

CHILD'S NAME _____ DATE _____

The ALSUP is intended for use as a **discussion guide** rather than as 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.

LAGGING SKILLS

This section will help you understand why the child is responding so maladaptively to problems and frustrations. Please note that these **lagging skills are not the primary focal point of intervention**. In other words, you won't be discussing the lagging skills with the student, nor will you be teaching most of the skills explicitly. The primary targets of intervention are the unsolved problems you'll be documenting in the next section.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty maintaining focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty seeing "grays"/concrete, literal, black & white, thinking
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inflexible, inaccurate interpretations/cognitive distortions or biases (e.g., "Everyone's out to get me," "Nobody likes me")
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty persisting on challenging or tedious tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty shifting from original idea, plan, or solution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty appreciating how his/her behavior is affecting others
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person's perspective or point of view
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sensory/motor difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty

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 an 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 ALSUP Guide for guidance on the four guidelines for 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?

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?

The **Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)** is a discussion guide created to assist caregivers in identifying a child's lagging skills and unsolved problems. Lagging skills provide caregivers with new lenses. Rather than viewing a child's difficulties as attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, unmotivated, lazy, or limit testing, lagging skills provide more accurate, productive, actionable lenses.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING LAGGING SKILLS:

How hard could it be to check off lagging skills? Not that hard, but here are a few important reminders:

- Go in order...you don't want to miss anything.
- Don't spend time hypothesizing or theorizing about causal factors (why the student is lacking these skills)...you can't establish cause with any level of precision, and your time will be better spent identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems
- Don't spend any time talking about the child's behavior either...the behavior is simply the way children communicate that there are expectations they are having difficulty meeting
- Checking off a lagging skill is not a democratic process and shouldn't take more than 3-5 seconds each. If any caregivers in the meeting think the lagging skill applies to the child, check it off.
- While lagging skills provide you with new lenses -- a worthy goal -- lagging skills are not the primary targets of intervention. The unsolved problems you'll be identifying are the primary targets of intervention. If you solve those problems collaboratively and proactively, the child's skills will be enhanced.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS:

An unsolved problem is ***an expectation a child is having difficulty meeting***. Writing unsolved problems is harder, because the wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP is going to translate directly into the words that you're going to use to introduce the unsolved problem to the child when it comes time to solve the problem together. As such, there are four guidelines for writing unsolved problems:

They should contain no reference to the child's challenging behaviors. Since you won't be talking with children about their behavior, there's no need to include the behavior in the wording of the unsolved problem. Instead, almost all unsolved problems begin with the words *Difficulty*, followed by a verb (a variety of verbs are shown in the examples below as well). So you wouldn't write *Screams and swears when having difficulty completing the word problems on the math homework...* instead write *Difficulty completing the word problems on the math homework*.

They should contain no adult theories. So you wouldn't write *Difficulty writing the definitions to the spelling words in English... because his parents were recently divorced*.

They should be split, not clumped (so you wouldn't write *Difficulty getting along with others* but rather *Difficulty getting along with Trevor on the school bus in the morning*).

They should be specific. To make an unsolved problem as specific as possible, there are two strategies:

- Include details related to *who, what, where, and when*
- Ask *What expectation is the child/student having difficulty meeting?*

The above guidelines -- and a variety of sample verbs -- are embodied in the following examples (they're grouped based on setting, but the verbs apply across settings):

SCHOOL/FACILITY:

- Difficulty getting started on the double-digit division problems in math
- Difficulty completing the map of Europe in geography
- Difficulty participating in the discussions in morning meeting
- Difficulty moving from choice time to math
- Difficulty ending computer time to come to circle time
- Difficulty walking in the hallway between classes
- Difficulty raising hand during Social Studies discussions
- Difficulty keeping hands to self in the lunch line
- Difficulty lining up for the bus at the end of the school day
- Difficulty remaining quiet when a classmate is sharing his or her ideas in English
- Difficulty waiting for his turn during the four-square game at recess
- Difficulty retrieving Geography notebook from locker before Geography class

