

Collaborative Problem Solving and More: *Solutions for Peace at Home*

Sara Sanders Gardner, Autistic at Work; Corporate, Family, and Professional Trainer

Collaborative Problem Solving materials from Think:Kids at Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry,
www.thinkkids.org

Disclaimer

I am a Think:Kids' Certified Trainer in the Collaborative Problem Solving[®] approach and have been approved by Think:Kids to use these materials.

Some of these slides were developed by Think:Kids and are the property of © Massachusetts General Hospital. All rights reserved.





PARENT

- Perfect
- Disciplinarian
- Paragon
- Long-Suffering
- Accomplished
- Admirable
- Efficient
- Totally Organized
- Respected

PARENT

- Encouraging
- Understanding
- Empathetic
- Kind
- Flexible
- Trustworthy
- Tactful
- Thoughtful
- Loving



Our story

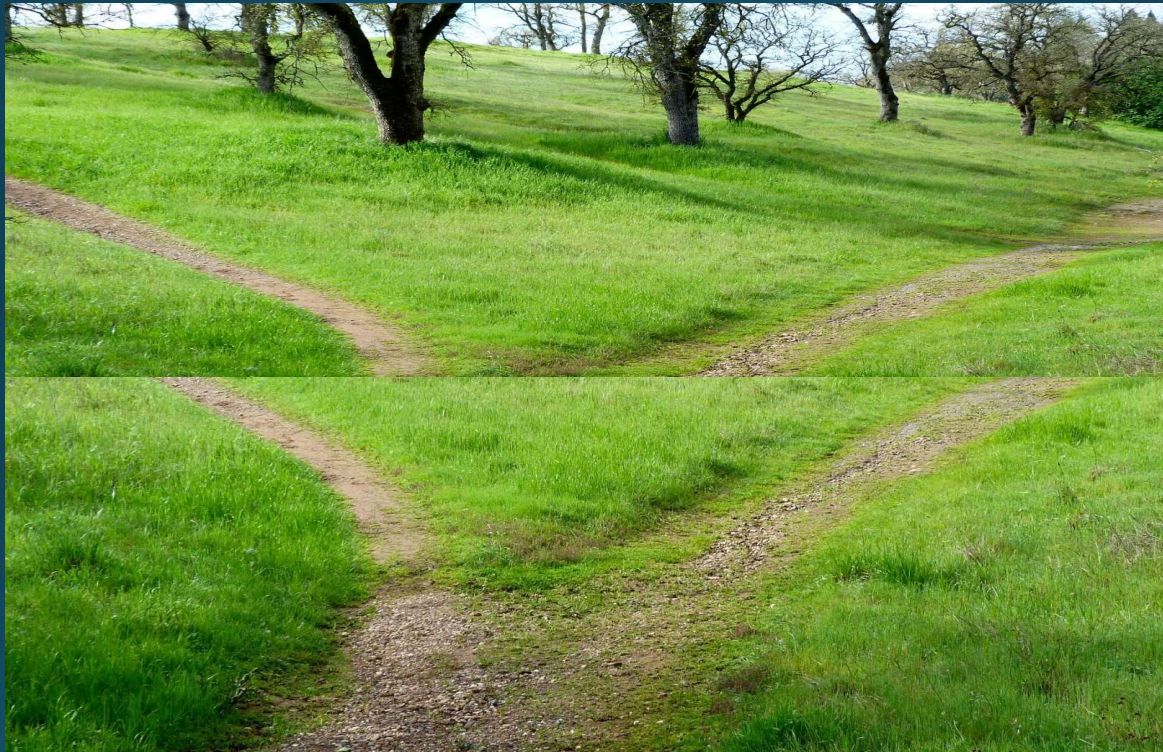


Today



Conventional wisdom about kids with
challenging behavior...

