Four Important Themes

- Emphasis is on problems (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)…upstream (not downstream)

- The problem solving is collaborative rather than unilateral …something you're doing *with* the kid rather than *to* him

- The problem solving is proactive rather than emergent

  – this is possible if we answer two important questions: why and when is this kid challenging?

- Understanding comes before helping

Key Theme #5 (Really #1)

Kids do well if they can

If the kid could do well, he would do well.

Key Theme #6 (Really #2)

Doing well is preferable

(we've been focused on motivation when
we should have been focused on skills)

Answer to the Question Why:
Challenging Kids are Lacking Skills

Challenging kids are challenging because they're lacking the skills not to be challenging…they are delayed in the development of crucial cognitive skills, such as flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving.

- Challenging kids aren't always challenging
- They're challenging in conditions in which certain skills are being demanded
- It's a developmental delay

Challenging behavior *communicates* that the kid doesn't have the skills to meet certain demands and expectations…behavior is simply the signal…the fever…the byproduct

Adult Roles in the Lives of Behaviorally Challenging Kids

- Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
- 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 (but indirectly) teaches skills

What Skills Are Behaviorally Challenging Kids Lacking?

- Executive skills
- Language processing/communication skills
- Emotion regulation skills
- Cognitive flexibility skills
- Social skills

Answer to the Question <u>When</u>: The Clash of the Two Forces

Challenging episodes occur when the demands being placed upon a person outstrip his or her skills

- best conceived as "unmet expectations" or "unsolved problems"
- results in "incompatibility episodes"

Lagging Skills

Demands of Environment
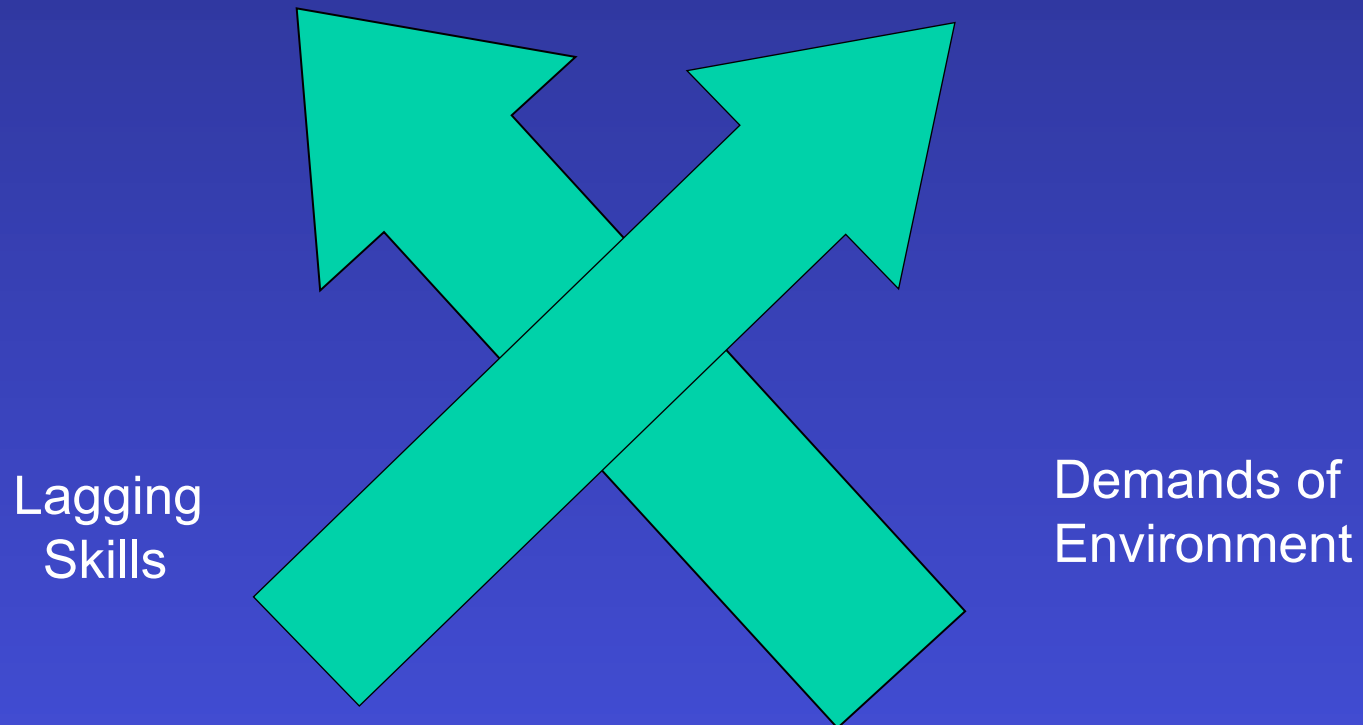
ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)

ALSUP ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS & UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

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

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

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

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The Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)

- On the left side is a representative list of the skills frequently found lagging in challenging kids
- Unsolved problems are identified on the right side
- 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 things we can't do anything about, we are likely to come to the conclusion that we can't do anything to help)
- We want to avoid the "correlation equals causation error"

Using the ALSUP

- Participants receive a blank copy of the ALSUP
  – The kid is not present in the meeting
- Start at the top…don't "cherry-pick" lagging skills
- After checking off a given lagging skill, identify the unsolved problems that spring to mind when thinking of that lagging skill ("Can you give me some examples of times when Theresa is having difficulty…")
- Come up with as many unsolved problems as possible for an endorsed lagging skill
- No need to write the same unsolved problem more than once
- Don't go down the entire list of lagging skills and then go back to identify unsolved problems
- Don't identify unsolved problems first and then go back to decide which lagging skills apply to that unsolved problem
- No need to establish which lagging skill best explains a particular unsolved problem…just assume multiple lagging skills can contribute to the same unsolved problem

Using the ALSUP:
Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

The wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP is going to translate into the words that are used when the unsolved is introduced to the child when it comes time to solve it together. The wording should be kid-friendly.