HOME/CLINIC:

- Difficulty getting out of bed at 7 am in the morning to get ready for school on weekdays
- Difficulty going to church on Sundays
- Difficulty taking turns when playing chess with brother
- Difficulty sitting next to sister at dinner
- Difficulty putting the dishes into the dishwasher after dinner
- Difficulty taking the trash out on Tuesdays
- Difficulty brushing teeth before going to bed at night
- Difficulty ending Xbox at 8 pm
- Difficulty making bed before school on weekday mornings

There are also a variety of verbs that should be avoided, including *accepting, appreciating, staying calm, asking for help, listening, paying attention, focusing, considering, understanding, persisting, controlling*.

The goal of the Empathy Step is to gather information from the child about his/her concern or perspective on the unsolved problem you're discussing (preferably proactively). For many adults, this is the most difficult part of Plan B, as they often find that they are unsure of what to ask next. So here's a brief summary of different strategies for "drilling" for information:

REFLECTIVE LISTENING AND CLARIFYING STATEMENTS

Reflective listening basically involves **mirroring what a child has said** and then encouraging him/her to provide additional information by saying one of the following:

- "How so?"
- "I don't quite understand"
- "I'm confused"
- "Can you say more about that?"
- "What do you mean?"

Reflective listening is your "default" drilling strategy...if you aren't sure of which strategy to use or what to say next, use this strategy.

ASKING ABOUT THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE/WHEN OF THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

EXAMPLES:

- "Who was making fun of your clothes?"
- "What's getting the way of completing the science project?"
- "Where is Eddie bossing you around?"

ASKING ABOUT WHY THE PROBLEM OCCURS UNDER SOME CONDITIONS AND NOT OTHERS

EXAMPLE: "You seem to be doing really well in your work group in math...but not so well in your work group in social studies...what's getting in the way in social studies?"

ASKING THE CHILD WHAT S/HE'S THINKING IN THE MIDST OF THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

Notice, this is different than asking the child what s/he is feeling, which doesn't usually provide much information about the child's concern or perspective on an unsolved problem.

EXAMPLE: "What were you thinking when Mrs. Thompson told the class to get to work on the science quiz?"

BREAKING THE PROBLEM DOWN INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS

EXAMPLE: "So writing the answers to the questions on the science quiz is hard for you...but you're not sure why. Let's think about the different parts of answering questions on the science quiz. First, you have to understand what the question is asking. Is that part hard for you? Next, you need to think of the answer to the question. Is that part hard? Next, you have to remember the answer long enough to write it down. Are you having trouble with that part? Then you have to actually do the writing. Any trouble with that part?"

DISCREPANT OBSERVATION

This involves making an observation that differs from what the child is describing about a particular situation, and it's the riskiest (in terms of causing the child to stop talking) of all the drilling strategies.

EXAMPLE: "I know you're saying that you haven't been having any difficulty with Chad on the playground lately, but I recall a few times last week when you guys were having a big disagreement about the rules in the box-ball game. What do you think was going on with that?"

TABLING (AND ASKING FOR MORE CONCERNS)

This is where you're "shelving" some concerns the child has already expressed so as to permit consideration of other concerns.

EXAMPLE: "So if Timmy wasn't sitting too close to you, and Robbie wasn't making noises, and the floor wasn't dirty, and the buttons in your pants weren't bothering you...is there anything else that would make it difficult for you to participate in Morning Meeting?"

SUMMARIZING (AND ASKING FOR MORE CONCERNS)

This is where you're summarizing concerns you've already heard about and then asking if there are any other concerns that haven't yet been discussed. This is the recommended strategy to use before moving on to the Define Adult Concerns step.

EXAMPLE: "Let me make sure I understand all of this correctly. It's hard for you to do your social studies worksheet for homework because writing down the answers is still hard for you...and because sometimes you don't understand the question...and because Mrs. Langley hasn't yet covered the material on the worksheet. Is there anything else that's hard for you about completing the social studies worksheet for homework?"