**Kids do well if they
*want to***



Your Understanding of Behavior Determines Your Solution

Conventional Wisdom says that Children Use Behavior



To get things



To avoid things

Logical Solution

Set up system of
*Rewards and
Punishment*

(Operant system or
Applied Behavior
Analysis)



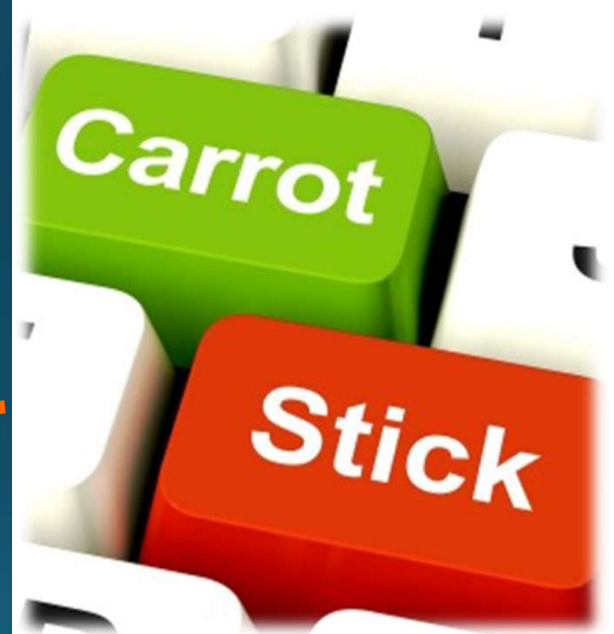


DO:

- Teach basic lessons
- Provide external motivation

DON'T:

- Teach complex thinking skills
- Build relationships
- Help kids stay regulated



Side Effects:

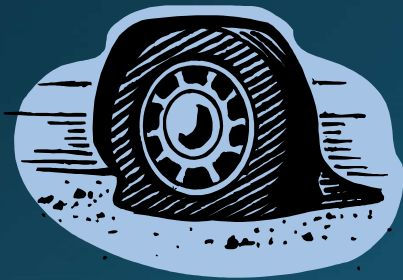
Decreasing internal motivation

Not worth trying

Increases fixed mindset

Kids Do Well If They Can™

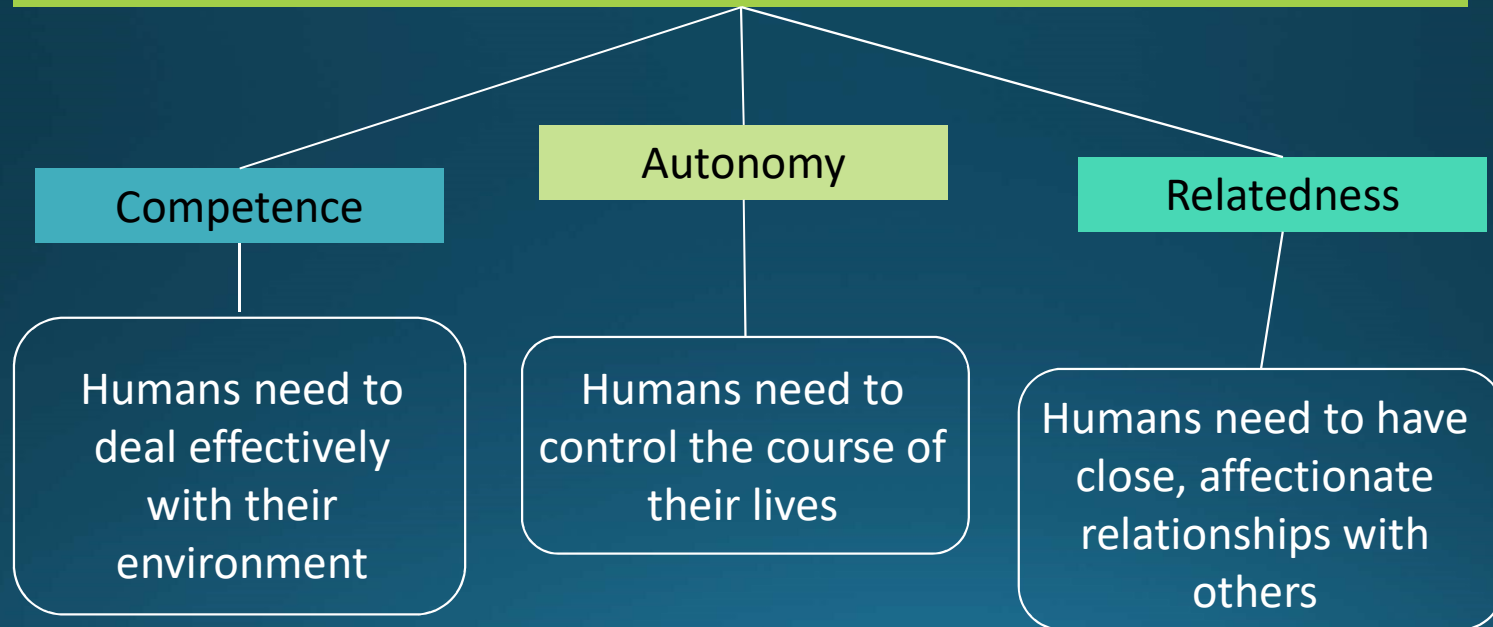
*When this becomes our guiding philosophy,
we are able to begin to **TEACH** and
SUPPORT students, rather than simply try
to **MOTIVATE** them.*



