Moving From Power and Control to Collaboration and Problem Solving

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WHAT WE’RE TALKING ABOUT

- Lenses
- Practices
- Structures
1. Emphasis is on **problems** (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)...**upstream** (not downstream)

   - Challenging behavior is simply the signal...the fever...the means by which a child *communicates* that he/she is having difficulty meeting certain expectations

   - Behaviors are not the only observable, objective, quantifiable data...unsolved problems are too
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 only if we answer two important questions: *why* and *when* is this kid challenging?

4. Understanding comes before helping
SIX KEY THEMES

5. Kids do well if they can
   ▪ If the kid could do well, he would do well
     ▪ Not True:
       ▪ Attention-seeking
       ▪ Manipulative
       ▪ Coercive
       ▪ Unmotivated
       ▪ Limit-testing

6. Doing well is preferable
   ▪ We’ve been focused on motivation when we should have been focused on skills
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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WHAT SKILLS ARE BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS LACKING?

✓ Executive skills
✓ Language processing/communication skills
✓ Emotion regulation skills
✓ Cognitive flexibility skills
✓ Social skills
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
Challenging episodes occur when expectations outstrip skills

- “unmet expectations” = “unsolved problems”
- results in “incompatibility episodes”
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
**Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)**

**Lagging Skills**
- Difficulty handling interruptions, shifting from one interest to another
- Difficulty staying on task for a logical sequence or prescribed order
- Difficulty persisting on challenging or tiring tasks
- Poor self-esteem
- Difficulty maintaining focus
- Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsivity)
- Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem
- Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words
- Difficulty understanding teachers' response to frustration as it is communicated
- Difficulty initiating involvement or seeking needed help
- Difficulty seeking "gray" solutions, ideal black & white thinking
- Difficulty adhering to rules, routines
- Difficulty reading, writing, or speaking accurately, clearly, or coherently
- Difficulty setting time, goals, or priorities
- Difficulty assuming tasks from others
- Difficulty moving from one activity to another
- Difficulty taking into account practical factors that would suggest the need to complete a task within a given time
- Frequent, incorrect, or inappropriate decisions or actions
- Difficulty maintaining focus or attention when performing tasks
- Difficulty functioning with regular short breaks
- Difficulty with the handling of several tasks at once
- Difficulty including leisure/leisure activities

**Unsolved Problems**
- Difficulty respecting the boundaries of others
- Difficulty empathizing with others
- Difficulty appreciating how others are coming across or being perceived by others
- Sarcasm/putting others down

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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
THE PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN
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
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?”)
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)
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
FINAL QUESTIONS

- Do you still have expectations?
- Is adult-child conflict inevitable?
- Are the ways in which we’re going about parenting, teaching, disciplining, and interacting with our kids teaching the skills on the better side of human nature?
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES

livesinthebalance.org
cpsconnection.com