AN APPROACH TO HELPING CHILDREN

COLLABORATIVE
PROBLEM SOLVING

AN APPROACH TO HELPING CHILDREN

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WHO IS IT FOR?

Young people aged between 4 years and 18 years who are:
- easily frustrated
- Inflexible
- don’t yet have the skills to solve problems

Or

- any child who requires some support in finding a solution to a problem
IMPORTANT CPS THEMES

1. Emphasis is on solving problems rather than on extinguishing or replacing behaviors.

2. Problem solving is collaborative rather than unilateral.

3. Understanding comes before helping; understanding is the most important part of helping.
CPS PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOST IMPORTANT THEME

Children do well if they can.

(if children are not doing well, we adults need to help them figure out why so they can help)
AN IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF.

• If the kid had the skills to go about getting, escaping and avoiding in an adaptive fashion, then why would they try to get, escape or avoid in a maladaptive fashion?

• We all get, escape, and avoid! If he or she is doing it in a maladaptive fashion, that would suggest he/she does not have the skills to go about getting, escaping and avoiding in an adaptive fashion.
SO WHY ARE CHALLENGING CHILDREN CHALLENGING?

CPS theory: Children are challenging because they’re lacking the skills not to be challenging; they don’t yet have the crucial cognitive skills such as flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance and problem – solving.
THE CLASH OF TWO FORCES

Challenging episodes occur when the cognitive demands being placed upon a person outstrip the person’s capacity to respond adaptively.

Lagging skills

Demands of environment
WHEN IN A CHILD’S DEVELOPMENT DO CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS BEGIN TO EMERGE?

When incompatibility between the child’s skills and the demands of the environment start 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.

Lagging Skills  

Demands of Environment
Every challenging behavior involves a lagging skill and a demand for that skill (an unsolved problem)
THE SPECTRUM OF LOOKING BAD

A child may exhibit any variety of challenging behaviors when the clash of forces occurs.
IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Roles and Goals:

1. Lenses come first – Identify lagging skills

2. Get organized – identify unsolved problems, create mechanisms for communication and proactive intervention

3. Get busy – solve problems and simultaneously teach skills
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 a checklist or mechanism for quantifying.

The ALSUP helps parents, teachers and caregivers focus on things they can actually do something about.

Be aware: the unsolved problem that is identified by the group may not actually be the problem.
USING THE ALSUP

One section contains a representative list of the skills frequently found lagging in challenging children.

Middle section is where unsolved problems are identified.

Goal is to have a meaningful discussion about the degree to which each lagging skill applies to a particular child, along with the unsolved problems associated with the lagging skill.
Unsolved problems are examples of times when a child’s lagging skills are making it difficult to respond adaptively to specific demands or expectations.
EXAMPLES OF UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Brushing teeth when asked by mom before bed

Sitting on the carpet during math for 5 minutes

Packing bag for school in the morning, especially Sunday

Playing lego with sister on Friday mornings

Starting homework after school on a Tuesday
THREE PLANS
PLAN A, B AND C

Plans **only** come into play when there is an unsolved problem.

**Plan A** – imposition of adult will, unilateral

**Plan B** – collaborative problem solving

**Plan C** – dropping some expectations temporarily
PLAN B

Three steps:

1. **Empathy** - The goal of the Empathy step is to achieve the clearest possible understanding of a kid's concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem.

2. **Define the problem**

3. **Invitation to solve problem**
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

DEFINITE 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 the 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.
**ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS & UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (Rev. 8/29/11)**

**Child’s Name:** ________________________________  **Date:** ________________________________

**Instructions:** The ALSUP is intended for use as a discussion guide rather than 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 examples (unsolved problems) in which that lagging skill is causing difficulty. Unsolved problems should specify the explicit conditions in which the child or adolescent is having difficulty meeting expectations (a non-exhaustive list of potential unsolved problems is shown at the bottom of the page). To assist in prioritizing, also rate the degree to which each recorded unsolved problem is setting in motion challenging episodes.

## LAGGING SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lagging Skill</th>
<th>Examples (Unsolved Problems)</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another</td>
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<td>Difficulty doing things in a logical sequence or prescribed order</td>
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<td>Difficulty persisting on challenging or tedious tasks</td>
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<td>Poor sense of time</td>
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<td>Difficulty maintaining focus</td>
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<td>Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)</td>
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<td>Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem</td>
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<td>Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words</td>
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<td>Difficulty understanding what is being said</td>
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<td>Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally</td>
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<td>Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration</td>
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<td>Difficulty seeing the &quot;grays&quot;/concrete, literal, black-and-white, thinking</td>
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<td>Difficulty deviating from rules, routine</td>
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<td>Difficulty handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty</td>
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<td>Difficulty shifting from original idea, plan, or solution</td>
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<td>Difficulty taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action</td>
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<td>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”)</td>
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<td>Difficulty attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances</td>
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<td>Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills</td>
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<td>Difficulty seeking attention in appropriate ways</td>
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<td>Difficulty appreciating how his/her behavior is affecting other people</td>
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<td>Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person’s perspective or point of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty appreciating how he/she is coming across or being perceived by others</td>
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### EXAMPLES OF UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

**HOME:** Waking up/getting out of bed in the morning; Completing morning routine/getting ready for school; Sensory hypersensitivities (specify); Starting or completing homework (specify); Time spent in front of a screen (TV, video games, computer); Going to/getting ready for bed at night; Sibling interactions (specify); Cleaning room/completing household chores (specify)

**SCHOOL:** Shifting from one specific task to another (specify); Getting started on/completing class assignment (specify); Interactions with a particular classmate/teacher (specify); Behavior in hallway/at recess/in cafeteria/on school bus/waiting in line (specify); Handling disappointment/losing at a game/not coming in first/not being first in line (specify)

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PLANNING B FLOWCHART (7-12-10)

Child’s Name ___________________________ Date ________________

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #1

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date __________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)

Date __________

Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step)

Date __________

Problem Solved?
Yes ________ Date ________
No ________ Comment:

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #2

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date __________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)

Date __________

Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step)

Date __________

Problem Solved?
Yes ________ Date ________
No ________ Comment:

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #3

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid's Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date __________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)

Date __________

Solution Agreed Upon (Invitation Step)

Date __________

Problem Solved?
Yes ________ Date ________
No ________ Comment: