

LIVES
in the
BALANCE

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

Moving From Power and Control to Collaboration and Problem Solving (and Meeting Kids Where They're At)

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Risk Factors

School shootings

Zero tolerance policies

Being a boy

Being LGBTQ+

Being white

Caregiver mental health

Decline of religion

High-stakes testing

Being neurodivergent

Being a girl

Being black or brown

Home and family life

Politics

Social media

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #1

Emphasis is on **problems
rather than on **behaviors**.**

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #1

Emphasis is on **problems (and solving them)** rather than on **behaviors (and modifying them)**...

- Concerning behavior is often best thought of as a **frustration or stress response** ...it's simply the *signal* by which a child *communicates* that they are having difficulty meeting certain *expectations*
 - Concerning behaviors can be “lucky” or “unlucky”
 - Less emphasis on unmet needs...
 - **You're improving behavior by solving the problems that are causing them**
 - Even if it's not accompanied by concerning behavior, an unmet expectation is still an unsolved problem
- This will require different assessment practices

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #2

**The problem solving is
collaborative, not unilateral.**

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #2

The problem solving is collaborative, not unilateral (Ask the kid):

- Something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* them
- Even if the kid can talk but aren't or aren't talking because they can't
- Engaging kids in solving the problems that are causing their concerning behavior is more effective at holding kids accountable than having them be passive recipients of adult-imposed consequences
- T-I-M-E

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #3

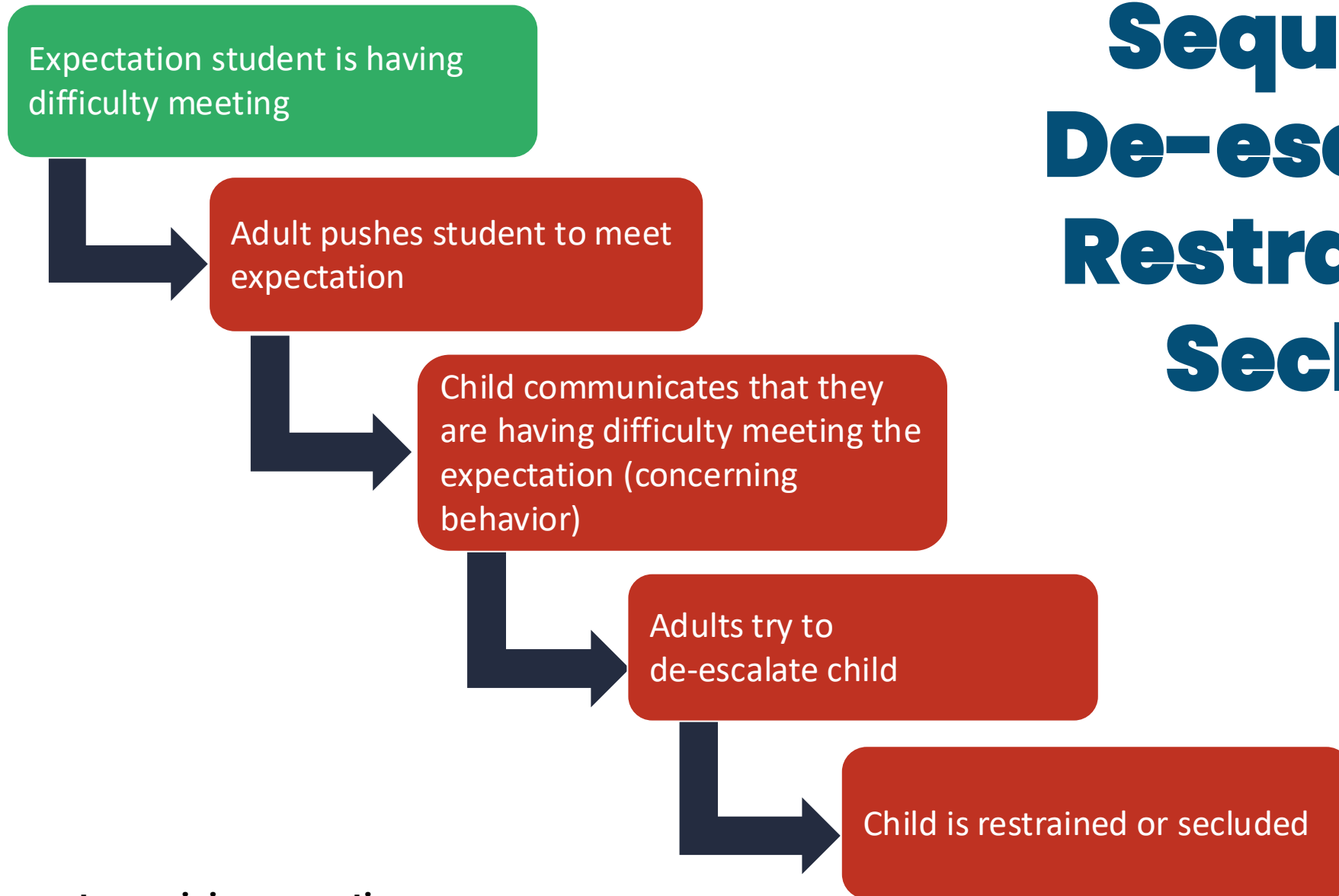
**The problem solving is
proactive, not reactive.**