*“The School Discipline Fix: Changing Behavior Using the Collaborative Problem Solving Approach”
- J. Stuart Ablon*

What Fosters Intrinsic Motivation? (Self-Determination Theory)

Meeting Three Basic Human Needs



Kids do well if they can...

...if they can't...something is getting in the way.

We need to figure out what so we can help.

Phases of Collaborative Problem Solving Approach

1. **Assessment:** identify the specific *problems to be solved* and *lagging thinking skills* precipitating the challenging behavior
2. **Planning:** Know your options for responding to these problems and what each option accomplishes
3. **Intervention:** Solve problems while building skills, confidence and relationships

Assessment

Goal of assessment is to create 3 lists:

- 1. Challenging behaviors**

- The behavior you want to change

- 2. Problems to be solved**

- The situations in which the child is challenging

- 3. Lagging skills**

- Reasons why the child is challenging

Equation of Challenging Behavior

$$\text{Skills} \geq \text{Problem} = \text{Adaptive Behavior}$$

$$\text{Skills} < \text{Problem} = \text{Challenging Behavior}$$



Research on Skills Deficits



**Language &
Communication**



**Attention &
Working Memory**



**Emotion &
Self-Regulation**

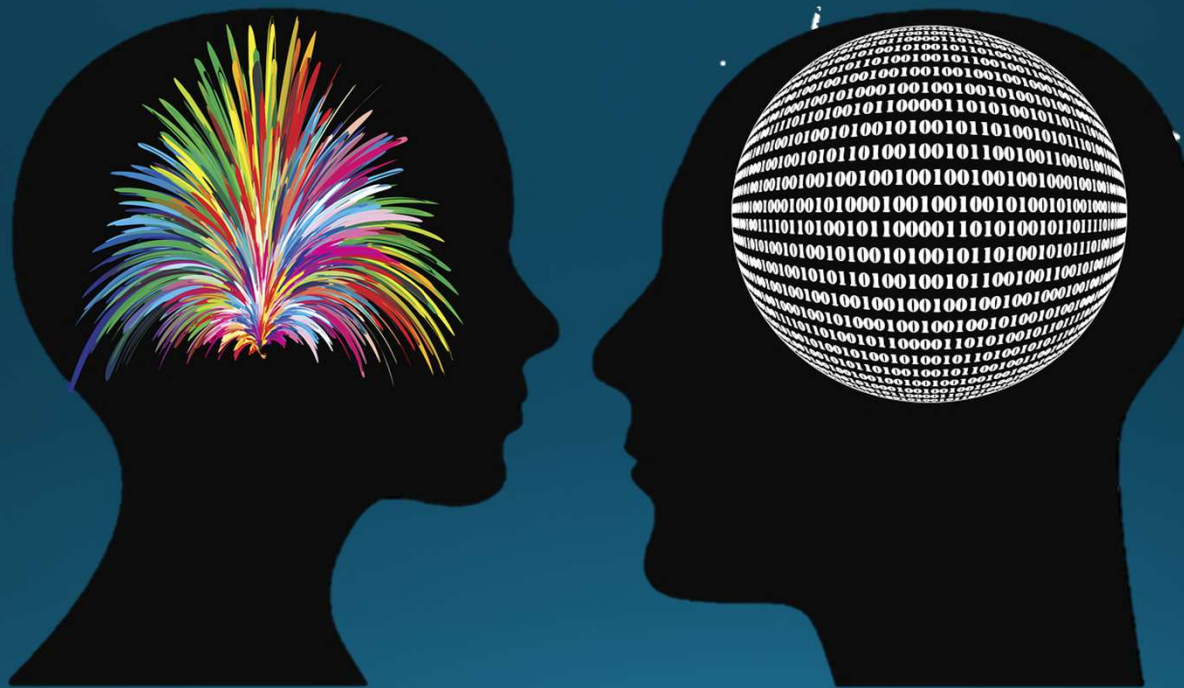


Cognitive Flexibility

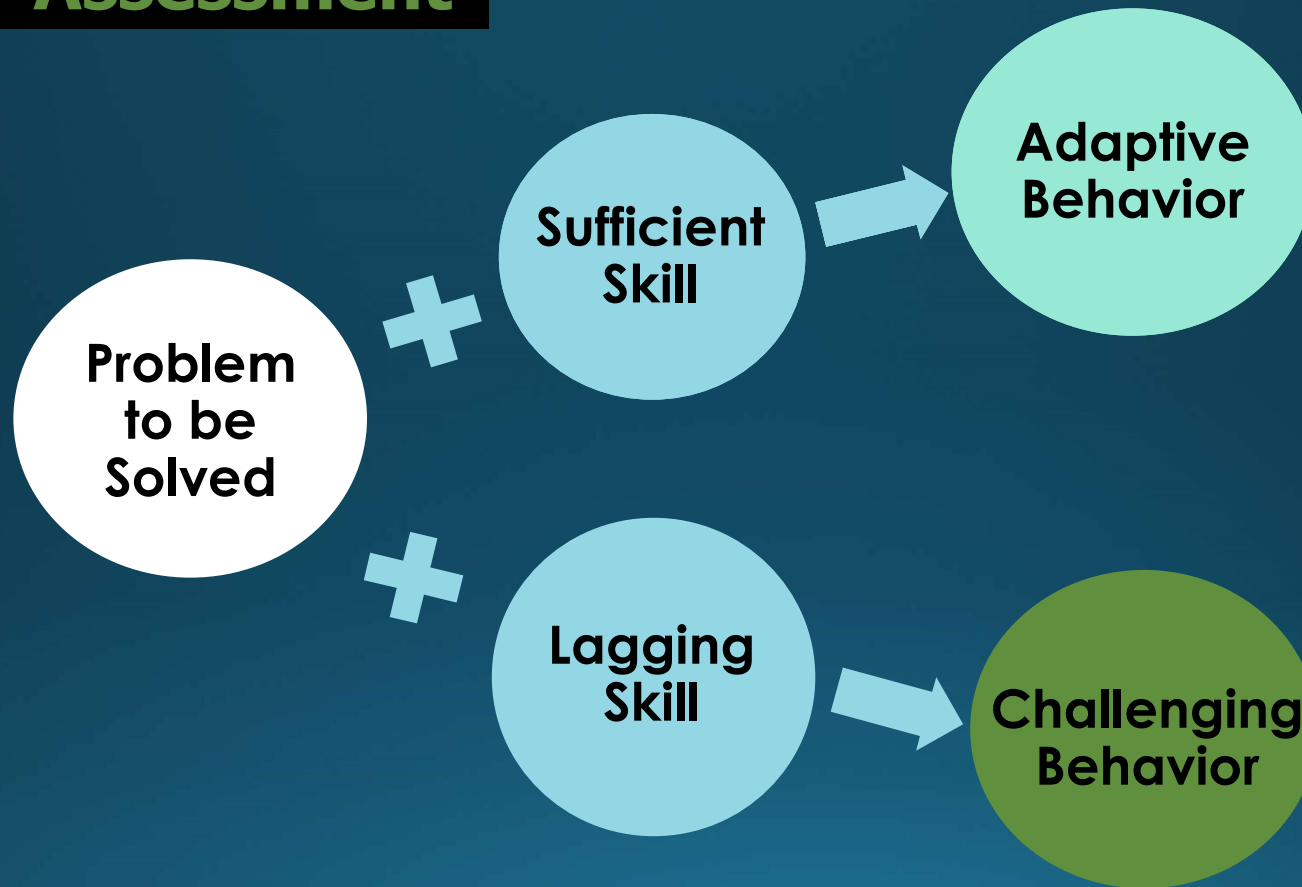


Social Thinking

Good News: New Neural Connections



Assessment



Some Unsolved Problems



Homework	Bedtime	Errands	Company
Dinner	Outings	School	Friends
Games	T.V.	Hunger	Boredom
Chores	Bathing	Hygiene	Conversation
Noises	Siblings	Clothing	Computer

Phases of Approach

1. Assessment: identify the specific *problems to be solved* and *lagging thinking skills* precipitating the challenging behavior
2. **Planning:** Know your options for responding to these problems and what each option accomplishes
3. Intervention: Solve problems while building skills, confidence and relationships

Expectations

- It is always important to establish structure and clear and realistic expectations!
- CPS does NOT mean anything goes!

