

SIX KEY THEMES

1. Emphasis is on **problems** (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)...**upstream** (not downstream)
 - Behaviors are not the only observable data...unsolved problems are observable too

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SIX KEY THEMES

2. The problem solving is **collaborative** rather than unilateral...something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* him
3. The problem solving is **proactive** rather than emergent
 - This is possible if we answer two important questions: **why** and **when** is this kid challenging?
4. Understanding comes before helping

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SIX KEY THEMES

5. Kids do well if they can
 - If the kid could do well, he would do well
6. Doing well is preferable
 - We've been focused on motivation when we should have been focused on skills

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ANSWER TO THE QUESTION 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.

- Challenging kids aren't always challenging
- They're challenging in conditions in which certain skills are being demanded
- It's a developmental delay

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ANSWER TO THE QUESTION WHY:

Challenging Kids are Lacking Skills

Challenging behavior *communicates* that the kid doesn't have the skills to meet certain demands and expectations...behavior is simply the signal...the fever...the byproduct.

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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

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THE TOP 5

Skills That Foster the Better Side of Human Nature

- Empathy
- Appreciating how one's behavior is affecting others
- Resolving disagreements without conflict
- Taking another's perspective
- Honesty

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ANSWER TO THE QUESTION WHEN:

The Clash of the Two Forces

Challenging episodes occur *when the demands being placed upon a person outstrip his or her skills*

- "unmet expectations" = "unsolved problems"
- results in "incompatibility episodes"



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ADULT ROLES IN THE LIVES OF BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS

- Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
- Solve problems collaboratively and proactively
 - Promotes a problem solving partnership
 - Engages kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
 - Produces more effective, durable solutions
 - Simultaneously teaches skills

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ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)

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ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)

- On the left side is a representative list of the skills frequently found lagging in challenging kids
- Unsolved problems are identified on the right side
- The ALSUP is meant to be used as a **discussion guide**...not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying
- 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 want to avoid the "correlation equals causation error."

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USING THE ALSUP

- Participants receive a blank copy of the ALSUP
 - The kid is not present in the meeting
- Start at the top...don't "cherry-pick" lagging skills
- After checking off a given lagging skill, identify the unsolved problems that spring to mind when thinking of that lagging skill
 - "Can you give me some examples of expectations Theresa is having difficulty meeting when you think of her having difficulty (repeat lagging skill)..."
- Come up with as many unsolved problems as possible for an endorsed lagging skill

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USING THE ALSUP

Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

A problem well stated is a problem half solved.*

~Charles Kettering

The wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP is going to translate into the words that are used when the unsolved problem is introduced to the child when it comes time to solve it together. The wording should be kid-friendly and...

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USING THE ALSUP

Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

- Free of challenging behaviors (**Difficulty...**)
- Free of adult theories (**no need to explain anything**)
- Split, not clumped
 - *"Split early, maybe you can clump later...but if you clump early, you 'll never find out"*
- As specific as possible
 - STRATEGY #1: Who, What, Where/When...NOT why)
 - STRATEGY #2: What expectation is the child having difficulty meeting?

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USING THE ALSUP

A Few More Guidelines

- Don't go down the entire list of lagging skills and then go back to identify unsolved problems
- Don't identify unsolved problems first and then go back to decide which lagging skills apply to that unsolved problem
- No need to establish which lagging skill best explains a particular unsolved problem...just assume multiple lagging skills can contribute to the same unsolved problem
- No need to write the same unsolved problem more than once
- You're not looking for "hundred percenters"
- Very important to consider whether the kid is actually capable of meeting a given expectation

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USING THE ALSUP

Expect lightbulbs to go on when...

- Caregivers come to recognize that a kid is, indeed, lacking many skills
- Caregivers come to recognize why prior interventions have been ineffective
- Caregivers begin to regret the manner in which they've been interacting with a kid based on incorrect assumptions
- Caregivers become aware that unsolved problems occur under highly specific conditions
- Caregivers recognize that unsolved problems are predictable and therefore be solved proactively
- 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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MORE UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Ask the Kid

- “What are people getting on your case about?”
- “What are you getting in trouble for?”

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NEXT GOAL

Prioritizing

- You can't work on everything at once
- Focus on the “big fish” first
 - SAFETY: Those unsolved problems contributing to unsafe behavior
 - FREQUENCY: Those unsolved problems contributing to incompatibility episodes most often
 - GRAVITY: Those unsolved problems having the greatest negative impact on the kid or others

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THE PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN (Plan B Flowchart)



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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 solve the problem
- Add new unsolved problems as old ones are solved

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OPTIONS FOR HANDLING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

PLAN A:

Solve the problem unilaterally

PLAN B:

Solve the problem collaboratively

PLAN C:

