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”
TIMING IS EVERYTHING

INCOMPATIBILITY EPISODES ARE HIGHLY PREDICTABLE

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: Intervention is reactive and occurs emergently, in the heat of the moment (“What should I do when?”)

CRISIS PREVENTION: Intervention is planned and occurs proactively, well before highly predictable incompatibility episodes occur again (“What am I going to do before?”)
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)
PLAN B
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?”).
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:

- 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)
ADDITIONAL POINTERS:

- You’re not thinking about solutions yet (the Empathy step is a “Solution-Free Zone”)

- Remember, “drilling” isn’t “grilling”…it involves “listening,” not “lessoning” or “lessening” (dismissing, trumping)

- Stay neutral, non-defensive throughout (suspend your emotional response…the Empathy step isn’t about you)

- Don’t rush (the Empathy step is not a mechanical formality…you’re really curious…you really want to know!)

- You’re not ready to leave the Empathy step until you’ve summarized and asked for more and there is no more
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
- He doesn’t trust you and/or the process yet (he has a lot of experience with Plan A)
- He really doesn’t know
- He needs the problem broken down into its component parts
- He needs time to think (adults better get comfortable with silence)
- He’s having difficulty putting his thoughts into words

WHAT IF HE’S STILL NOT TALKING?
- Educated guessing/hypothesis testing
PLAN B

The Empathy Step: Other Responses to “What’s Up?”

"I don’t have a problem with that” or “I don’t care”
- that’s the beginning of his concern or perspective…start drilling!
- the kid almost certainly has a problem with all the conflict surrounding the unsolved problem

“I don’t want to talk about it”
- first, assume he has a good reason
- next, give him permission not to talk
- see if he’ll talk about why he doesn’t want to talk about it
- Don’t do anything today that will reduce the likelihood of the kid talking to you tomorrow

Defensiveness (“I don’t have to talk to you!”)
- he may need reassurance that you’re not using Plan A
  - “I’m not telling you what to do”
  - “You’re not in trouble”
  - “I’m not mad at you”
  - “I’m just trying to understand”
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 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
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)
PLAN B

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)

- Battling over solutions define a power struggle (a win/lose proposition)…solving problems collaboratively is a win/win proposition
YOU’RE READY!

ADDITIONAL POINTERS

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

- Solving problems tends to be incremental... the first solution seldom solves the problem durably... most problems require more than one discussion.

- Solutions that don’t stand the test of time:
  - weren’t as realistic as first thought
  - weren’t as mutually satisfactory as thought
  - didn’t address all the concerns (those that hadn’t yet been identified or prioritized)
HOW ARE THE SKILLS TRAINED?

- Some skills can be trained explicitly (in the traditional sense)
  - some social skills
  - language processing/communication skills
- Skills are being taught in each of the three steps of Plan B

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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
SOLVING PROBLEMS WITH 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

livesinthebalance.org
cpsconnection.com