Prepared with the assistance of Dr. Christopher Watson

A more compassionate, productive, effective, approach to understanding and helping behaviorally challenged kids.

Dr. Ross Greene is the originator of the research-based approach-- now called Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS)-- to understanding and helping behaviorally challenging kids, as described in his books *The Explosive Child* and *Lost at School*. The CPS model has been implemented in countless families, schools, inpatient psychiatry units, therapeutic group homes, and residential and juvenile detention facilities. The approach sets forth two major tenets. First, challenging behavior in kids is best understood as the result of lagging cognitive skills (in the general domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving) rather than as the result of passive, permissive, inconsistent, noncontingent parenting. And second, the best way to reduce challenging episodes is by working together with the child - collaborating - to solve the problems setting them in motion in the first place (rather than by imposing adult will and intensive use of reward and punishment procedures). Here are some of the important questions answered by the model:

QUESTION: Why are challenging kids challenging?

ANSWER: Because they're lacking the skills not to be challenging. If they had the skills, they wouldn't be challenging. That's because -and this is perhaps the key theme of the model - *Kids do well if they can*. And because (here's another key theme) *Doing well is preferable to not doing well*. This, of course, is a dramatic departure from the view of challenging kids as attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, limit-testing, and poorly motivated. It's a completely different set of lenses, supported by research in the neurosciences over the past 30-40 years, and it has dramatic implications for how caregivers go about helping such kids.

QUESTION: When are challenging kids challenging?

ANSWER: When the demands or expectations being placed upon them exceed the skills that they have to respond adaptively. Of course, that's when we all respond maladaptively: when we're lacking the skills to respond adaptively. Thus, an important goal for helpers is to identify the skills a challenging kid is lacking. An even more important goal is to identify the specific expectations a kid is having difficulty meeting, referred to as *unsolved problems*... and to help kids solve those problems. Because unsolved problems tend to be highly predictable, the problem-solving should be proactive most of the time. Identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems is accomplished through use of an instrument called the *Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)*. You can find the ALSUP in The Paperwork section of the website of Lives in the Balance, the nonprofit Dr. Greene founded to help disseminate his approach (livesinthebalance.org).

QUESTION: What behaviors do challenging kids exhibit when they don't have the skills to respond adaptively to certain demands?

ANSWER: Challenging kids communicate that they're struggling to meet demands and expectations in some fairly common ways: whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying, screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, throwing, lying, stealing, and so forth. But what a kid *does* when he's having trouble meeting demands and expectations isn't the most important part (though it may feel that way). *Why* and *when* he's doing these things are much more important.

QUESTION: What should we be doing differently to help these kids better than we're helping them now?

ANSWER: If challenging behavior is set in motion by lagging skills and not lagging motivation, then it's easy to understand why rewarding and punishing a kid may not make things better. Since challenging behavior occurs in response to highly predictable unsolved problems, then the goal is to solve those problems. But if we solve them unilaterally, through imposition of adult will (referred to in the model as "Plan A"), then we'll only increase the likelihood of challenging episodes and we won't solve any problems durably. Better to solve those problems collaboratively ("Plan B") so the kid is a fully invested participant, solutions are more durable, and (over time) the kid -- and often the adults as well -- learn the skills they were lacking all along. *Plan B* is comprised of three basic ingredients. The first ingredient - called the *Empathy* step - involves gathering information from the child so as to achieve the clearest understanding of his or her concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem. The second ingredient (called the *Define Adult Concerns* step) involves entering into consideration the adult concern or perspective on the same unsolved problem. The third ingredient (called the *Invitation* step) involves having the adult and kid brainstorm solutions so as to arrive at a plan of action that is both realistic and mutually satisfactory...in other words, a solution that addresses the concerns of both parties and that both parties can actually perform.

QUESTION: Where can I learn more about this model?