Expectations consistently met → No problem

Expectations not consistently met → Problem



When you have a problem, the first step is knowing what your options are and what each option accomplishes (or doesn't!)

Goals of Intervention

1. Pursue high priority expectations
2. Reduce challenging behavior
3. Solve chronic problems durably
4. Build skills, confidence (ie, *intrinsic* motivation)
5. Create (or restore) a helping relationship

Three Plans

(Your Options for responding to Triggers/Unmet Expectations)

Plan A: Impose adult will

Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively

Plan C: Drop it (for now, at least)

Three Plans

Plan A: Impose adult will

- What goals ARE being pursued:
 - *Pursuing expectations*
- What goals are NOT being pursued:
 - *Reducing challenging behavior*
 - *Solving problems durably*
 - *Building skills, confidence*
 - *Creating (or restore) a helping relationship*



Three Plans

Plan C: Drop it (for now, at least)

Being strategic – not *giving in*

- What goals ARE being pursued:
 - *Reducing challenging behavior*
- What goals are NOT being pursued:
 - *Pursuing expectations*
 - *Solving problems durably*
 - *Building skills, confidence*
 - *Creating (or restore) a helping relationship*

Three Plans

Plan B: Work towards solving the problem in a mutually satisfactory and realistic manner

- What goals ARE being pursued:
 - *Pursuing expectations*
 - *Reducing challenging behavior*
 - *Solving problems durably*
 - *Building skills, confidence*
 - *Creating (or restore) a helping relationship*

Goals Achieved by the Three Plans

GOALS	PLAN A	PLAN C	PLAN B
Try to get your expectation met	✓	✗	✓
Reduce challenging behavior	✗	✓	✓
Build skills, confidence	✗	✗	✓
Solve problems	✗	✗	✓
Build relationship	✗	?	✓



BREAK TIME

Please return in 7 minutes!

The Biggest Misconception

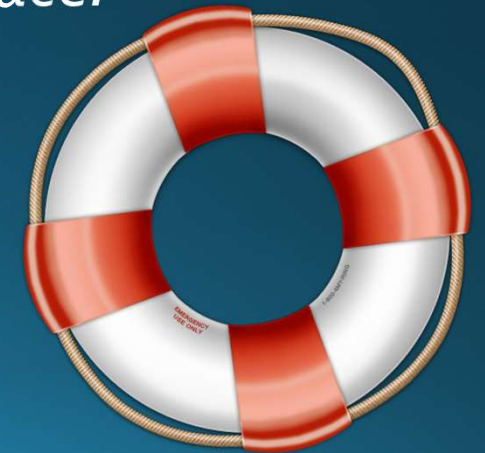
- CPS does NOT mean anything goes!
- Structure and clear expectations are always important
- Asking a child to do something (clearly and even emphatically) is NOT Plan A!
- Asking a child to do something is simply setting an expectation - which is not the same as trying to impose your will (Plan A) when someone doesn't meet your expectations
- The Plans are not needed until you have an UNMET expectation

Important Reminder:

- Any problem that can be handled using Plan A can also be handled using Plan B.
- However, is there a time when you must use Plan A despite the downsides? Of course! But ...

What about safety issues?

The more severe or unsafe the behavior, the more important it is to solve the problem and build the skills causing the behavior in the first place.



Phases of Approach

1. **Assessment:** identify the specific *problems to be solved* and *lagging thinking skills* precipitating the challenging behavior
2. **Planning:** Know your options for responding to these problems and what each option accomplishes
3. **Intervention:** Solve problems while building skills, confidence and relationships

Reminder!

Challenging behaviors are
highly predictable.

Plan B Timing

EMERGENCY B

Takes place in the midst of challenging behavior occurring (yet again):
crisis management/de-escalation

PROACTIVE B

Takes place well before challenging behavior recurs: (crisis prevention)

A prepared adult and a calm child are more likely to understand and solve problems