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #3

The problem solving is **proactive**, not reactive (Don't be late):

- These kids are highly predictable, if we answer two questions proactively:
 1. **Why** do some kids respond so poorly to problems and frustrations?
Answer: Because they're struggling with the **skills** that are involved in responding adaptively to frustrations (flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, emotion regulation)
 2. **When** do kids exhibit concerning behavior?
Answer: When they're having difficulty meeting certain expectations
- Once skills and unsolved problems are identified, intervention can be largely proactive

Sequence of De-escalation, Restraint, and Seclusion



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Set Up to Be Late

- ✓ Give the kid a break
- ✓ Send the kid to the calming corner
- ✓ Call for the crisis managers
- ✓ Teach coping strategies
 - *90% should be helping kids anticipate and solve problems before they're frustrated*
- ✓ De-escalation, restraint, seclusion
- ✓ Discipline referral, detention, suspension, expulsion, paddling

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #4

Kids do well if they can.

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #4

Kids do well if they can

If the kid could do well, they would do well.

(not Kids do well if they wanna):

Not True:

Attention-seeking

Manipulative

Coercive

Unmotivated

Limit-testing

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #5

Doing well is preferable.

Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #5

Doing well is preferable:

Solved problems don't cause concerning behaviors...only unsolved problems do

Limitations of Focusing on Behavior (and Modifying It)

- Rewards and punishments solve no problems.
- Rewards and punishments are distracting...they cause us to focus on frustration responses rather than the problems that are causing those responses.
- **You never find out what's getting in the way of a kid meeting a particular expectation.**
- There is significant disproportionality in the ways in which rewards and punishments are administered.
- There wouldn't be disproportionality if we weren't using punitive, exclusionary disciplinary procedures.
- **Developmental variability:** Better to be disproportional in solving problems than in administering detentions, suspensions, expulsions, paddling, restraint, seclusion, and arrests.

Key Skills

- **Flexibility/
adaptability**
- **Frustration
tolerance**
- **Problem solving**
- **Emotion regulation**

- These are the global skills that help us respond to problems and frustrations adaptively.
- Many skills can be taught through direct instruction, but these may not be among them.
- But these skills are enhanced by engaging kids in the process of solving problems collaboratively (the "gravy").
- Unsolved problems are the targets of intervention in the CPS model...not skills.

Operationalizing Change



Identify skills
and unsolved
problems



Solve problems
collaboratively and
proactively

Operationalizing Change

- **Identify skills and unsolved problems**
- Solve problems collaboratively and proactively

- Helps make intervention proactive rather than reactive
- **Skills:** Helps adults view kids through more compassionate, accurate, productive lenses
- **Unsolved Problems:** If we don't identify problems proactively we won't solve them proactively... and we'll always find ourselves in the heat of the moment dealing with behavior.

Operationalizing Change

- Identify 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 enhances skills

Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)

ASUP 2024

ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

CHILD'S NAME:

DATE:

NAMES OF CAREGIVERS COMPLETING THIS INSTRUMENT:

STEP 1: SKILLS

Whether neurotypical or neurodivergent, children communicate that they're having difficulty meeting expectations in diverse ways, including through their concerning behavior. This behavior is best conceived as a frustration or stress response, the nature of which is determined by a variety of factors, most especially certain skills related to flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation. Some kids can demonstrate these skills under some conditions but not under other conditions.

