LIVES in the BALANCE | Collaborative & Proactive Solutions
THIS IS HOW PROBLEMS GET SOLVED

Noncompliance is Good:

What Concerning Behavior Tells Us If We're Viewing It Through the Right Lenses



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Important Starting Concept

Developmental Variability:

- The natural differences in the timing, rate, and pathway of development across (and within) individuals…children do not reach milestones at the same time.
- Acknowledging and being attuned to that variation is essential for educators, parents, and clinicians to support diverse developmental trajectories.

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Important Definition

The definition of good teaching, good parenting, and good treatment is

meeting every child where they're at.

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Second Important Concept

Expectation Management:

Ensuring that the expectations we're placing on a child are within reach developmentally.

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Important Lenses

Kids do well if they can.

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Change in Practice #1

Focus on expectations rather than on behaviors.

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Change in Practice #1

Emphasis is on unsolved problems (and solving them) rather than on behaviors (and modifying them)…

- Concerning behavior is 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"
  - Good versus bad disproportionality
  - Caregivers take unsolved problems less personally than concerning behaviors
  - 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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Change in Practice #2

Solve problems collaboratively, not unilaterally.

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Change in Practice #2

Solve problems collaboratively, not unilaterally (Ask the kid):

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

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Change in Practice #3

Solve problems proactively, not reactively.

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Change in Practice #3

Solve problems proactively, not reactively (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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Paradigm Shift/Key Theme #4

Kids do well if they can

(not Kids do well if they wanna):

If the kid could do well, they would do well…
because **doing well is preferable**

These Characterizations are Inaccurate:

Attention-seeking
Manipulative
Coercive
Unmotivated
Limit-testing

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Limitations of Focusing on Behavior (and Modifying It)

- Rewards and punishments solve no problems.
- Rewards and punishments are distracting…they cause us to focus on frustration responses rather than the problems that are causing those responses.
- **You never find out what's getting in the way of a kid meeting a particular expectation.**
- There is significant disproportionality in the ways in which rewards and punishments are administered.
- There wouldn't be bad disproportionality if we weren't using punitive, exclusionary disciplinary procedures.

