What Challenging Behavior Communicates
How Pediatricians Can Facilitate Helpful Conversations with Caregivers

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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

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?
Visual Depiction of 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”

Six Key Themes
4. Understanding comes before helping
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 focuses on skills

What Skills Are Behaviorally Challenging Kids Lacking?
• Executive skills
• Language processing/communication skills
• Emotion regulation skills
• Cognitive flexibility skills
• Social skills
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

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

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 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)

How are the Skills Trained?

Mostly Indirectly

- Some skills can be trained explicitly
  - some social skills
  - language processing/communication skills
- There really isn’t a technology for explicitly teaching most of the lagging skills on the ALSUP...but skills are being taught in each of the three steps of Plan B

Facilitating the Conversation with Caregivers

- Emphasize skills rather than motivation
- Emphasize *when* (unmet expectations)
  - *De-emphasize behavior/diagnoses*
- Emphasize proactive intervention
- Emphasize non-punitive, non-adversarial, skill-building, collaborative interventions
- Send them to the Lives in the Balance website
Additional Information/Resources

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

www.cpsconnection.com
Advanced and certification trainings