This section is aimed at helping caregivers discuss those skills and the degree to which they may be impacting a particular child. Being aware of and considering the skills that may impact a child's capacity to handle life's problems and frustrations and meet various expectations helps caregivers move away from motivational explanations for concerning behavior (e.g. attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, unmotivated) and toward a more compassionate, accurate understanding of such behavior. Note that these skills are not the primary focal point of intervention in the CPS model; the unsolved problems you'll be identifying in Step 2 will be the "targets" of intervention.

Please check off a skill if it's difficult for the child to access at times and appears to be making it difficult for the child to handle problems and frustrations and/or meet certain expectations:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Maintain focus | <input type="radio"/> Consider a range of solutions to problems | <input type="radio"/> Regulate emotional response to problems and frustrations |
| <input type="radio"/> Regulate activity level | <input type="radio"/> Flexibly handle ambiguity, uncertainty | <input type="radio"/> Empathize with others, appreciate another person's perspective or point of view |
| <input type="radio"/> Handle transitions, shift from one mindset to another | <input type="radio"/> Shift from original idea, plan, or solution | <input type="radio"/> Interoception (ability to understand and feel what's going on inside their body) |
| <input type="radio"/> Consider the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulse control) | <input type="radio"/> Express concerns, needs, or thoughts in words or other means of communication | <input type="radio"/> Tolerate and manage the sensory environment |
| <input type="radio"/> Persist on challenging or tedious tasks | <input type="radio"/> Understand what is being communicated by others | |
| <input type="radio"/> Sense of time (time that has passed, time needed) | <input type="radio"/> Appreciate how their actions affect others | |

STEP 2: UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Unsolved problems are the specific expectations a child is having difficulty meeting. The wording of an unsolved problem will translate directly into the words that you'll be using when you introduce the unsolved problem to the child when it comes time to solve the problem together. Poorly worded unsolved problems often cause the problem-solving process to deteriorate before it even gets started. Please reference the ASUP Guide for guidance on writing unsolved problems.

SCHOOL/FACILITY PROMPTS

Are there specific tasks/expectations the student is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there classmates this student is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

Are there tasks and activities this student is having difficulty moving from or to?

Are there classes/activities the student is having difficulty attending/being on time to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the student has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the child about?

List unsolved problems here:
(or on a separate sheet)

HOME/CLINIC PROMPTS

Are there chores/tasks/activities the child is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there siblings/other children the child is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

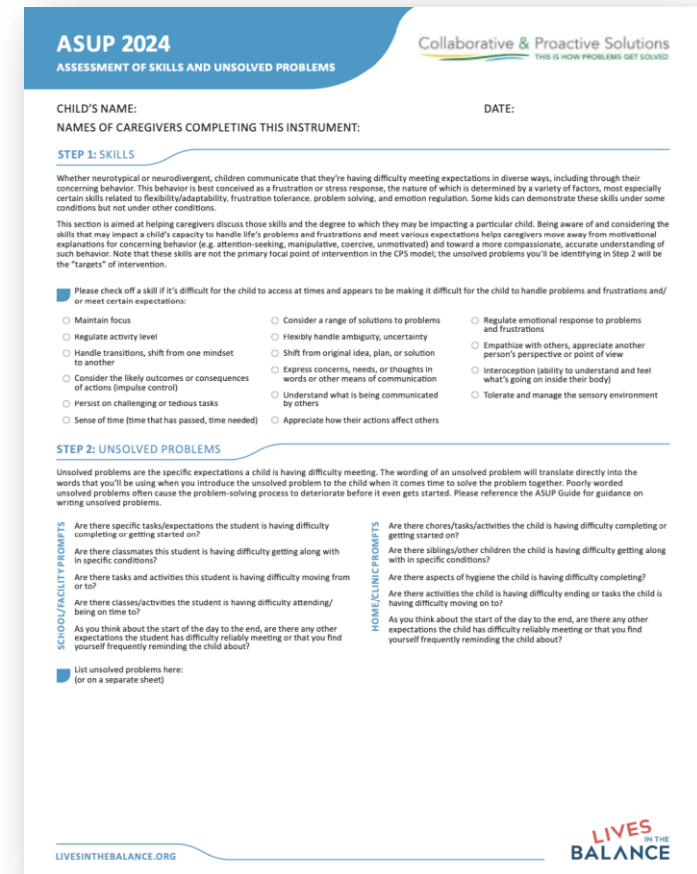
Are there aspects of hygiene the child is having difficulty completing?