EMERGENT B

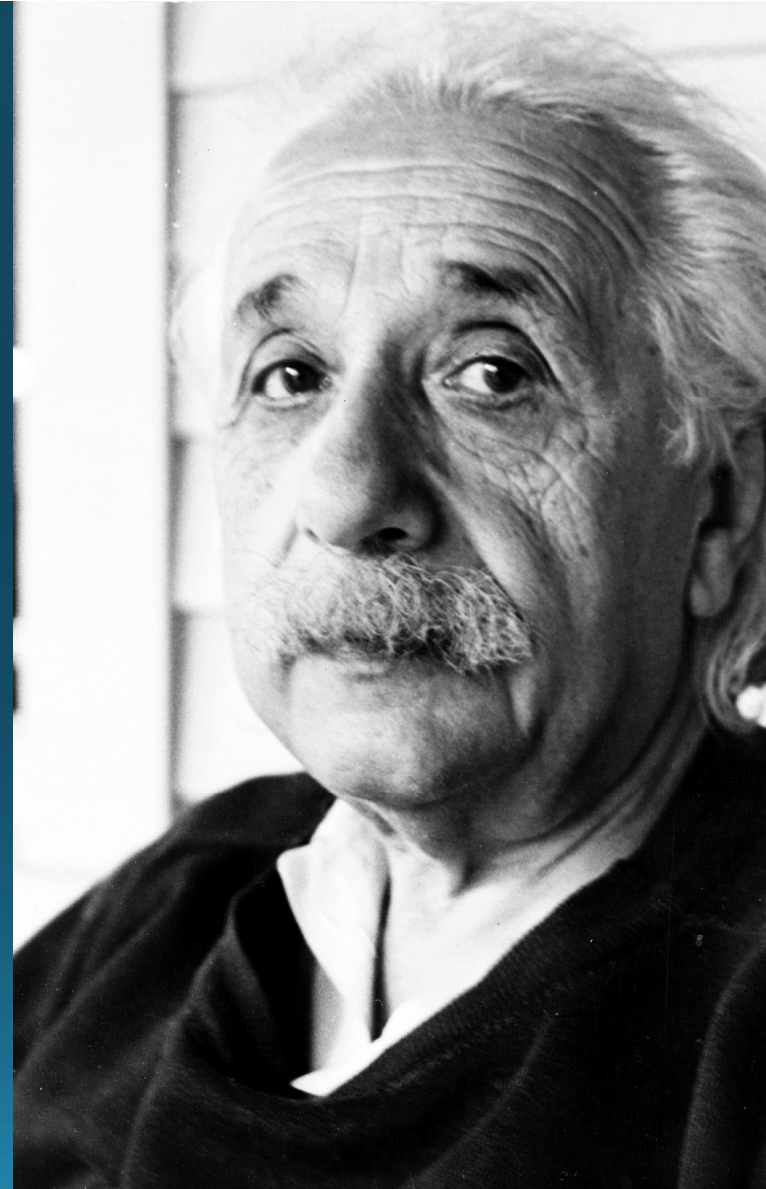
No emergency, unpredicted situation, responding to mild pushback regarding expectation

Plan B Ingredients

1. **EMPATHIZE:** Clarify child concern
2. **SHARE** adult concern
3. **COLLABORATE:** Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."

- Albert Einstein



Plan B Ingredients

1. **EMPATHIZE:** Clarify child concern
2. **SHARE** adult concern
3. **COLLABORATE:** Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

Empathize: Clarify Child Concern

THE GOAL: Gather information to understand the kid's *specific concern or perspective* about the trigger or expectation



Empathize: Clarify Child Concern

THE SCRIPT: Start with a *neutral* observation
like ...

- "I've noticed that..."
- "It seems like..."
- "It looks as if ..."

Followed by an inquiry:

- "*What's up?*"

Empathize: Clarify Child Concern

TIPS for starting off on the right foot:

DO:

- State the *trigger or expectation*
- Stick with the facts or externalize the problem

DO NOT:

- Start with the challenging behavior
- Blame or assume

But its not all about the words: body language, tone, etc. matter!

Empathize: Clarify Child Concern

THE TOOLS: Detective work to clarify concerns requires probing and drilling down using a combination of 4 tools:

- clarifying questions
- educated guessing
- reflective listening*
- reassurance*

* Regulating tools



THE FEELING: EMPATHIC, patient, open-minded listening

Empathize: Clarify Child Concern

How do you know when you are READY TO MOVE ON?

- Do you have a clear understanding of the child's concern or perspective?
- Have you learned something new?
- Are you wanting to suggest a solution?
- Is the child calm (regulated) and accessible (because the next ingredient isn't calming!)?

