



# Collaborative & Proactive Solutions

The Next Generation of Solving Problems Collaboratively

**Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.**

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

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

“Man masters nature not by force but by understanding.”

*Jacob Bronowski*

“We cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them.”

*Albert Einstein*

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

*Benjamin Franklin*

“I hope that someday we will learn the terrible cost we all pay  
when we ignore or mismanage those people in society  
who most need our help.”

*The Hon. Judge Sandra Hamilton,  
Provincial Court of Alberta, Canada*

©Ross W. Greene, Ph.D., 2017

*All rights reserved*

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

1

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

2

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

3

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

4

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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.

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

5

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**WHAT SKILLS ARE BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGING KIDS LACKING?**

- ✓ Executive skills
- ✓ Language processing/communication skills
- ✓ Emotion regulation skills
- ✓ Cognitive flexibility skills
- ✓ Social skills

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

6

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

7

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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**

- "unmet expectations" = "unsolved problems"
- results in "incompatibility episodes"



© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

8

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

9

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

## ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (ALSUP)



© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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"

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 expectations Theresa is having difficulty meeting when you think of her having difficulty (repeat lagging skill)..."
- Come up with as many unsolved problems as possible for an endorsed lagging skill

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## USING THE ALSUP

### Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

**A problem well stated is a problem half solved."**

—Charles Kettering

The wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP is going to translate into the words that are used when the unsolved problem is introduced to the child when it comes time to solve it together. The wording should be kid-friendly and...

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

13

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## USING THE ALSUP

### Guidelines for Identifying Unsolved Problems

- 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?

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

14

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## USING THE ALSUP

### A Few More Guidelines

- 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
- No need to write the same unsolved problem more than once
- You're not looking for "hundred percenters"
- Very important to consider whether the kid is actually capable of meeting a given expectation

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

15

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

16

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## MORE UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

### Ask the Kid

- "What are people getting on your case about?"
- "What are you getting in trouble for?"

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

17

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 having the greatest negative impact on the kid or others

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

18

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# THE PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN

## (Plan B Flowchart)

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## 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"**

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

22

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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?*")

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

23

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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*

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

24

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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)

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

25

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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?")

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

26

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 kid says, "I don't want to talk about it"
- The kid responds defensively ("I don't have to talk to you!")

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

27

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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)

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

28

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## PLAN B

### The Empathy Step: The Kid Says Something (cont.)

#### 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

29

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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:

- 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
- He doesn't trust you and/or the process yet (he has a lot of experience with Plan A)
- He really doesn't know
  - Maybe he hasn't thought about his concerns for a very long time
- 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

30

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 talking when you're in a rage"
  - "You're not in trouble."
  - "I'm not mad at you."
  - "I'm just trying to understand."

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

81

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 (though they do often know what their solutions 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

82

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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...")
- 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)

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

83

Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

34

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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)

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

35

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

36

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES (Start Small)

- Leadership commitment
  - Time, continuity, participation
- Formation of Core Group (start small)
  - 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

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

37

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## IS PLAN B RELEVANT FOR 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)?

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

38

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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 that foster the display of the characteristics on the more positive side of human nature?

© 2017 Dr. Ross Greene

39

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES**



[livesinthebalance.org/newsletter](http://livesinthebalance.org/newsletter)  
[cpsconnection.com](http://cpsconnection.com)  
Advanced and certification trainings

40

 Collaborative & Proactive Solutions  
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---