Are there activities the child is having difficulty ending or tasks the child is having difficulty moving on to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the child has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the child about?

Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)

- The ASUP is meant to be used as a **discussion guide**...not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying.
- You don't need the ASUP for every student...just the ones who are struggling the most
- The ASUP helps caregivers focus on things they can actually do something about (if we only focus on the things we can't do anything about, we are likely to conclude that we can't do anything).
- We're not trying explain how the kid came to exhibit concerning behaviors or why the kid is having trouble meeting an expectation.



The image shows the ASUP 2024 form, titled "Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems" by Collaborative & Proactive Solutions. The form includes fields for the child's name, date, and names of caregivers. It is divided into two main sections: Step 1: Skills and Step 2: Unsolved Problems. Step 1 includes a list of skills to be assessed, such as maintaining focus, regulating activity level, and handling transitions. Step 2 includes a list of prompts to identify unsolved problems, such as specific tasks, chores, and activities. The form also includes a section for listing unsolved problems and a footer with the website LIVESIN THE BALANCE.ORG and the logo for LIVES in the BALANCE.

Using the ASUP

- Participants receive a blank copy of the ASUP
 - One participant is keeping track
 - The kid is not present in the meeting
- Start with the skills...check all that apply (about 10 seconds each)
- After completing the skills section, begin identifying unsolved problems, using the prompts (about 1 minute per unsolved problem)
- Be exhaustive...identify as many unsolved problems as possible for each prompt
- If you start with the kid's behavior, you're going through the "back door" and backtracking, which is much harder
- No need to write the same unsolved problem twice

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

The wording of the unsolved problem on the ASUP 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.

“A problem well stated is a problem half solved.”

-Charles Kettering

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

- **Free of concerning behaviors**
- **Free of adult theories**
- **Split, not clumped**
- **As specific as possible**

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

- **Free of concerning behaviors**

Unsolved problems start with the word “Difficulty,” followed by a verb.

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

- Free of concerning behaviors
- **Free of adult theories**

- Our theories are often wrong.
 - “Assumption-free living”

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

- Free of concerning behaviors
- Free of adult theories
- **Split, not clumped**

- Micro, not macro
- “Preferred” and “unpreferred” are clumped (and are also theories).

Using the ASUP: **Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems**

- Free of concerning behaviors
- Free of adult theories
- Split, not clumped
- **As specific as possible**

- Asking “W” questions (*who, what, where, when...not why*)
- Asking, “What expectation is the child having difficulty meeting?”

Using the ASUP: **A Few More Guidelines**

- Verb selection is the hardest part of writing unsolved problems (completing, getting started on, participate in, get along with, go to, come back from).
- "Upstream" unsolved problems are better than "downstream" unsolved problems.
- Desired behavior is OK... concerning behavior is not.

Using the ASUP: **A Few More Guidelines**

- The wording of unsolved problems should be kid-friendly.
- The unsolved problem is the “conversation-starter” ...it’s the “entry point”.
- Even if the kid is meeting an expectation sometimes and not others, any expectation that a kid is having difficulty meeting **reliably** is an unsolved problem.

The ASUP is a Game-Changer

- Caregivers come to recognize that a kid is, in fact, struggling with many skills and is having difficulty meeting many expectations.
 - Are they all important?
 - Can the kid reliably meet them all?
- Caregivers come to recognize why prior interventions have been ineffective.
- Caregivers begin to regret the way they've been treating the child.
- Caregivers recognize that unsolved problems are predictable and can therefore be solved proactively.

