#### CHILD'S NAME \_

DATE

**INSTRUCTIONS:** 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.

If a lagging skill applies, check it off and then (before moving on to the next lagging skill) identify the specific expectations the child is having difficulty meeting in association with that lagging skill (unsolved problems). A non-exhaustive list of sample unsolved problems is shown at the bottom of the page.

LAGGING SKILLS
Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another
Difficulty doing things in a logical sequence or prescribed order
Difficulty persisting on challenging or tedious tasks
Poor sense of time
Difficulty maintaining focus
Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)
Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem
Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words
Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally
Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration
Difficulty seeing "grays"/concrete, literal, black & white, thinking
Difficulty deviating from rules, routine
Difficulty handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty
Difficulty shifting from original idea, plan, or solution
Difficulty taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action
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")
Difficulty attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/ poor perception of social nuances
Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills
Difficulty seeking attention in appropriate ways
Difficulty appreciating how his/her behavior is affecting others
Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person's perspective or point of view
Difficulty appreciating how s/he is coming across or being perceived by others
Sensory/motor difficulties

#### UNSOLVED PROBLEMS GUIDE:

Unsolved problems are the specific expectations a child is having difficulty meeting. Unsolved problems should be free of maladaptive behavior; free of adult theories and explanations; "split" (not "clumped"); and specific.

#### HOME EXAMPLES

- Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning in time to get to school
- Difficulty getting started on or completing homework (specify assignment)
- Difficulty ending the video game to get ready for bed at night
- Difficulty coming indoors for dinner when playing outside
- Difficulty agreeing with brother about what TV show to watch after school
- Difficulty with the feelings of seams in socks
- Difficulty brushing teeth before bedtime

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## SCHOOL EXAMPLES

- Difficulty moving from choice time to math
- Difficulty sitting next to Kyle during circle time
- Difficulty raising hand during social studies discussions
- Difficulty getting started on project on tectonic plates in geography
- Difficulty standing in line for lunch



## **ALSUP Guide**

- The Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP) is best used as a discussion guide rather than as a free-standing checklist or rating scale.
- Meetings should be focused almost totally on identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems. It is not the goal of the meeting to try to explain *why* a child has a particular lagging skill or unsolved problem, so hypotheses and theories about *cause* are to be avoided. It is also counterproductive to have participants go into great detail about the *behaviors* that a child exhibits in response to a given unsolved problem so story telling is to be avoided as well.
- It's best to discuss each lagging skill (rather than "cherry-picking"), starting at the top
- If a lagging skill is endorsed, don't continue moving down the list of lagging skills...move *over* to identify the unsolved problems associated with the lagging skill
- An unsolved problem is an *expectation a child is having difficulty meeting in association with a particular lagging skill*
- To identify unsolved problems, begin with the stem, "Can you give some examples of expectations (Theresa) is having difficulty meeting when you think of her having (then restate the endorsed lagging skill. For example, "Can you give some examples of expectations Theresa is having difficulty meeting when you think of her having difficulty making transitions?"
- Identify as many unsolved problems as possible for each endorsed lagging skill... don't move on after identifying only one unsolved problem has been identified.
- Many lagging skills may contribute to the same unsolved problem...don't spend valuable meeting time trying to be precise about which lagging skill best accounts for a given unsolved problem.
- Don't write the same unsolved problem in more than once, even if a later lagging skills reminds you of the same unsolved problem.
- There are some important guidelines for writing unsolved problems:
  - ⇒ **They usually begin with the word** *Difficulty*, and the word *Difficulty* is usually followed by a verb, for example:
  - 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
  - Difficultly *moving* from choice time to math
  - Difficulty ending computer time to come to circle time
  - Difficulty *coming* into school in the morning
  - Difficulty *going* to the nurse for your medication before lunch

- Difficulty *walking* in the hallway between classes
- Difficulty *keeping* hands to self in the lunch line
- Difficulty *lining up* for the bus at the end of the school day
- Difficulty sitting next to Trevor during circle time
- Difficulty taking turns during class discussions in Social Studies
- Difficulty *raising* hand during class discussions in Science
- 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 putting away the Legos after choice time
- Difficulty *retrieving* his Geography notebook from his locker before Geography class
- Difficulty *arriving* at school on time at 8:30 am
- ⇒ **They should contain no reference to the child's** *challenging* **behaviors**, though reference to *expected* behaviors is fine (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 raising hand* but rather *Difficulty raising hand during social studies discussions*)
- ⇒ **They should be specific**...there are two strategies to help:
  - Include details related to who, what, where, and when
  - Ask What expectation is the child/student having difficulty meeting?

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



# F.A.Q.

# **Collaborative & Proactive Solutions**

#### IS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

### 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!

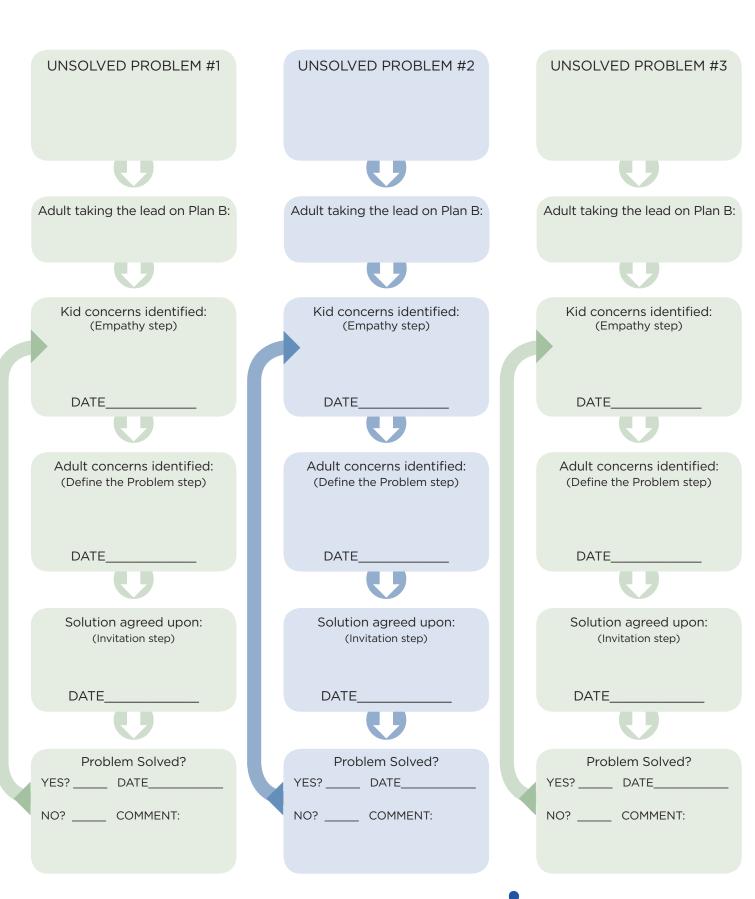


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Collaborative & Proactive Solutions THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

CHILD'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

ives in the Balance



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.



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### 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

#### 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

### 2 DEFINE ADULT CONCERNS 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

- Maybe he really doesn't know
- Maybe he needs the problem broken down into its component parts
- Maybe he needs time to think

- Leave the empathy step before you completely understand the kid's concern or perception
  Talk about solutions yot
- Talk about solutions yet

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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



