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THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

## Moving From Power and Control to Collaboration and Problem Solving (and Meeting Kids Where They're At)

Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.



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### Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #1

**Emphasis is on **problems** (and solving them) rather than on **behaviors** (and modifying them)...**

- Concerning behavior is often best thought of as a **frustration or distress response** ...it's simply the **signal** by which a child **communicates** that they are having difficulty meeting certain **expectations**
  - Concerning behaviors can be "lucky" or "unlucky"
  - Less emphasis on unmet needs...
  - Even if it's not accompanied by concerning behavior, an unmet expectation is still an unsolved problem
- This will require different assessment practices

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### Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #2

**The problem solving is **collaborative**, not unilateral (Ask the kid):**

- Something you're doing **with** the kid rather than **to** them
- Even if the kid can talk but aren't or aren't talking because they can't
- Engaging kids in solving the problems that are causing their concerning behavior is more effective at holding kids accountable than having them be passive recipients of adult-imposed consequences
- T-I-M-E

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## Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #3

**The problem solving is proactive, not reactive  
(Don't be late):**

- These kids are highly predictable, if we answer two questions proactively:
  1. **Why** do some kids respond so poorly to problems and frustrations?  
Answer: Because they're struggling with the skills that are involved in responding adaptively to frustrations (flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, emotion regulation)
  2. **When** do kids exhibit concerning behavior?  
Answer: When they're having difficulty meeting certain expectations
- Once skills and unsolved problems are identified, intervention can be largely proactive

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## Sequence of De-escalation, Restraint, and Seclusion

