COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

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Our lives are one BIG problem solving adventure

- Most people try to solve problems by sticking to a position. Each side states their position, most of the time you take turns. Goal is trying to convince the other side of the rightness of your position.
Developer of the CPS Model

- Ross Greene, Ph.D
- Associate Clinical Professor in the Dept of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School
- Research funded by NIH, US Dept of Educ and Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group
RESEARCH

CPS has been applied predominantly to youth with **externalizing behavior problems**, and has been implemented in a wide range of settings, including families, general and special education schools, inpatient psychiatry units and residential and juvenile corrections facilities.
Clinical Study

- Outpatient study, 50 clinically referred youth (boys/girls) with ODD 4–13 yrs
- In addition to ODD all children had at least subthreshold symptoms of bipolar disorder or severe major depression
- Children assigned to CPS or Parent Training program.
Clinical Study

- PT group treated using Barkley’s program for defiant youth. 10 weeks of treatment (9 consecutive weeks with one month follow up)
- CPS group range more variable. 6–16 weeks of treatment, depending on clinician’s assessment of the needs of each family. Average length was 10 weeks.
- Variety of assessment tools. Clinical global impression rating by parents and clinicians, parent ratings of the frequency and severity of their children’s oppositional behavior, parental stress and parent–child relationship.
RESULTS

• CPS produced significant improvement in parent’s ratings of their children’s oppositional behavior
• CPS produced borderline significant improvement in a variety of domains of parenting stress, including child adaptability and parent competence.
• CPS produced significant improvement in limit-setting
• 80% of CPS children showed an excellent response to treatment as compared to 44% of the PT children
• This study is currently being replicated at Virginia Tech. Initial results are very strong and encouraging.
What is Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)?

- Cognitive–behavioral psychosocial approach
- Evidence–based
- CPS is a “hybrid” model including social learning theory, developmental theory, systems theory, transactional models of development and real life.
“Kids do well if they can…”
- Ross Greene

- And they may lack the skills to do so.
- CPS thinks of these skills as “lagging skills”.

Ross Greene
Think DEVELOPMENT

- Challenging behavior is about delayed development, not poor motivation.
- Challenging behavior cannot be viewed outside the context of development.
- The goal of intervention is to move development forward.
Challenging behavior is everywhere
It’s a “BOTH–AND” situation

- Kids don’t usually exhibit challenging behavior in a vacuum
- It usually takes two to tango: a kid who’s lacking skills AND an environment (parents, teacher, peers) that demands those skills.
Our **USUAL** way to look at challenging behavior

- The child or teen has learned that challenging behavior is an effective means of getting something (e.g. attention) or escaping or avoiding something (e.g. homework)

The above definition is a traditional, popular definition of the function of behavior.
Most used strategy for challenging behavior is...
Rationale for Consequences

- Teaches kids basic lessons about right and wrong way to behave.
- Gives kids the incentive to behave the right way.

**Adults have a strong tendency to automatically apply consequences to challenging behavior. Whether of the natural or artificial variety, consequences do not teach lagging skills or help kids solve problems.**
Let’s stop and think for a moment.
OUTLOOK # 1

- Poor motivation
- KIDS DO WELL IF THEY WANT TO
OUTLOOK # 2

- Lagging skills
- KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN
Let’s think…

- **Outlook #1**
  - Poor motivation (KIDS DO WELL IF THEY WANT TO)

- **Outlook #2**
  - Lagging skills (KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN)

Dependent on which outlook, this point of view will have significant ramifications for how adults interact with kids with behavioral challenges and try to help them.
Another way to think about challenging behavior...

- Challenging behavior occurs when the **cognitive demands** being placed upon a person **outstrip** the person’s capacity to respond adaptively.
• When the demands of the environment are greater than the abilities of the individual to deal with the demands an unsolved problem develops.
Interlocking Forces

Demands of Environment

Lagging Skills

UNSOLVED PROBLEM
4 CPS Goals

• Create a helping relationship
• Help solve unsolved problems
• Teach lagging skills (indirectly)
• Reduce challenging behaviors
QUESTIONS SO FAR?
• Includes a list of the skills frequently found lagging in kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges
• Meant to be used as a discussion guide for achieving a consensus – not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying
• Also includes a list of the unsolved problems that may precipitate challenging episodes.

Ross Greene
**Assessment of Lagging Skills & Unsolved Problems** (Rev. 4/15/11)

**Instructions:** The ALSUP is intended for use as a discussion guide rather than 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 examples (unsolved problems) in which that lagging skill is causing difficulty. Unsolved problems should specify the explicit conditions in which the child or adolescent is having difficulty meeting expectations (a non-exhaustive list of potential unsolved problems is shown at the bottom of the page). To assist in prioritizing, also rate the degree to which each recorded unsolved problem is setting in motion challenging episodes.