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Operationalizing Change



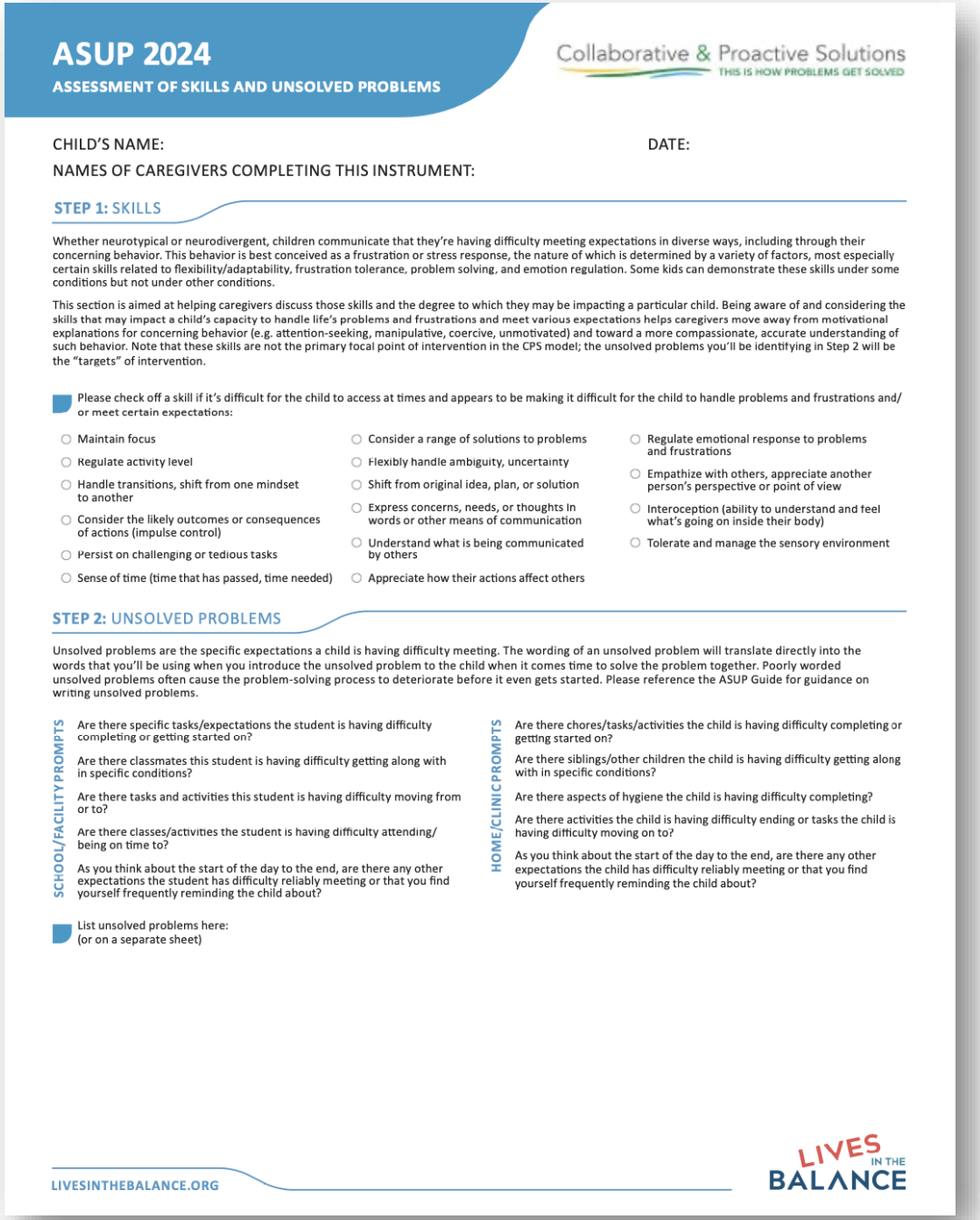
Identify skills and unsolved problems



Solve problems collaboratively and proactively

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Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems (ASUP 2024)



ASUP 2024

ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

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CHILD'S NAME: DATE:

NAMES OF CAREGIVERS COMPLETING THIS INSTRUMENT:

STEP 1: SKILLS

Whether neurotypical or neurodivergent, children communicate that they're having difficulty meeting expectations in diverse ways, including through their concerning behavior. This behavior is best conceived as a frustration or stress response, the nature of which is determined by a variety of factors, most especially certain skills related to flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation. Some kids can demonstrate these skills under some conditions but not under other conditions.

This section is aimed at helping caregivers discuss those skills and the degree to which they may be impacting a particular child. Being aware of and considering the skills that may impact a child's capacity to handle life's problems and frustrations and meet various expectations helps caregivers move away from motivational explanations for concerning behavior (e.g. attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, unmotivated) and toward a more compassionate, accurate understanding of such behavior. Note that these skills are not the primary focal point of intervention in the CPS model; the unsolved problems you'll be identifying in Step 2 will be the "targets" of intervention.

Please check off a skill if it's difficult for the child to access at times and appears to be making it difficult for the child to handle problems and frustrations and/or meet certain expectations:

- ○ Maintain focus
- ○ Regulate activity level
- ○ Handle transitions, shift from one mindset to another
- ○ Consider the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulse control)
- ○ Persist on challenging or tedious tasks
- ○ Sense of time (time that has passed, time needed)
- ○ Consider a range of solutions to problems
- ○ Flexibly handle ambiguity, uncertainty
- ○ Shift from original idea, plan, or solution
- ○ Express concerns, needs, or thoughts in words or other means of communication
- ○ Understand what is being communicated by others
- ○ Appreciate how their actions affect others
- ○ Regulate emotional response to problems and frustrations
- ○ Empathize with others, appreciate another person's perspective or point of view
- ○ Interoception (ability to understand and feel what's going on inside their body)
- ○ Tolerate and manage the sensory environment

STEP 2: UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Unsolved problems are the specific expectations a child is having difficulty meeting. The wording of an unsolved problem will translate directly into the words that you'll be using when you introduce the unsolved problem to the child when it comes time to solve the problem together. Poorly worded unsolved problems often cause the problem-solving process to deteriorate before it even gets started. Please reference the ASUP Guide for guidance on writing unsolved problems.

SCHOOL/FACILITY PROMPTS

Are there specific tasks/expectations the student is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there classmates this student is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

Are there tasks and activities this student is having difficulty moving from or to?

Are there classes/activities the student is having difficulty attending/being on time to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the student has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the child about?

HOME/CLINIC PROMPTS

Are there chores/tasks/activities the child is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there siblings/other children the child is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

Are there aspects of hygiene the child is having difficulty completing?

Are there activities the child is having difficulty ending or tasks the child is having difficulty moving on to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the child has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the child about?

List unsolved problems here:
(or on a separate sheet)

Options for Handling Unsolved Problems



Solve the problem unilaterally



Solve the problem collaboratively



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:** Taking a very close look at whether a child can meet the expectations being placed on them and removing expectations that are out of reach at this point in their development.
- **Stabilizing:** Unsolved problems that have been put on hold don't cause concerning behavior.

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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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Trauma Informed Practice

Values/Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice



Definitions

Safety	Trustworthiness	Choice	Collaboration	Empowerment
Ensuring physical and emotional safety for all. Generally involves protection of self or others.	Maximizing trust, ensuring clear expectations, and having consistent boundaries. Refers to transparency.	Making individual choice and control a priority. Refers to the right to self-determination and autonomy.	Sharing power and working together with individuals. The idea of working with, not doing to or for.	Involves the recognition of strengths and skills to build a realistic sense of hope and possibility.

Values/Principles in Practice

Safety	Trustworthiness	Choice	Collaboration	Empowerment
Create a welcoming environment **Embrace** diversity and inclusion **Give** consequences using supportive, non-confrontational language	**Provide** clear information about expectations **Inform** others of transitions ahead of time **Express** patience and acceptance	**Inform** others about options available to them **Balance** flexibility while defining parameters **Reflect** options regarding race, gender and culture	**Seek** ideas and feedback **Explore** others' circumstances from their perspective **Acknowledge** power dynamics	**Build** on strengths and capacities **Ensure** interactions are validating and affirming **Use** person-first and inclusive language

Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care (2021)
Informed by Fallot & Harris (2009) Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care

Additional Information/Resources

Visit us at:

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truecrisisprevention.org

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