

Moving From Power and Control to Collaboration and Problem Solving

*Ross W. Greene,
Ph.D.*

livesinthebalance.org



PARADIGM SHIFT

1. Emphasis is on **problems** (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)...
 - Concerning behavior is simply the **signal** by which a child **communicates** that they are having difficulty meeting certain **expectations** (not unmet needs)
 - Concerning behaviors can be “lucky” or “unlucky”
 - Behaviors are not the only observable, objective, quantifiable data...unsolved problems are too
 - This will require different assessment practices

PARADIGM SHIFT

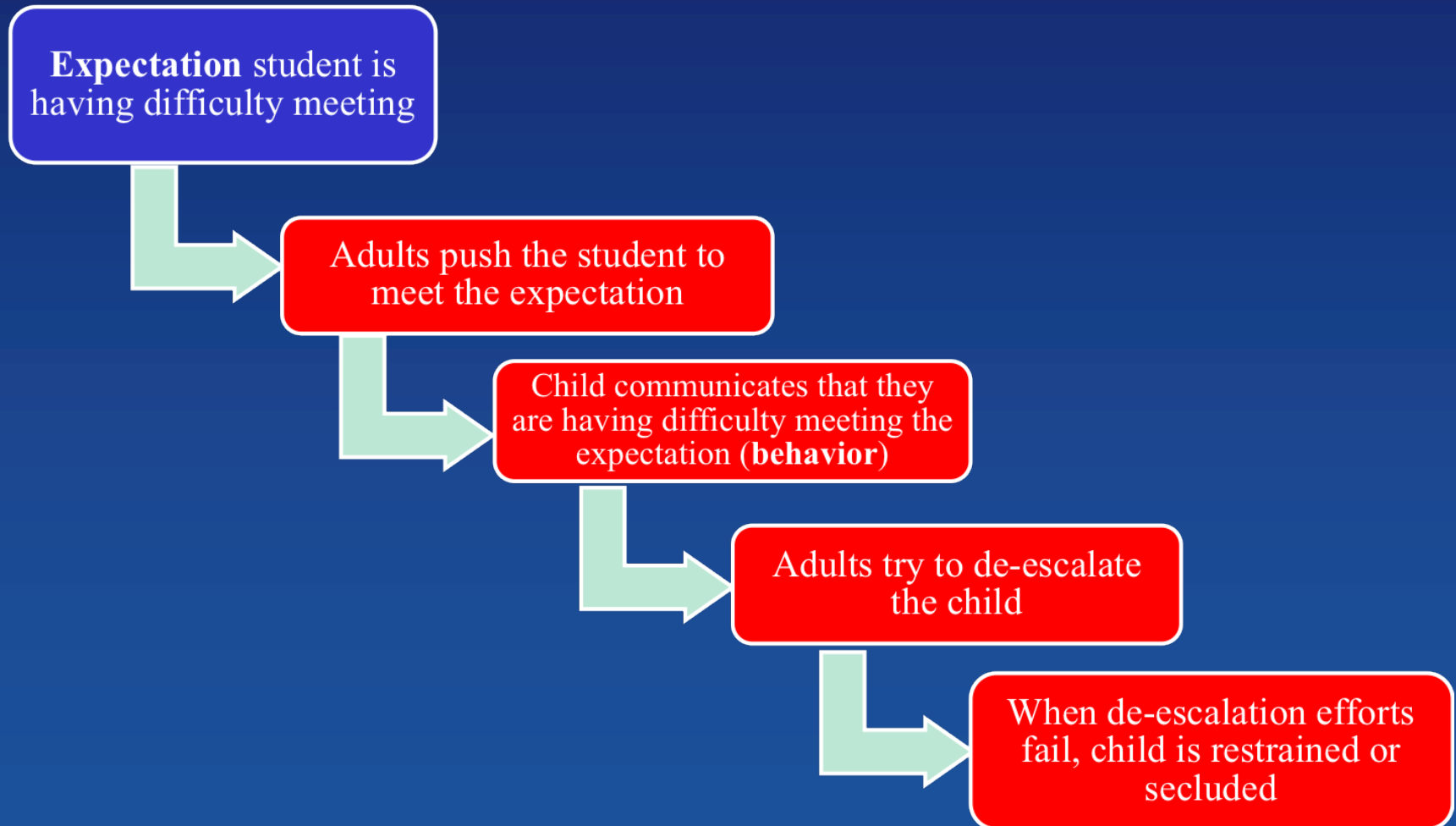
2. The problem solving is **collaborative**, not unilateral

- Something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* them
- Even if the kid can talk but won't or won't talk because they can't
- Kid is still "accountable" (a lot more so than if they are passive recipients of our imposed solutions and consequences)

