

BILL OF RIGHTS

For Kids with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges
(and All the Rest)

LIVES
in the
BALANCE

If a kid is struggling, we need to make sure caregivers understand their difficulties and are treating them in ways that are effective and compassionate. There are lives in the balance, and we all need to do everything we can to make sure those lives are supported and uplifted. And because ALL kids struggle sometimes, our lenses and practices should be the same for ALL of them.

KIDS HAVE THE RIGHT:

To have their concerning behavior understood as a frustration or stress response, whether those behaviors are “lucky” (e.g., whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying) or “unlucky” (e.g. screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, biting, throwing, destroying, running). The “unlucky” behaviors are more likely to elicit responses from adults that are harsh, punitive, exclusionary, and harmful, and less likely to elicit empathy, nurturance, and support (which is why we call them unlucky).

To have caregivers understand that kids with unlucky frustration responses are likely to be struggling with certain **skills**, especially in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation. They are not lacking motivation.

To have caregivers understand that kids with concerning behaviors are deserving of the same compassion and thoughtful intervention as kids who are struggling with skills in more traditional domains such as reading, writing, and math.

To have caregivers understand that concerning behavior occurs in response to specific expectations that kids are having difficulty meeting - called “unsolved problems” - and that these unsolved problems are usually highly predictable and can therefore be identified and solved proactively.

To have caregivers focus on unsolved problems (and solving them) rather than the concerning behaviors that are being caused by those unsolved problems. This helps caregivers be proactive rather than reactive and focus on crisis prevention rather than crisis management.

To have caregivers recognize that it is far more productive to solve problems collaboratively - with the full involvement of the kid - than unilaterally.

To have caregivers recognize that **kids do well if they can** - if they could do well they would do well - and recognize that characterizations such as bratty, spoiled, manipulative, attention-seeking, coercive, limit-testing, controlling, or unmotivated are obsolete, incorrect, and counterproductive.

To have caregivers understand that it is only unsolved problems that cause concerning behaviors; solved problems don't, and that consequences are not problem-solving strategies.

To therefore have caregivers understand that time-outs, detentions, suspensions, expulsion, restraints, seclusions, and corporal punishment do not solve problems or “build character” but rather often make things worse.

To have adults recognize that kids are not only to be seen but also heard; that having one's concerns heard, taken seriously, validated, and addressed are critical to solving problems and to improving communication, relationships, and behavior.

To have adults appreciate that the real world requires collaboration and problem solving skills far more than blind adherence to authority.

To be in ecosystems where the collaborative resolution of problems - rather than power and control - is modeled, practiced, and encouraged.