

Helping the Behaviorally Challenging Child

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Kids Do Well If They Can™

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


From "Treating Explosive Kids" Ross Greene & Stuart Ablon

"Instead of asking yourself, 'What's it going to take to motivate this kid to behave differently?' ask 'Why is this so hard for this child? What's getting in his way? How can I help?'"

--"The Explosive Child"

Possible Skill Deficits

- Social Skills
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Emotion Regulation
- Executive Functioning
- Language Processing
- Sensory Processing*



* Sensory Processing is not included in Dr. Greene's model

Social Skills

- **Recognizing the impact of one's behavior on others**
- **Appreciating social nuances**
- **Responding appropriately to social feedback**

Cognitive Flexibility Skills

- **Concrete, literal thinking**
- **Rule-oriented**
- **Rigid, "black and white" thinking**
- **Failure to see the "big picture"**

Executive Functioning Skills

- **Organization and Planning**
- **Working Memory**
- **Inhibit impulses**
- **Shifting cognitive set from one activity to another**

Emotion Regulation Skills

- **Maintaining an “even keel” when frustrated**
- **Possible problematic life circumstances, such as unrecognized learning inefficiency or unknown bullying**
- **Possible biological issues**

Language Processing Skills

- **Labeling and categorizing emotions**
- **Communicating feelings and needs**
- **Selecting response options**
- **Receiving feedback**

Sensory Processing Skills

- **Tactile**
- **Proprioceptive**
- **Vestibular**
- **Visual**
- **Auditory**
- **Gustatory, Olfactory**

Skill Deficits as Pathways to Behavioral Difficulties

“When a person is lacking the skill to do what is requested, frustration is a likely outcome.

When that same person lacks the skill to handle frustration, meltdowns are predictable.”

--- Dr. Ross Greene

Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems

Identify specific conditions under which the challenging behavior is occurring.

**Who
What
Where
When**

Common Unsolved Problems at Home

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

- ### Common Unsolved Problems at School
- At-desk work – especially writing or math
 - Group work
 - Recess
 - Assemblies
 - Lunch time
 - P.E.

“Behind every challenging behavior is an unsolved problem or lagging skill (or both.)”

-- "Treating Explosive Kids"

- ### Traditional Response
- #### Reward and Punishment
- a) teaches basic lessons well
(if child is able to implement)
 - b) motivates well (if skill is in place)

- ### New Response: Collaborative Problem Solving
1. helps adults prioritize issues
 2. teaches lacking or delayed skills
 3. reduces meltdowns

- ### Collaborative Problem Solving
- **Plan A:** Imposes Adult will
 - **Plan B:** Takes **Both** child’s and adult’s needs into account
 - **Plan C:** Let it go, deal with it later, not an issue

Goals Achieved by Problem Solving

	Pursue Expectations	Reduce Outbursts	Teach Skills
Adult's way	X		
CPS	X	X	X
Not an issue		X	

COMPLIANCE

Traditional discipline emphasizes compliance as the most important aspect for successful development in the real world.

COLLABORATION

Problem-solving emphasizes that working things out with people in a mutually satisfactory manner is most important.

Needs and Expectations are Met
Collaborative Problem Solving

- Achieve Stability (reduce meltdowns)
- Helps adults pursue their expectations of children
- Teaches lacking thinking skills

MANTRA: *"Is this something we're working on? Do I have a concern about it?"*

When do we HAVE to impose adult will? (Plan A)

- Immediate SAFETY issues

After solving the immediate safety issue, put Plan B in place to begin solving the problem permanently, rather than continuing to react to it each time it comes up.

More on CPS

Common objections:

- Kids need to know Adult is the authority
- We don't have time to "talk things out"
- We have to treat all kids the same
- My way has always worked before
- It's difficult to implement a new plan
- Other objections or questions?

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“An explosive outburst – like other forms of maladaptive behavior – occurs when the cognitive demands being placed upon a person outstrip that person’s capacity to respond adaptively.”

-- “Lost at School”

Steps to Plan B

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- 1) Empathy & Understanding (with reassurance)**
keeps people calm, gets child’s concern on table
“What’s up?”
- 2) Define Adult’s Concern**
adult gets their concern on the table
- 3) Invitation (plus agree to come back)**
“Let’s think about how we can work this out.” “And if it doesn’t work out so well, we’ll talk again figure out why and come up with something else.”

Two Types of Plan B

Emergency	Proactive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ You didn’t realize a problem would occur ➤ You forgot to plan ahead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ You planned ahead ➤ A predictable trigger <p style="text-align: center;">This is PREFERRED</p>

Plan C: When it’s Not an Issue

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- When you don’t have a concern
- When you’re not working on an issue
- When it’s not important

*This does not mean “giving in.”
This means making a decision that an issue is not important or should be worked on at a later time.*

Road Blocks

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- Too much “Emergency CPS”
- CPS as a last resort
- Putting solutions rather than concerns on the table, or have preordained solutions in mind
- Agreeing to unrealistic solutions
- Ignoring issues too much
- Imposing adult will too much

Deciding What to Work On

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Using the “ALSUP” (Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems) sheet choose no more than three areas to work on at a time with a particular child.

School Wide Plans

**Collaborative Problem Solving
can be written into IEPs and
school wide plans**

- a) Consistency across the day
- b) Meltdown reduction in all classes
- c) All students benefit

What if the child won't participate in CPS?

- Why? Lacking Skills
- Fear

"Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate
leads to suffering, suffering leads to Dark Side."

Yoda, Star Wars, Episode 1, The Phantom Menace

Two More Types of Plan B

Problem Focused	Skill Focused
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for resolving problems <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: doing homework, getting ready for school</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used to teach lagging skills <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example: difficulty with cognitive flexibility</i></p>

Overcoming Setbacks

Look for:

- Teasing
- Adult understanding
- Learning Difficulties – are they addressed?
- Schedule changes
- Readjusting solutions to find one that works

Think:Kids

RETHINKING CHALLENGING KIDS

A program in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital.

www.thinkkids.org

*"When adults re-think challenging kids,
amazing things can happen."*

Resources

- <http://www.thinkkids.org/>
- <http://livesinthebalance.org>
- <http://www.caroltomlinson.com/>
- <http://www.behaviortoday.info>
- <http://www.lostatschool.org/>

The Explosive Child and ***Lost at School*** by Ross Greene, PhD

Treating Explosive Kids by Ross Greene, PhD & Stuart Ablon, PhD

ADHD – Living Without Brakes by Martin L. Kutscher

How to Talk so Kids Can Learn by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Smart But Scattered by Peg Dawson, EdD & Richard Guare, PhD