PARADIGM SHIFT

3. The problem solving is **proactive**, not reactive
- These kids are highly predictable, if we answer two questions:
 - **Why** do some kids respond so poorly to problems and frustrations?
 - Answer: **Because they're lacking the skills to respond more adaptively**
 - **When** do kids exhibit concerning behaviors?
 - Answer: **When they're having difficulty meeting certain expectations**
 - This is the information that's been missing
 - Once unsolved problems are identified, intervention can be largely proactive

SEQUENCE OF RESTRAINT & SECLUSION



THE (non-exhaustive) LIST OF LATE

- Take a break
- Calming corner
- Coping strategies/deep breathing/counting to 10
- De-escalating
- Restraint and seclusion
- Discipline referral
- Detention, suspension, expulsion, paddling

PARADIGM SHIFT

4. Kids do well if they can

- If the kid could do well, they would do well
 - **Not True:**
 - Attention-seeking
 - Manipulative
 - Coercive
 - Unmotivated
 - Limit-testing

5. Doing well is preferable

LIMITATIONS OF MODIFYING BEHAVIOR

- Rewards and punishments solve no problems
- Rewards and punishments are distracting...they cause us to focus on signals rather than the problems that are causing those signals
- 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
- Better to be disproportional in solving problems than in administering detentions, suspensions, expulsions, paddling, restraint, seclusion, and arrests

Disproportionality Is Complex



WHAT 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 the skills are enhanced by engaging kids in the process of solving problems collaboratively

KEY HELPER ROLES IN CPS

- Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
 - Helps make intervention proactive rather than reactive...otherwise, you're in "perpetual survival mode" or "walking on eggshells"
 - Helps adults view kids through more compassionate, accurate, productive lenses
 - Helps us focus on the problems that are causing concerning behaviors rather than on the behaviors
- 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

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 their 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?
- 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 student about?

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?

REV 10/2020

livesinthebalance.org



ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)

ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)

- In the top section is a representative list of the skills frequently found lagging in kids with concerning behaviors
- Unsolved problems are identified in the bottom section
- The ALSUP is meant to be used as a **discussion guide**...not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying
- The ALSUP 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 to help)
- We're not trying explain how the kid came to exhibit concerning behaviors

USING THE ALSUP

- Participants receive a blank copy of the ALSUP
 - The kid is not present in the meeting
- Start with the lagging skills...check all that apply (about 10 seconds each)
- After completing the lagging 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
- No need to write the same unsolved problem twice

USING THE ALSUP

Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems

"A problem well stated is a problem half solved."

-Charles Kettering

The wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP 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.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

1. Free of concerning behaviors (*Most unsolved problems start with the word "Difficulty," followed by a verb...*)
2. Free of adult theories (*no need to explain anything*)
3. Split, not clumped
4. As specific as possible
 - STRATEGY #1: Who, What, Where, When...NOT Why)
 - STRATEGY #2: What expectation is the child having difficulty meeting?

USING THE ALSUP

A Few More Guidelines

- Verb selection is the hardest part of writing unsolved problems
- Don't write "aftermath" unsolved problems (e.g., "Difficulty asking for help..." or "Difficulty staying calm...")
- The wording of unsolved problems should be kid-friendly
- You're not looking for "hundred percenters" ...just expectations that a kid is having difficulty meeting **reliably**

THE ALSUP CHANGES LENSES

Expect lightbulbs to go on when...

- Caregivers come to recognize that a kid is, in fact, lacking many skills and having difficulty meeting many expectations
- Caregivers come to recognize why prior interventions have been ineffective
- Caregivers begin to regret the way they've been treating the child based on incorrect assumptions
- Caregivers become aware that unsolved problems occur under highly specific conditions
- Caregivers recognize that unsolved problems are predictable and can therefore be solved proactively

MORE UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Ask the Kid

- “What are people getting on your case about?”
- “What are you getting in trouble for?”

NEXT GOAL

Prioritizing

- You can't work on everything at once
- High priorities:
 - **SAFETY:** Unsolved problems contributing to unsafe behaviors
 - **FREQUENCY:** Unsolved problems contributing to concerning behaviors 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

Adult taking the lead on Plan B:

Kid concerns identified: (Empathy step)
DATE _____

Adult concerns identified: (Define the Problem step)
DATE _____

Solution agreed upon: (Invitation step)
DATE _____

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

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #2

Adult taking the lead on Plan B:

Kid concerns identified: (Empathy step)
DATE _____

Adult concerns identified: (Define the Problem step)
DATE _____

Solution agreed upon: (Invitation step)
DATE _____

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

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #3

Adult taking the lead on Plan B:

Kid concerns identified: (Empathy step)
DATE _____

Adult concerns identified: (Define the Problem step)
DATE _____

Solution agreed upon: (Invitation step)
DATE _____

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

REV 09/09

livesinthebalance.org

Lives in the Balance
FOSTERING COLLABORATION • TRANSFORMING LIVES • INSPIRING CHANGE

KEEPING TRACK

The Problem Solving Plan (Plan B Flowchart)