Next Goal: Prioritizing

- You can't work on everything at once.
- High priorities:
 - **Safety**: Unsolved problems contributing to unsafe behaviors
 - **Frequency**: Unsolved problems occurring most often
 - **Gravity**: Unsolved problems having the greatest negative impact on the kid or others

The Problem Solving Plan

PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

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 concerns identified: (Empathy step) DATE _____	Kid concerns identified: (Empathy step) DATE _____	Kid 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? <input type="checkbox"/> DATE _____ NO? <input type="checkbox"/> COMMENT: _____	Problem Solved? YES? <input type="checkbox"/> DATE _____ NO? <input type="checkbox"/> COMMENT: _____	Problem Solved? YES? <input type="checkbox"/> DATE _____ NO? <input type="checkbox"/> COMMENT: _____

REV 03/08

The Early Problems Worksheet



Early Problems Worksheet

Student's Name _____

Unsolved Problem _____

Date of Empathy Step _____

What information was gathered from the student about what's making it hard for them to meet the above expectation?

What was the adult's concern (about how the unsolved problem is affecting the student and/or others)?

What solution was agreed upon?

Is the solution working, or is there a need to revisit the problem solving process?

Options for Handling Unsolved Problems



Solve the problem
unilaterally



Solve the problem
collaboratively



Put the
expectation on
hold for now

Plan C

Put the Expectation on Hold for Now

Reasons to use Plan C:

- **Prioritizing/Triaging:** You can't solve everything at once.
- **Expectation management:** Removing expectations that are out of reach at this point in development.
- **Stabilizing:** Unsolved problems that have been put on hold don't cause concerning behavior. (Stabilization comes before education)

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* concerning behaviors
 - ...is not a partnership
 - ...does not involve kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
 - ...provides no information whatsoever about the factors making it difficult for the kid to meet a given expectation... solutions arrived at through Plan A are **“uninformed”**

Antecedent Interventions

- ✓ Modifying the environment to make it less aversive
- ✓ Changing task demands to make them easier, shorter, less aversive
- ✓ Incorporating student interest and preferences

Plan C

Put the Expectation on Hold for Now

- **Proactive C:**
 - Don't bring it up
 - An agreed-upon **interim plan** for putting the expectation on hold for now (not the same as modifying or adapting the expectation)
- **Emergency C:**
 - “OK”

**Plan
C**

Put the Expectation on Hold for Now

**- Fair does not mean equal...
you're aiming for EQUITY, not equality**

- Your goal is to meet every kid where they're at

Plan B

Solve the Problem Collaboratively

1. Empathy Step

- Gather information from the child about what's hard about meeting the expectation.

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

- Identify adult concerns.

3. Invitation Step

- Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory.

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step
3. Invitation Step

Goal:

- **Gather information from kids** to understand what's making it hard for them to meet the expectation.

Introduction:

- The Empathy step begins with the words **“I’ve noticed that”** followed by an unsolved problem and an initial inquiry (**“What’s up?”**)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step
3. Invitation Step

What happens after “What’s up?”

1. The kid says something
2. The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”
3. The kid says, “I don’t have a problem with that” or “I don’t care”
4. The kids says, “I don’t want to talk about it right now”
5. The kid responds defensively (“I don’t have to talk to you!”)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step
3. Invitation Step

The kid says something

Top Three Drilling Strategies:

1. **Reflective listening and clarifying statements**
2. **Asking "W" questions** (the who, what, where, when of the unsolved problem)
8. **Summarizing** (recapping and asking for more concerns)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says something

Drilling Strategies, *cont.*:

3. Asking about the **situational variability** of the unsolved problem

4. Asking kids what they are **thinking** in the midst of the unsolved problem

5. Breaking the problem down into its **component parts**

6. **Discrepant Observation**

7. **Tabling** (“removing” and asking for more concerns)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says something

Additional Pointers:

- You're not thinking about solutions in the Empathy step (it's a "Solution-Free Zone")
- Remember, "drilling" isn't "grilling"...it involves "listening," not "lessoning" or "lessening" (dismissing) or "trumping"

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says something

Additional Pointers (cont.):

- Stay neutral and non-defensive throughout the Empathy step (suspend your emotional response...this step isn't about you)...the information is more important than style points
- Don't rush (the Empathy step is not a mechanical formality...you're really curious...you really want to know!)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”

A few tips:

- Don’t freak (“I don’t know” and silence are pretty standard)
- Keep drilling

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”

Figure out why: Adult Factors

- You used Plan A
- You used Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
- The unsolved problem wasn’t worded according to the guidelines
- Demeanor (facial expression, tone of voice, etc.)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”