### 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 understanding what is being said
- 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 the "grays?" concrete, literal, black-and-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 other people
- 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

### Examples (Unsolved Problems)

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**Examples of Unsolved Problems**

- Home: Waking up/getting out of bed in the morning; Getting ready for school; Sensory hypersensitivities (specify); Starting or completing homework (specify); Time spent in front of a screen (TV, video games, computer); Going to bed at night; Sibling interactions (specify); Cleaning room/completing household chores (specify)
- School: Getting ready for school; Completing morning routine/getting ready for school; Sensory hypersensitivities (specify); Starting or completing homework (specify); Time spent in front of a screen (TV, video games, computer); Getting ready for school; Completing morning routine/getting ready for school; Sensory hypersensitivities (specify); Starting or completing homework (specify); Time spent in front of a screen (TV, video games, computer); Sibling interactions (specify); Cleaning room/completing household chores (specify); Behavior in hallway/cafeteria/on school bus/waiting in line (specify); Handling disappointment/loss of a game/not coming to first/going to first in line (specify)

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First Step

- Group meeting to fill out an ALSUP. This can be with staff who work with the student or with parents whose child you are seeing for therapy.
Purpose of the CPS meeting

- Focuses on consensus-building, understanding and lens changing

- Provides a structure for the team and/or parents

What are the unsolved problems contributing to the kid’s worst moments or safety issues?
The ALSUP helps us to fill in the pieces
When completing the ALSUP—some ADVICE

- Don’t go global
- Keep it specific
- Say things like…..
- “That is good to know but I’m not sure what that means for this child right now.”
EXPECT RESISTANCE
Let’s look closer at the excuses and explanations as to why CPS won’t work.
Explanations and Excuses

- He has bipolar disorder
- She has bad wiring
- His mother used illicit drugs while pregnant
- She just wants attention
- He just wants his own way
- She just doesn’t care
- He wants control
- I’m not a mental health professional
- She’ll be gone next year anyway.
- He’s manipulating us

- She has a bad attitude
- He’s making bad choices
- She has a mental illness
- His father is in jail
- Have you met her mother?
- You know what neighborhood he lives in right?
- This is a waste of time – she doesn’t want to do well.
- I’d love to help him…. But I don’t have time.
- I really need to focus on the kids who want to learn.
IT IS HARD TO GIVE UP POWER

• Most adults are used to having more power than children and adolescents in decision making.

• We are asking them to give up power and play on an equal playing field.
We want to solve the problems with each party having an equal say.
Second Step

- Prioritizing which unsolved problem to work on
- Decide who will be most involved with the child/adolescent.
  - Which teacher?
  - Mother/Father?
  - Other family member?
Third Step

- Choose a plan:
  - Plan A
  - Plan B
  - Emergency Plan B
  - Plan C
PLAN A
PLAN A

- **IMPOSE ADULT WILL** - the world of consequences
- “No”, “You must”, “You can’t”, “1,2,3”
- One way to solve unsolved problems
- Downsides: Can cause more challenging behavior, doesn’t solve the problem durably, problems come back over and over
PLAN C

- Drop it (for now at least)
- Not giving in—prioritizing which unsolved problem to work on.
EMERGENCY PLAN B

- Takes place when an unsolved problem has already set in motion maladaptive behavior;
- Can be useful for solving problems;
- But more useful for crisis management/de-escalation;
- Only difference is the timing and wording of the empathy step.
OUR CHALLENGE

- Biggest challenge for school/family systems in transforming discipline is: the shift from reactive to proactive mechanisms
PLAN B

Problems

Solutions
PROACTIVE PLAN B

• Takes place well before an unsolved problem sets maladaptive behavior in motion again
• Gives us time to gather information
• Gives us time to solve problems durably.
Arrange a meeting.
Planned.
Not “spur of the moment.
Respectful
Neutral
Caring
#1. Empathy
#2. Defining the Problem
#3. Invitation
Empathy: KEY LANGUAGE

• I’ve noticed that.......... What’s up?
#1. EMPATHY

- Goal: to gather information and achieve an understanding of the kid’s concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem.
#1 Empathy Step

- Your only goal for the first step is to figure out **WHY**.
- You do this by gathering information.
#1. Empathy (Gathering of Information)

- Dr. Greene calls it “Drilling”
- Keep it neutral
- Clarify well – who, what, where, when
- You need to have an AHA moment as to what is wrong from the child/adolescent’s perspective
- Goal is to get the kid talking
- You may have some hypothesis – don’t say it yet.
#1. Empathy (Gathering of Information)

