Moving From Power and Control to Collaboration and Problem Solving

Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.
OPTIONS FOR HANDLING UNSOLVED 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 imposes it, 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 giving up... it’s about prioritizing (and stabilizing)

- **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)
PLAN B The Empathy Step

GOAL:
Gather information from the kid 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 kids says, “I don’t want to talk about it”
- 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 the kid 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

I Don’t Know/Silence

WHAT TO DO:
- Don’t freak
- Keep drilling

IF HE’S STILL NOT TALKING, FIGURE OUT WHY:

Adult Impediments
- You used Plan A
- You used Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
- The Introduction wasn’t specific, free of theories, free of maladaptive behaviors, split

Child Impediments
- The kid doesn’t trust you and/or the process yet (he has 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
- The kid needs time to think (adults better get comfortable with silence)
- The kid is having difficulty putting their thoughts into words
  - Educated guessing/hypothesis testing
PLAN B 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…adult concerns are related to why it’s important that the expectation be met

- 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)
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)
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES

livesinthebalance.org
cpsconnection.com
thekidswelose.com