Plan B Ingredients

1. **EMPATHIZE:** Clarify child concern
2. **SHARE** adult concern
3. **COLLABORATE:** Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

Share Adult Concern



THE GOAL: to make sure the adult's *concern / perspective* is on the table

Share Adult Concern

THE SCRIPT: Express your concern by saying something like:

- *"**And** the thing is"*
- *"**And** my concern is"*
- *"**And** what's important to me is"*

Not: *"I hear you but ..."*

Share Adult Concern

TIP: Sharing the adult concern is not calming!

So what do you do if child escalates or shuts down?

- Go back to Empathy and reassure them you haven't forgotten about their concern!

And what do you do if child "doesn't care" about the adult concern?

- They don't have to! They just need to take it into consideration

Share Adult Concern

How do you know when you are

READY TO MOVE ON?

- Do you have *two* sets of *concerns* / perspectives on table? (not two sets of *solutions* = a power struggle (“dueling solutions”))
- Is child still calm and accessible (regulated)? If not, re-empathize!

Plan B Ingredients

1. **EMPATHIZE:** Clarify child concern
2. **SHARE** adult concern
3. **COLLABORATE:** Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

Collaborate: Brainstorm, Assess, Choose

THE GOAL: to *brainstorm* solutions together
so as to address both concerns, assess them
and choose one to try

Collaborate: Brainstorm, Assess, Choose

THE SCRIPT: Recap the concerns to summarize the problem to be solved:

- *"I wonder if there's a way that (insert both concerns)" or "I bet we can think of something so that (insert both concerns)"*

Then **bite your tongue** and ask:

- *"Do you have any ideas?" (WAIT first but its ok to suggest some if the child can't)*

Any idea is a good idea!

- *"That's an idea. Let's think it through together."*

Collaborate: Brainstorm, Assess, Choose

THE TOOLS: *Think* it through together with these questions:

- Does it work for you?
- Does it work for me/us?
- Is it doable / realistic (*think* skills!)?
- If we do it, will it bring up any additional concerns?
- When can we talk again to see how it worked?

Collaborate: Brainstorm, Assess, Choose

How do you know when you are READY TO MOVE ON?

- When you have a mutually satisfactory and realistic solution
- And a follow-up plan to enact the solution and revisit the problem if the solution doesn't work

This is Hard!

- Early on, Plan B will feel like slogging through mud (its awkward to the child too!)
- Over time, a Plan B “rhythm” should develop
- You don’t have to finish all 3 ingredients in one discussion
- The first solution seldom solves the problem durably
- Difficult problems require revisiting (it’s not a deal you’re making!!)

Skills Taught while Problem Solving

- Collaborative Problem Solving is skills training!
- Skills are modeled, practiced and developed through experiential learning and a *relational* process
- The entire process naturally trains organized, reflective, flexible thinking and problem solving
- And fosters hope and optimism in the child that they can do better (growth mindset)

Plan B Skills Taught

1. **EMPATHIZE:** Clarify child concern

Identifying, clarifying and expressing concerns, regulating emotions

2. **SHARE** adult concern

Perspective-taking, recognizing impact on others, empathy

3. **COLLABORATE:** Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

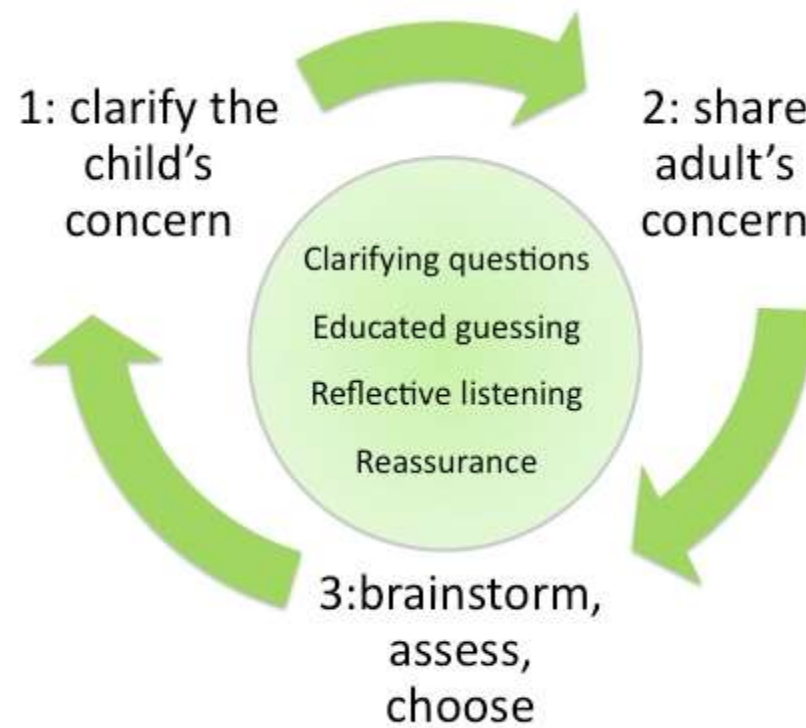
Generating solutions, reflecting on multiple thoughts, considering outcomes, moving off original idea