- Don’t rush
- You’re not ready to move on until you have a CLEAR understanding of the student’s problems from THEIR PERSPECTIVE.
- Sometimes you need to go through the “side door” rather than the “front door”
- Be prepared for surprises
- Time and time again, research (and practical experience) has shown that the most reliable factor leading people to change – by far – is the RELATIONSHIP with the person helping them change.
Dealing with Silence
Dealing with “I Don’t Know” and Silence

- They really don’t know, but doesn’t have the words to say
- Maybe they’ve never thought about it before
- Maybe you never asked before
- Maybe they need time to think (better get comfortable with silence)
- They forgot the question
- They know but they aren’t trusting you yet, not feeling comfortable saying it yet
- Could say “I don’t want to put words in your mouth, tell me if I’ve got it wrong.”
ROSS GREENE “DRILLING” EXAMPLE

• http://www.livesinthebalance.org/drilling-information
http://www.livesinthebalance.org/silence
#2. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

- Goal: to ensure that the adult’s concern or perspective is entered into consideration.
Defining the Problem: KEY LANGUAGE

• “Here’s the deal…….”
• “The thing is…….”
• “My concern is…….”
• “What is yours?”
• Define the problem (BOTH sides)
• Usually adult concerns are – safety, learning, how the behavior is affecting the other students in the class(school example) or how the child’s behavior is influencing the family or achievement in school or relationships.
• Get the child/adolescents’ concern on the table AND the adult’s concerns also.
#3. INVITATION

- Goal: to brainstorm solutions together so as to address both concerns
• “I wonder if there’s is a way...........”
#3. INVITATION

- Summarize the two concerns, sticking as closely to what was identified in the first two steps.
- Ask for ideas from the child as to how they think the problem could be solved.
- Initially the solution may not be realistic and mutually satisfactory. Keep working at it.
- Let child/adolescent know that this is something you are doing with him/her rather than to him/her.
- Agree to return to Plan B if it isn’t durable.
#3. INVITATION

- Crucial to let the child/adolescent know you’re invested in getting his/her concern addressed as you are in getting your own concern addressed.
- The child/adolescent is given the first opportunity to generate solutions – but the resolution of the problem is a team effort.
- Never accept “I’ll try harder”
Thoughts to remember

• Don’t use the word COMPROMISE—no meeting 1/2 way.
• Solutions need to be durable – will it last in the future?
• If facilitator thinks the solution won’t work they can say that…. It’s ok to be honest
• With CPS all you are really doing is organizing the effort
• Vague concerns lead to vague solutions
• First solution probably won’t last
• Real problems are solved incrementally
ROSS GREENE EXAMPLE

- http://www.livesinthebalance.org/plan-b-goes-awry-part-1
Fourth Step

- DO IT and see what happens
- Early on CPS is hard
- In order to get good at CPS, you need to practice CPS
- Most problems require more than one discussion
- Initially the child/adolescent will probably propose solutions that are not realistic or mutually satisfactory
Goodness Of Fit

Helps to figure out the pieces

Takes the blame out

Gives a skill that can be used in life
TYPICAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IN FAMILY THERAPY

- Session ONE – Identify lagging skills, unsolved problems, current disciplinary practices
- Case Formulation
- Session TWO – Introduce Plans
- Describe Plan B
- Session THREE – Demonstrate Plan B
- Coach independent use of Plan B
- Address family dynamics/other factors interfering with independent use of Plan B
THE GOAL
BE PATIENT. IT TAKES TIME.
Tools

- Plan B Cheat Sheet
- ALSUP
- Plan B Flowchart
**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 highly specific unsolved problem) ... what's up?"
- Drilling for Information: usually focuses on the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem, and why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others.

**More Help:**
- If you're not sure what to say next, want more info, or are confused by something the kid has said, say:
  - "How so?"
  - "I'm confused."
  - "I don't quite understand."
  - "Can you tell me more about that?"
  - "Let me think about that for a second."
- If the kid doesn't talk or says "I don't know," try to figure out why:
  - Maybe your observation wasn't very neutral
  - Maybe your unsolved problem was too vague
  - Maybe you're using Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
  - Maybe you're using Plan A
  - Maybe he really doesn't know
    - he might need time to think
    - he might need problem broken down into its component parts

**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 perspective
- talk about solutions yet

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**DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP**

**Ingredient/Goal:** Enter the concern of the second party (often the adult) into consideration.

**Words:**
- "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

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**INVITATION STEP**

**Ingredient/Goal:** Brainstorm 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:**
- 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, "ingenious" 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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PLAN B FLOWCHART (7-12-10)

Child’s Name ___________________________  Date ___________________________

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #1

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid’s Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date ______________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #2

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid’s Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date ______________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)

UNSOLVED PROBLEM #3

Adult Taking the Lead on Plan B

Kid’s Concerns Identified (Empathy Step)

Date ______________

Adult Concerns Identified (Define the Problem Step)
CPS CASE STUDY

CORY
Questions?
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