- Specify high-priority unsolved problems
- Designate person primarily responsible for solving the problem with the child
- Follow the remaining sequence to track the three steps involved in solving the problem collaboratively
- Add new unsolved problems as old ones are solved

OPTIONS FOR HANDLING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

PLAN A:

Solve the problem unilaterally

PLAN B:

Solve the problem collaboratively

PLAN C:

Put the expectation on hold for now

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
- **PLAN A** is not a partnership
- **PLAN A** does not involve kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
- **PLAN A** 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”**

PLAN C

Put the expectation on hold for now

Not about giving in or giving up...it's about prioritizing (and stabilizing) – **expectation management** rather than behavior management

- **PROACTIVE C:**
 - don't bring it up
 - an agreed-upon interim plan for putting the expectation on hold for now
- **EMERGENCY C: “OK”**

*Good parenting and good teaching mean
being responsive to the hand you've been dealt*

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 The Empathy Step

GOAL:

Gather information from kids so as to understand their concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem...especially, 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 The Empathy Step

What happens after “What’s up?”

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

PLAN B The Empathy Step

The Kid Says Something

DRILLING STRATEGIES:

1. **Reflective listening** and **clarifying statements**
2. Asking about the **who, what, where, when** of the unsolved problem
3. Asking about the **situational variability** of the unsolved problems
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** (and asking for more concerns)
8. **Summarizing** (and asking for more concerns)

PLAN B The Empathy Step

The Kid Says Something (cont.)

ADDITIONAL POINTERS:

- You're not thinking about solutions yet (the Empathy step is a "Solution-Free Zone")
- Remember, "drilling" isn't "grilling" ...it involves "listening," not "lessoning" or "lessening" (dismissing, trumping)
- Stay neutral and non-defensive throughout (suspend your emotional response...the Empathy step isn't about you)
- Don't rush (the Empathy step is not a mechanical formality...you're really curious...you really want to know!)
- "Pre-drilling" is an option

PLAN B The Empathy Step

I Don't Know/Silence

WHAT TO DO:

- Don't freak ("I don't know" and silence are typical)
- Keep drilling

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

Child Factors

- The kid doesn't trust you and/or the process yet (they have a lot of experience with Plan A)
- The kid really doesn't know
- 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)
- The kid is having difficulty putting their thoughts into words
 - Strategy: Educated guessing/hypothesis testing

PLAN B The Empathy 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!

“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

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 what to do”*
 - *“You’re not in trouble”*
 - *“I’m not mad at you”*
 - *“I’m just trying to understand”*

PLAN B The Define Adult Concerns 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...")

WHAT'S HARD:

Adults frequently don't know what their *concerns* are...adult concerns are related to **why it's important that the expectation be met:**

How the problem is affecting the kid (e.g., health, safety, learning, fairness)

How the problem is affecting others (e.g., health, safety, learning, fairness)

PLAN B The Invitation Step

GOAL:

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

WHAT'S HARD:

▪The Wording:

- Should recap two concerns so as to summarize the problem to be solved (Starts with: “**I wonder if there’s a way...**”)
Generically: “I wonder if there’s a way for us to do something about (one party’s concerns) and also do something about (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 The 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
- Before agreeing on a solution, give conscious, 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...no 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 (don't use the word "when" in the Invitation)
- Battling over solutions defines a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)...solving problems collaboratively is a win/win proposition

PLAN B The Invitation Step

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)

HOW ARE THE SKILLS ENHANCED?

- Many skills can be taught through direct instruction...it's not clear that flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation are among them
- But these skills are being enhanced in each of the three steps of Plan B
- Plan B also builds a problem-solving repertoire

IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES

- Key Themes
 - Leaders Gotta Lead
 - Start Small/Build Capacity
- Phase 1: Core Group
- Phase 2: Spread It (Modeling)
- Phase 3: Spread It (Coaching)
- Phase X: Embed It (New Structures)
 - mission/priorities
 - time, schedule
 - paperwork/referral mechanisms/meetings
 - communication/follow-up/follow through
 - teacher evaluations

SAMPLE SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

We strive to provide whatever it takes to ensure that students are successful academically, socially, and emotionally and reach their highest potential. Our school is student-centered, safe, and nurturing, and we employ strategies that are non-punitive, non-exclusionary, and relationship-and skill-enhancing. We meet students where they're at, value individual differences, and strive to collaboratively solve the problems that are interfering with their success.

FINAL QUESTION

- Why do the problems that affect kids' lives so often cause conflict between us and them?

Sign up to be an Advocate!

Lives in the Balance Advocators are helping us advocate on behalf of kids with behavioral challenges and their caregivers across the world...

Sign up here:

livesinthebalance.org/advocators



advocator

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES



livesinthebalance.org
cpsconnection.com
thekidswelose.com
truecrisisprevention.org