the kid has said, say:
  — "How so?"
  — "I'm confused."
  — "I don't quite understand."
  — "Can you tell me more about that?"
  — "Let me think about that for a second."

– If the kid doesn't talk or says "I don't know", try to figure out why:
  — Maybe the unsolved problem wasn't free of challenging behavior, wasn't specific, wasn't free of adult theories, or was "clumped" (instead of split)
  — Maybe you're using Emergency Plan B (instead of Proactive Plan B
  — Maybe you're using Plan A
  — Maybe he really doesn't know
  — Maybe he needs the problem broken down into its component parts
  — Maybe he needs time to think

What You're Thinking:
"What don't I yet understand about the kid's concern or perspective? What doesn't make sense to me yet? What do I need to ask to understand it better?"

Don't…
- skip the Empathy step
- assume you already know what the kid's concern is and treat the Empathy step as if it is a formality
- rush through the Empathy step
- leave the Empathy step before you completely understand the kid's concern or perspective
- talk about solutions yet

DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP

Ingredient/Goal:
Enter the concern of the second party (often the adult) into consideration

Words:
"The thing is (insert adult concern)…." or "My concern is (insert adult concern)…"

More Help:
Most adult concerns fall into one of two categories:
  — How the problem is affecting the kid
  — How the problem is affecting others

What You're Thinking:
"Have I been clear about my concern? Does the child understand what I have said?"

Don't…
- start talking about solutions yet
- sermonize, judge, lecture, use sarcasm

INVITATION STEP

Ingredient/Goal:
Brainstorm solutions that are realistic (meaning both parties can do what they are agreeing to) and mutually satisfactory (meaning the solution truly addresses the concerns of both parties)

Words:
Restate the concerns that were identified in the first two steps, usually beginning with "I wonder if there is a way…"

More Help:

–Stick as closely to the concerns that were identified in first two steps

–While it's a good idea to give the kid the first opportunity to propose a solution, generating solutions is a team effort

–It's a good idea to consider the odds of a given solution actually working …if you think the odds are below 60-70 percent, consider what it is that's making you skeptical and talk about it

–This step always ends with agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

What You're Thinking:
"Have I summarized both concerns accurately? Have we truly considered whether both parties can do what they've agreed to? Does the solution truly address the concerns of both parties? What's my estimate of the odds of this solution working?"

Don't…
–Rush through this step either
–Enter this step with preordained, "ingenious" solutions
–Sign off on solutions that both parties can't actually perform
–Sign off on solutions that don't truly address the concerns of both parties.

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A more compassionate, productive, effective approach to understanding and helping behaviorally challenging kids

Dr. Ross Greene – author of *The Explosive Child* and *Lost at School* – is the originator of a research-based approach to understanding and helping behaviorally challenging kids that has been implemented in countless families, schools, inpatient psychiatry units, therapeutic groups homes, and residential and juvenile detention facilities. The approach sets forth two major tenets. First, challenging behavior in kids is best understood as the result of lagging cognitive skills (in the general domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving) rather than as the result of passive, permissive, inconsistent, noncontingent parenting. And second, the best way to reduce challenging episodes is by working together with the child – collaborating – to solve the problems setting them in motion in the first place (rather than by imposing adult will and intensive use of reward and punishment procedures). Here are some of the important questions answered by the model:

Question: *Why are challenging kids challenging?*
Answer: Because they're lacking the skills not to be challenging. If they had the skills, they wouldn't be challenging. That's because – and this is perhaps the key theme of the model – ***Kids do well if they can***. And because (here's another key theme) ***Doing well is always preferable to not doing well*** *(if a kid has the skills to do well in the first place)*. This, of course, is a dramatic departure from the view of challenging kids as attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, limit-testing, and poorly motivated. It's a completely different set of lenses, supported by research in the neurosciences over the past 30-40 years, and it has dramatic implications for how caregivers go about helping such kids.

Question: *When are challenging kids challenging?*
Answer: When the demands or expectations being placed upon them exceed the skills that they have to respond adaptively. Of course, that's when we all respond maladaptively: when we're lacking the skills to respond adaptively. Thus, an important goal for helpers is to identify the skills a challenging kid is lacking. An even more important goal is to identify the specific expectations a kid is having difficulty meeting (the conditions in which challenging behavior is occurring), referred to as ***unsolved problems***…and to help kids solve those problems. Because unsolved problems tend to be tend to be highly predictable, the problem-solving should be proactive most of the time. Identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems is accomplished through use of an instrument called the ***Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)***. You can find the ALSUP in The Paperwork section of the website of ***Lives in the Balance,*** the non-profit Dr. Greene founded to help disseminate his approach (***www.livesinthebalance.org***).

Question: *What behaviors do challenging kids exhibit when they don't have the skills to respond adaptively to certain demands?*
Answer: Challenging kids let us know they're struggling to meet demands and expectations in some fairly common ways: whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying, screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, throwing, breaking, lying, stealing, and so forth. But what a kid ***does*** when he's having trouble meeting demands and expectations isn't the most important part (though it may feel that way)…***why*** and ***when*** he's doing these things are much more important.

Question: *What should we be doing differently to help these kids better than we're helping them now?*
Answer: If challenging behavior is set in motion by lagging skills and not lagging motivation, then it's easy to understand why rewarding and punishing a kid may not make things better. Since challenging behavior occurs in response to highly predictable unsolved problems, then challenging kids – and the rest of us – are a whole lot better off when adults help them solve those problems. But if we solve them unilaterally, through imposition of adult will (referred to in the model as "Plan A"), then we'll only increase the likelihood of challenging episodes and we won't solve any problems durably. Better to solve those problems collaboratively ("Plan B") so the kid is a fully invested participant, solutions are more durable, and (over time) the kid ----- and often the adults as well ----- learn the skills they were lacking all along. ***Plan B*** is comprised of three basic ingredients. The first ingredient – called the ***Empathy*** step – involves gathering information from the child so as to achieve the clearest understanding of his or her concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem. The second ingredient (called the ***Define the Problem*** step) involves entering into consideration the adult concern or perspective on the same unsolved problem. The third ingredient (called the ***Invitation*** step) involves having the adult and kid brainstorm solutions so as to arrive at a plan of action that is both realistic and mutually satisfactory…in other words, a solution that addresses the concerns of both parties and that both parties can actually perform.

Question: *Where can I learn more about this model?*
Answer: The ***Lives in the Balance*** website is a very good place to start. It has a ton of free resources to help you learn about and apply Dr. Greene's approach, including streaming video, audio programming, commentary, support, and lots more.

Question: Is this the same model as what was previously known as *Collaborative Problem Solving*?
**Answer:** Yes. Unfortunately, Dr. Greene may no longer be able to refer to the model he originated by that name…plus, the model has evolved so much over the past five or so years, it probably needs a new name anyway…stay tuned!

Lives in the Balance

Hope, compassion, support, and help for behaviorally challenging kids and their caregivers

Founded by Dr. Ross Greene, Lives in the Balance provides free resources to help you learn about the model of care he described in his books *The Explosive Child* and *Lost at School*...
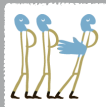
LEARN

In this section, you can learn all about Dr. Greene's model through streaming video and other resources

SHARE

In this section, you'll hear from and about people who are making a difference by implementing the model in their settings

CONNECT

This section contains a treasure trove of additional resources, including our radio programs and listening library

COLLABORATE

If you're ready to advocate on behalf of behaviorally challenging kids and their caregivers, this section is for you

WWW.LIVESINTHEBALANCE.ORG