Unsolved Problems should be:

- Free of challenging behaviors (Difficulty…)
- Free of adult theories (no need to explain anything)
- Split, not clumped
    "Split early, maybe you can clump later…but if you clump early, you'll never find out"
- As specific as possible
    Strategy #1: Who, What, Where/When…NOT why)
    Strategy #2: What expectation is the child having difficulty meeting?

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
- - Focus on the "big fish" first
    - – Safety: those unsolved problems contributing to unsafe behavior
    - – Frequency: those unsolved problems contributing to incompatibility episodes most often
    - – Gravity: those unsolved problems causing greatest harm to the kid or others

THE PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN

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 solve the problem
- Add new unsolved problems as old ones are solved

Options for Handling <u>Unsolved</u> Problems

Plan A: solve the problem unilaterally

Plan B: solve the problem collaboratively

Plan C: set the problem aside for now

Plan A: Solve the problem unilaterally

- The adult decides what the solution is and involves the imposition of adult will, often accompanied by adult-imposed consequences
  - "I've decided that…"
- Plan A *causes* incompatibility episodes in challenging kids
- 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 expectations…solutions arrived at through Plan A are "uninformed"

Plan C: Set the problem aside for now

Not about giving in or capitulating…it's about prioritizing

- Emergency C: "OK"

- Proactive C:

    - don't bring it up

    - an agreed-upon interim plan for tabling the problem for now

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 so as to identify child's concerns)

2. Define Adult Concerns Step
(identify adult concerns)

3. Invitation Step
(collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory)

The Empathy Step

Goal:

Gather information from the kid so as to achieve the clearest possible understanding of his concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem

Introduction:

The Empathy step begins with the words "I've noticed that", followed by an unsolved problem and an initial inquiry ("What's up?")

The Empathy Step (cont.): The Kid Says Something

- Drilling Strategies:

  - Reflective listening and clarifying statements
  - Asking about the who, what, where/when of the unsolved problem
  - Asking about why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others
  - Asking the kid what s/he's thinking in the midst of the unsolved problem
  - Breaking the problem down into its component parts
  - Discrepant Observation
  - Tabling (and asking for more concerns)
  - Summarizing (and asking for more concerns)

The Define Adult Concerns Step

Goal:

• Enter the adult's concern or perspective into consideration (possibly beginning with, "The thing is…" or "My concern is…")

What's Hard:

Adults frequently don't know what their concerns are (though they do often know what their solutions are)…adults concerns are not merely a repetition of the expectation

• Adult concerns typically fall into one of two categories:

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

• The Define Adult Concerns step is a Solution-Free Zone, too…the first two steps are reserved exclusively for concerns

The Define Adult Concerns Step (cont.)

Additional Pointers:

• If you get solutions instead of concerns on the table in the first two steps, that's a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)

  – Solving problems collaboratively is a win/win proposition

• Some kids say they "don't care" about your concern

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…")
  - 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)

The Invitation Step (cont.)

- Goal is to demonstrate to the kid that you're as invested in getting his concern addressed as you are in getting your own concern 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, you'll need multiple solutions (and more than one Plan B)

- Before agreeing on a solution, give deliberate consideration to whether the solution is realistic and mutually satisfactory…if not, refine the original solution or think of alternatives

- Goal is to come up with a solution so the problem doesn't come up again…not to come up with a solution for what to do in the heat of the moment when the problem recurs (don't use the word "when" in the Invitation)

- The Invitation ends with an agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

Implementation in Schools and Facilities (Start Small)

- Leadership commitment
  - Time, continuity, participation

- Formation of Core Group (start small)
  - Practice using ALSUP and Plan B
  - Ensures that there are mentors to help others
  - Ensures structures that support the model are in place before full-scale implementation
  - Integrate paperwork into existing systems
  - Create new mechanisms for communication, follow-up

- Create a plan for spreading, training, coaching
  - Helping those who are having trouble
  - Revisiting/revising existing policies/procedures

Is Plan B Relevant for Kids with Very Limited Communication Skills?

- Reference point is infants
  - Identifying unsolved problems (requires excellent observational skills)
  - Identifying concerns
  - Collaborating on solutions

- Important Questions:
  - Does the child need additional training on the basics?
    - The relationship between problems and solutions
    - Basic concepts of problems and concerns
  - How is the child communicating now? Can we build on existing means of communication?
    - How can we help the child communicate more easily (pictures) about the basic components of problem-solving (problems, concerns, solutions)?

Additional Information/Resources

www.livesinthebalance.org
Walking tours/Web-based radio programs/
Kids Advocacy Action Network/
Research/Paperwork/Facebook groups

www.cpsconnection.com
Advanced and certification trainings

cynthiagraton@livesinthebalance.org
CPS providers