Set the problem aside for now

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PLAN A

Solve the problem unilaterally

- The adult decides what the solution is and imposes it, often accompanied by adult-imposed consequences
 - *"I've decided that..."*
- **PLAN A** causes incompatibility episodes in challenging kids
- **PLAN A** is not a partnership
- **PLAN A** does not involve kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
- **PLAN A** provides no information whatsoever about the factors making it difficult for the kid to meet a given expectations...solutions arrived at through Plan A are **"uninformed"**

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TIMING IS EVERYTHING

INCOMPATIBILITY EPISODES ARE HIGHLY PREDICTABLE

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: Intervention is reactive and occurs emergently, in the heat of the moment ("What should I do *when?*")

CRISIS PREVENTION: Intervention is planned and occurs proactively, well before highly predictable incompatibility episodes occur again ("What am I going to do *before?*")

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PLAN C

Set the problem aside for now

Not about giving in or capitulating... it's about prioritizing

- **EMERGENCY C:** "OK"
- **PROACTIVE C:**
 - don't bring it up
 - an agreed-upon interim plan for tabling the problem for now

*Good parenting and good teaching mean
being responsive to the hand you've been dealt*

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PLAN B

Solve the problem collaboratively

1. **Empathy Step**
(gather information so as to identify child's concerns)
2. **Define Adult Concerns Step**
(identify adult concerns)
3. **Invitation Step**
(collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory)

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PLAN B

The Empathy Step

GOAL:

Gather information from the kid so as to achieve the clearest possible understanding of his concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem

INTRODUCTION:

The Empathy step begins with the words "I've noticed that" followed by an unsolved problem and an initial inquiry ("What's up?")

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PLAN B

The Empathy Step

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" or "I don't care"
- The kid says, "I don't want to talk about it"
- The kid responds defensively ("I don't have to talk to you!")

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PLAN B

The Empathy Step: The Kid Says Something

DRILLING STRATEGIES:

- **Reflective listening** and **clarifying statements**
- 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
- Breaking the problem down into its **component parts**
- **Discrepant Observation**
- **Tabling** (and asking for more concerns)
- **Summarizing** (and asking for more concerns)

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PLAN B

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

ADDITIONAL POINTERS:

- * You're 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've summarized and asked for more and there is no more

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PLAN B

The Empathy Step: 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
- * You used 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 hasn't thought about his concerns for a very long time
- * He needs the problem broken down into its component parts
- * He needs time to think (adults better get comfortable with silence)
- * He's having difficulty putting his thoughts into words

WHAT IS HE'S STILL NOT TALKING?

- * Educated guessing/hypothesis testing

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PLAN B

The Empathy Step: Other Responses to "What's Up?"

"I don't have a problem with that" or "I don't care"

- * 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!")

- * he may need reassurance that you're not using Plan A
 - * "I'm not talking you what to do"
 - * "You're not in trouble"
 - * "I'm not mad at you"
 - * "I'm not trying to understand"

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PLAN B

The Define Adult Concerns Step

GOAL:

Enter the adult's concern or perspective 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 are not merely a repetition of the expectation

- * 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 Adult Concerns step is a Solution-Free Zone, too...the first two steps are reserved exclusively for concerns

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PLAN B

The Invitation Step

GOAL:

Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory

WHAT'S HARD:

*The Wording:

- Should recap two concerns so as to summarize the problem to be solved (Starts with: "I wonder if there's a way...")
- The kid is given the first opportunity to generate solutions ("Do you have any ideas?"), but resolution of the problem is a team effort (collaborative)

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PLAN B

The Invitation Step (cont.)

- Goal is to demonstrate to the kid that you're as invested in getting his concern addressed as you are in getting your own concern addressed
- You don't know where the plane is landing before it takes off (no preordained solutions)
- If there are multiple concerns that cannot be addressed by the same solution, you'll need multiple solutions (and more than one Plan B)
- Before agreeing on a solution, give deliberate consideration to whether the solution is realistic and mutually satisfactory...if not, refine the original solution or think of alternatives
- 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 (don't use the word "when" in the Invitation)
- Battling over solutions define a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)...solving problems collaboratively is a win/win proposition

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YOU'RE READY!

ADDITIONAL POINTERS

- The Invitation ends with an agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time
- 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 as first thought
 - weren't as mutually satisfactory as thought
 - didn't address all the concerns (those that hadn't yet been identified or prioritized)

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HOW ARE THE SKILLS TRAINED?

- Some skills can be trained explicitly (in the traditional sense)
 - some social skills
 - language processing/communication skills
- Skills are being taught in each of the three steps of Plan B

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IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES (Start Small)

- Leadership commitment
 - Time, continuity, participation
- Formation of Core Group (start small)
 - Practice using ALSUP and Plan B
 - Ensures that there are mentors to help others
 - Ensures structures that support the model are in place before full-scale implementation
 - 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

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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)?

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FINAL QUESTIONS

- Why do the problems that affect kids lives so often cause conflict between us and them?
- Are the ways in which we're going about parenting, teaching, disciplining, and interacting with our kids teaching the skills that foster the display of the characteristics on the more positive side of human nature?

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES



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