Understanding and Helping Kids with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges

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SIX KEY THEMES

1. Emphasis is on **problems** (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)…**upstream** (not downstream)
   - Behaviors are not the only observable data…unsolved problems are observable too
SIX KEY THEMES

2. The problem solving is collaborative rather than unilateral...something you’re doing with the kid rather than to him

3. The problem solving is proactive rather than emergent
   - This is possible if we answer two important questions: why and when is this kid challenging?

4. Understanding comes before helping
SIX KEY THEMES

5. Kids do well if they can
   ▪ If the kid could do well, he would do well

6. 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 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.
WHAT SKILLS ARE BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS LACKING?

- Executive skills
- Language processing/communication skills
- Emotion regulation skills
- Cognitive flexibility skills
- Social skills
THE TOP 5
Skills That Foster the Better Side of Human Nature

- Empathy
- Appreciating how one’s behavior is affecting others
- Resolving disagreements without conflict
- Taking another’s perspective
- Honesty
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 teaches skills
ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)
USING THE ALSUP

Expect lightbulbs to go on when...

- Caregivers come to recognize that a kid is, indeed, lacking many skills
- Caregivers come to recognize why prior interventions have been ineffective
- Caregivers begin to regret the manner in which they’ve been interacting with a kid based on incorrect assumptions
- Caregivers become aware that unsolved problems occur under highly specific conditions
- Caregivers recognize that unsolved problems are predictable and therefore be solved proactively
- Caregivers begin pondering how they’re going to create mechanisms for changing practices given what they now know about a kid’s difficulties
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 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)
IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES

- **Key Terms**
  - Leaders Gotta Lead
  - Start Small/Build Capacity

- **Formation of Core Group**
  - 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
Myth

Adult-child conflict is inevitable

Reality: Kids and adults are going to disagree with each other and kids are going to have difficult meeting some expectations
Do You Still Have Expectations?

Of course! You can’t raise kids without expectations.

It’s how you handle *unmet* expectations (unsolved problems) that matters...
Most Common Complaints

Kids: Adults won’t listen to me

Adults: The kid won’t talk to me
FINAL QUESTIONS

- Why do the problems that affect kids' lives so often cause conflict between us and them?

- Are the ways in which we’re going about parenting, teaching, disciplining, and interacting with our kids teaching the skills on the better side of human nature?
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES

livesinthebalance.org

cpsconnection.com