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    graph TD
      A[Expectation student is having difficulty meeting] --> B[Adult pushes student to meet expectation]
      B --> C[Child communicates that they are having difficulty meeting the expectation (concerning behavior)]
      C --> D[Adults try to de-escalate child]
      D --> E[Child is restrained or secluded]
  
```

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## Set Up to Be Late

- ✓ Give the kid a break
- ✓ Send the kid to the calming corner
- ✓ Call for the crisis manager
- ✓ Call the parent
- ✓ Teach coping strategies
  - 90% should be helping kids anticipate and solve problems before they're frustrated
- ✓ De-escalation, restraint, seclusion
- ✓ Discipline referral, detention, suspension, expulsion, paddling

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**Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #4**

**Kids do well if they can**  
 If the kid could do well, they would do well.  
**(not Kids do well if they wanna):**

**Not True:**  
*Attention-seeking*  
*Manipulative*  
*Coercive*  
*Unmotivated*  
*Limit-testing*

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**Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #5**

**Doing well is preferable:**  
 Solved problems don't cause concerning behaviors...only unsolved problems do

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**Operationalizing Change**



Identify skills and unsolved problems



Solve problems collaboratively and proactively

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**Operationalizing Change**

- Identify skills and unsolved problems
- Solve problems collaboratively and proactively

- Helps make intervention proactive rather than reactive
- **Skills:** Helps adults view kids through more compassionate, accurate, productive lenses
- **Unsolved Problems:** Helps us focus on the problems that are causing concerning behaviors (rather than on the behaviors)

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**Operationalizing Change**

- Identify 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 enhances skills

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**Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)**

ASUP 2024  
Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems

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DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CAREGIVER COMPLETING THIS INSTRUMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

STEP 2: ANALYZE PROBLEMS

STEP 3: IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

STEP 4: IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

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## Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)

- The ASUP is meant to be used as a **discussion guide**...not simply a checklist or mechanism for quantifying.
- You don't need the ASUP for every student...just the ones who are struggling the most
- The ASUP helps caregivers focus on things they can actually do something about (if we only focus on the things we can't do anything about, we are likely to conclude that we can't do anything to help).
- We're not trying explain how the kid came to exhibit concerning behaviors or why the kid is having trouble meeting an expectation.



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### Using the ASUP: Guidelines for Wording Unsolved Problems

- Free of concerning behaviors
- Free of adult theories
- Split, not clumped
- As specific as possible

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### Next Goal: Prioritizing

- You can't work on everything at once.
- High priorities:
  - **Safety**: Unsolved problems contributing to unsafe behaviors
  - **Frequency**: Unsolved problems occurring most often
  - **Gravity**: Unsolved problems having the greatest negative impact on the kid or others

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## Options for Handling Unsolved Problems

**Plan A**

Solve the problem unilaterally

**Plan B**

Solve the problem collaboratively

**Plan C**

Put the expectation on hold for now

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## Plan C Put the Expectation on Hold for Now

Reasons to use Plan C:

- **Prioritizing/Triaging:** You can't solve everything at once.
- **Expectation management:** Removing expectations that are out of reach at this point in development.
- **Stabilizing:** Unsolved problems that have been put on hold don't cause concerning behavior. (Stabilization comes before education)

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## 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 concerning behaviors
  - ...is not a partnership
  - ...does not involve kids in solving the problems that affect their lives
  - ...provides no information whatsoever about the factors making it difficult for the kid to meet a given expectation... solutions arrived at through Plan A are **"uninformed"**

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**Plan C** **Put the Expectation on Hold for Now**

- **Proactive C:**
  - Don't bring it up
  - An agreed-upon interim plan for putting the expectation on hold for now (not the same as modifying or adapting the expectation)
- **Emergency C:**
  - "OK"

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**Plan C** **Put the Expectation on Hold for Now**

**- Fair does not mean equal...  
you're aiming for EQUITY, not equality**

**- Your goal is to meet every kid where they're at**

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**Plan B** **Solve the Problem Collaboratively**

- 1. Empathy Step**
  - Gather information from the child about what's hard about meeting the expectation.
- 2. Define Adult Concerns Step**
  - Identify adult concerns.
- 3. Invitation Step**
  - Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory.

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**Plan B**

**1. The Empathy Step**

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

**Goal:**

- Gather information from kids to understand 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?”)

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**Plan B**

**1. The Empathy Step**

2. Define Adult Concerns Step

3. Invitation Step

**Plan B with Non-Speaking Kids**

**Some strategies:**

- Five-finger method
- Yes/No
- Pictures/Google Images
- Apps
- Assistive technology

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**Plan B**

1. The Empathy Step

**2. Define Adult Concerns Step**

3. Invitation Step

**Goal:**

Enter the adult’s concern or perspective into consideration in a way that doesn’t cause the child to feel that their concerns are being dismissed or disregarded (beginning with “The thing is...” or “My concern is...”).

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**Plan B**

1. The Empathy Step
- 2. Define Adult Concerns Step**
3. Invitation Step

**What's Hard:**  
 Adults frequently don't know what their concerns are...adult concerns are the answer to this question: **Why is it important that the expectation be met?**

**Two Possibilities:**

1. How is the unsolved problem affecting the kid?
2. How is the unsolved problem affecting other people?

(Typically: Health, safety, learning, fairness)

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**Plan B**

1. The Empathy Step
2. Define Adult Concerns Step
- 3. Invitation Step**

**Goal:**  
 Collaborate on a solution that is **realistic** and **mutually satisfactory**.

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**Plan B**

1. The Empathy Step
2. Define Adult Concerns Step
- 3. Invitation Step**

**What's hard: The Wording**

- **Recap the concerns:** "I wonder if there's a way for us to do something about/make sure that (one party's concerns) and also do something about/make sure that (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)

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Plan  
B

1. The Empathy Step
2. Define Adult Concerns Step
3. Invitation Step

- Goal is to demonstrate to kids that you're as invested in getting their concerns addressed as you are in getting your own concerns 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, prioritize which concerns are going to be addressed in this Plan B and which may be addressed in a subsequent Plan B.

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Plan  
B

### Implementation in Schools and Facilities

- **Leadership** (get the ball rolling and commit)
- **Move from Behaviors to Problems**
  - Intro PD
  - Structure Problem Identification (ASUP for targeted kids)
- **Solve Problems Collaboratively and Proactively**
  - Structures
  - Helpers
- **Time**

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Plan  
B

### How are the skills enhanced?

- Skills are being modeled, practiced, and enhanced in each of the three steps of Plan B.
- Solving problems is faster than enhancing skills.
- Plan B also helps build a problem-solving repertoire.

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## Additional Information/Resources

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livesinthebalance.org  
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**Feedback:**



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