

## 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

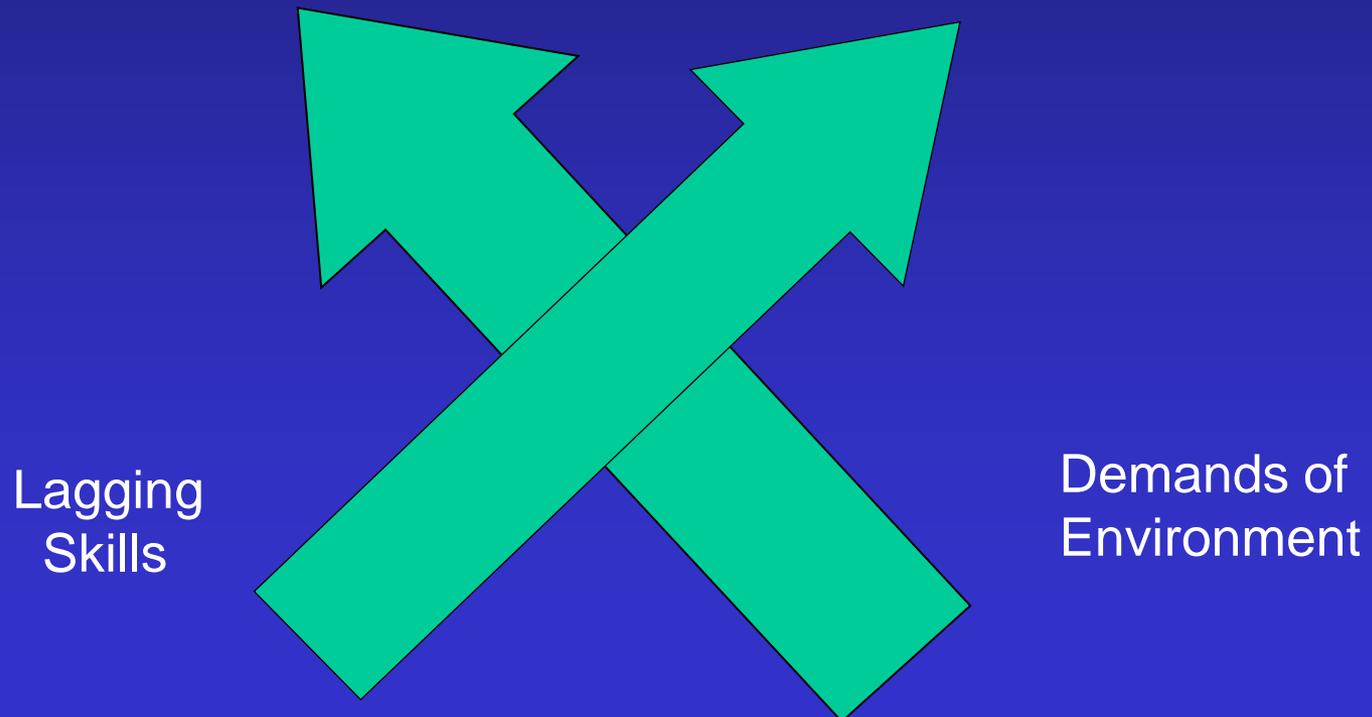
- Identify lagging skills and unsolved problems
- Solve problems collaboratively and proactively
  - Promotes a problem solving partnership
  - Engages kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
  - Produces more effective, durable solutions
  - Simultaneously (but indirectly) teaches skills

## Answer to the Question When:

### 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”



## 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?

## 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

## 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 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 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”

## 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 should I 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)

## 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 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)

## Additional Information/Resources

[www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)

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

[www.cpsconnection.com](http://www.cpsconnection.com)

Advanced and certification trainings