ANSWER: The *Lives in the Balance* website is a very good place to start. It has a ton of free resources to help you learn about and apply Dr. Greene's approach, including streaming video, audio programming, commentary, support, and lots more.

QUESTION: Isn't this the same model as what was previously known as Collaborative Problem Solving?

ANSWER: Dr. Greene is the originator of the Collaborative Problem Solving approach, and for many years referred to his model by that name in his research papers, scholarly articles, books, and workshops. He now calls his model *Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS)*. Be careful! There are others using the name Collaborative Problem Solving out there, but they had nothing to do with the origination or development of Dr. Greene's model and are not associated with Dr. Greene or Lives in the Balance in any way!

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? _____ DATE _____ NO? _____ COMMENT:	Problem Solved? YES? _____ DATE _____ NO? _____ COMMENT:	Problem Solved? YES? _____ DATE _____ NO? _____ COMMENT:

If we don't start doing right by kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, we're going to keep losing them at an astounding rate. Doing the right thing isn't an option...it's an imperative. There are lives in the balance, and we all need to do everything we can to make sure those lives aren't lost.

BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS HAVE THE RIGHT:

1. To have their behavioral challenges understood as a form of developmental delay in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving.
2. To have people -- parents, teachers, mental health clinicians, doctors, coaches...everyone -- understand that challenging behavior is no less a form of developmental delay than delays in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and is deserving of the same compassion and approach as are applied to these other cognitive delays.
3. Not to be misunderstood as bratty, spoiled, manipulative, attention-seeking, coercive, limit-testing, controlling, or unmotivated.
4. To have adults understand that challenging behavior occurs in response to specific unsolved problems and that these unsolved problems are usually highly predictable and can therefore be solved proactively.
5. To have adults understand that the primary goal of intervention is to collaboratively solve these problems in a way that is realistic and mutually satisfactory so that they don't precipitate challenging behavior any more.
6. To have adults (and peers) understand that time-outs, detentions, suspensions, expulsion, and isolation do not solve problems or "build character" but rather often make things worse.
7. To have adults take a genuine interest in their concerns or perspectives, and to have those concerns and perspectives viewed as legitimate, important, and worth listening to and clarifying.
8. To have adults in their lives who do not resort to physical intervention and are knowledgeable about and proficient in other means of solving problems.
9. To have adults who understand that solving problems collaboratively -- rather than insisting on blind adherence to authority -- is what prepares kids for the demands they will face in the real world.
10. To have adults understand that blind obedience to authority is dangerous, and that life in the real world requires expressing one's concerns, listening to the concerns of others, and working toward mutually satisfactory solutions.

① 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 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 perception
- Talk about solutions yet

② DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP | INGREDIENT/GOAL

Enter the concern of the second party (often the adult) into consideration.

WORDS | Initial Inquiry (neutral observation)

"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

③ INVITATION STEP | INGREDIENT/GOAL

Generate 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 | Initial Inquiry (neutral observation)

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 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

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advocator

(noun) a person who pleads for a cause or propounds an idea

If you've seen the Lives in the Balance documentary film, *The Kids We Lose*, then you know it's a jungle out there for kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. And it's not a walk in the park for parents, educators, mental health professionals, staff in facilities, or law enforcement professionals either. Fortunately, there is hope, but we're going to need your help to facilitate the changes in lenses, practices, structures, and systems that are needed to end the counterproductive, punitive practices -- detentions, suspensions, expulsions, paddling, restraint, and seclusion -- that are still commonly employed in schools and facilities. There are a lot of things **you** can do to heighten awareness and advocate for change.

Visit www.livesinthebalance.org/advocators to get involved in any or many of the following:

- ✓ Sign up for our Newsletter, *The Advocator*
- ✓ Check out our Punitive Index to familiarize yourself with the states where things are *really* bad
- ✓ Join our Facebook Group
- ✓ Sign up to Round Up! by rounding up your credit card purchases, you'll help Lives in the Balance fund the effort
- ✓ Stay on top of the most current news on how kids with behavioral challenges are being treated