The Relational Process

More bad news: Plan B isn't magical and requires many repetitions!

More good news: those repetitions, conducted in a relational context, are how skills are built and new neural networks in the brain are developed

Plan B Ingredients





Additional Communication Tools

During a meltdown

- Stay calm – your child can rely on your strength
- Speak quietly or just hold your child
- Be supportive and understanding
- Get down on your child's level
- Use empathy: "you're upset" "I can see you're angry about..." "it's really hard for you when..."
- Use reassurance: "We will work it out" "I'm on your side" "I love you"

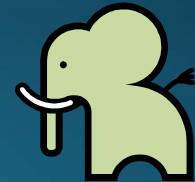
Use Positive Phrasing



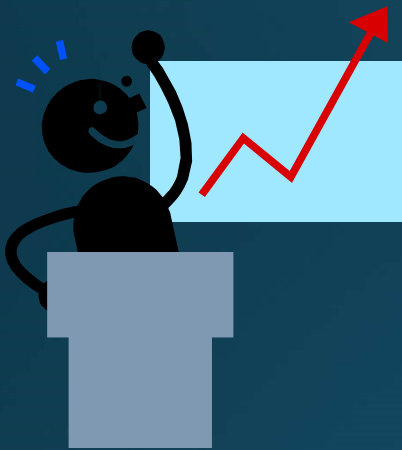
Instead of:

"Don't run into the street!"

you can say....



Use Declarative Language



“I notice your friend wants a turn”

“I love pizza!”

“I think it might rain.”

“Last time this happened, we...”

I see socks on the floor...

Declarative Language is Experience Sharing!
Use to: share an opinion, make a prediction,
announce/celebrate, observe, reflect on past
experience, problem solve

Words We (or others) Use

Emotional	Lazy	Oppositional	Manipulative	Rude
Impetuous	Impulsive	Obstinate	Violent	Insolent
Out-of-control	Intrusive	Defiant	Rebellious	Argumentative
Apathetic	Pushy	Slow	Enraged	Irritable
High-Strung	Provocative	Grumpy	Stubborn	Spiteful

Words We Use

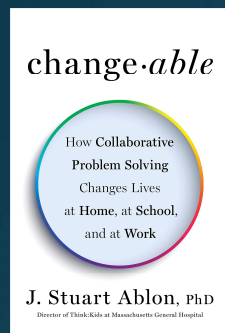
Sensitive	Careful	Methodical	Independent	Forthright
Eager	Enthusiastic	Observant	Vibrant	Individualistic
Outgoing	Lively	Sincere	Persevering	Strong
Laid-Back	Passionate	Eager	Likable	Assertive
Expressive	Earnest	Patient	Determined	Irrepressible



Final Thoughts?

Further Resources

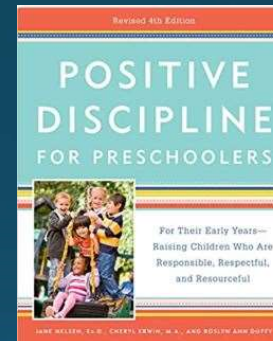
Changeable



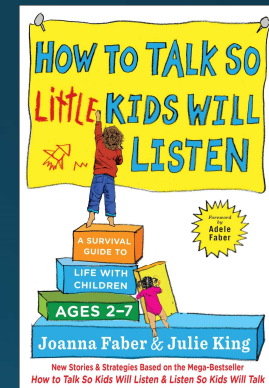
The School Discipline Fix



Positive Discipline



How to Talk So Kids Will Listen



Declarative Language:

www.peerprojectstherapyfromtheheart.com/uploads/2/5/9/2/25921473/murphy_asq_declarative.pdf

Resources

Collaborative Problem Solving materials, training, and more:

www.thinkkids.org

Positive Discipline, including online classes

www.positivediscipline.com/