Figure out why: Child Factors

- The kid doesn’t trust you and/or the process yet (due to lots of experience with Plan A)
- The kid has lost faith and doesn’t see the point in talking anymore
 - Strategy: “**Was it always so?**”
- The kid needs time to think (adults better get comfortable with silence)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”

Figure out why: Child Factors

- The kid just doesn’t know or is having difficulty putting their thoughts into words
 - Strategy: “Do you know what you want to say but you’re not sure how to say it? Or are you not sure what you want to say?”
 - Strategy: Educated guessing/ hypothesis testing

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

Plan B with Non-Speaking Kids

Some strategies:

- Five-finger method
- Yes/No
- Pictures/Google Images
- Apps
- Assistive technology

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

Plan B with High-Support Needs Kids

Building toward Plan B:

- Finding a way for the child to communicate **somehow about something** (*this means that*)
- Som**ething**: preferences, that something is wrong, pain or need for sensory input
- Som**ehow**: gestures, grunts, hand signals
- Your eyes are your most important assessment tool...often you're not asking...you're observing
- Your reference point is infants

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation 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 their concern or perspective...start drilling!

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

Other Responses to **“What’s Up?”**

“I don’t want to talk about it right now”

- First, assume they have a good reason
- Next, give them permission not to talk
- See if they’ll talk about why they don’t want to talk about it
- Don’t do anything today that will reduce the likelihood of the kid talking to you tomorrow

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

Other Responses to **“What’s Up?”**

Defensiveness: “I don’t have to talk to you!”

- The kid may need reassurance that you’re not using Plan A
 - “I’m not going to tell you the solution”
 - “You’re not in trouble”
 - “I’m not mad at you”
 - “I’m just trying to understand”

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

Goal:

Enter the adult’s concern or perspective into consideration in a way that doesn’t cause the child to feel that their concerns are being dismissed or disregarded (beginning with *“The thing is...”* or *“My concern is...”*).

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

What's Hard:

Adults frequently don't know what their concerns are...adult concerns are the answer to this question: **Why is it important that the expectation be met?**

Two Possibilities:

1. How is the unsolved problem affecting the kid?
2. How is the unsolved problem affecting other people?

(Typically: Health, safety, learning, fairness)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step
2. Define Adult Concerns Step
- 3. Invitation Step**

Goal:

Collaborate on a solution that is **realistic** and **mutually satisfactory**.

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

What's hard: The Wording

- **Recap the concerns:** "I wonder if there's a way for us to do something about/make sure that (one party's concerns) and also do something about/make sure that (the other party's concerns)."
- **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)

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

- Goal is to demonstrate to kids that you're as invested in getting their concerns addressed as you are in getting your own concerns 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, prioritize which concerns are going to be addressed in this Plan B and which may be addressed in a subsequent Plan B.

Plan B

1. The Empathy Step

2. Define Adult
Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

- Before agreeing on a solution, give formal, deliberate consideration to whether the solution is realistic and mutually satisfactory...if not, refine the original solution or think of alternatives (one solution at a time...not brainstorming).
- Goal is to solve the problem so it doesn't arise again...not to come up with a solution for what the kid should do in the heat of the moment when the problem recurs.
- Battling over solutions define a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)...solving problems collaboratively is a win/win proposition.

Plan B

What if the solution doesn't work or stops working?

- Solving problems tends to be incremental... the first solution sometimes doesn't solve the problem durably... many 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)

Plan B

Application in Clinical Settings

- Type 1 Session: ASUP
- Type 2 Session: Three Plans, Three Steps of Plan B
- Type 3 Session: Demonstration of Plan B
- Type 4 Session: Coaching of Plan B
- Type X: Addressing Interfering Factors

Plan B

Implementation in Schools and Facilities

- **Leadership** (get the ball rolling and commit)
- **Move from Behaviors to Problems**
 - Intro PD
 - Structure Problem Identification (ASUP for targeted kids)
- **Solve Problems Collaboratively and Proactively**
 - Structures
 - Helpers
- **Time**

Plan B

How are the skills enhanced?

- Skills are being modeled, practiced, and enhanced in each of the three steps of Plan B.
- Solving problems is faster than enhancing skills.
- Plan B also helps build a problem-solving repertoire.

Additional Information/Resources

Visit us at:

livesinthebalance.org

truecrisisprevention.org

Learn More 

