

WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

This is when you address the unsolved problem **UNILATERALLY**. It's when parents take the wheel and expect their kids to be compliant passengers. For challenging kids, this response rarely, if ever, works. In fact, it often leads to further opposition for the child and increased frustration for the parent.

PLAN B
Solve the problem **COLLABORATIVELY**.
This happens in 3 steps:
EMPATHY: Gather information to identify the child's concerns.
DEFINE ADULT CONCERNS: Identify what the problem is from your perspective.
INVITATION: Collaborate on a solution that is mutually satisfactory.

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING METHOD

Challenging kids are lacking skills. Dr. Ross Greene's CPS program outlines 3 Plans for responding to lagging skills that result in *unsolved problems*.

PLAN A

This is when you address the unsolved problem **UNILATERALLY**. It's when parents take the wheel and expect their kids to be compliant passengers. For challenging kids, this response rarely, if ever, works. In fact, it often leads to further opposition for the child and increased frustration for the parent.

PLAN B

Solve the problem **COLLABORATIVELY**.
This happens in 3 steps:
EMPATHY: Gather information to identify the child's concerns.
DEFINE ADULT CONCERNS: Identify what the problem is from your perspective.
INVITATION: Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory.

PLAN C

This is when you **SET THE PROBLEM ASIDE** for now. It's not about "giving in" or endorsing the behaviour. It's about prioritizing problems; "picking your battles". Park the problem by agreeing not to address it at this time. This can also be used during emergencies when safety takes precedence.

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It is common for kids to lag in some area of skills development while being ahead of the curve in others. In particular, when we find that our children struggle with emotional rigidity, explosiveness, defiance, or a strong need for control, parenting can feel challenging. Dr. Ross Greene created an approach that helps families navigate raising fiercely independent kids who struggle with managing the intensity of their emotions. Originally referred to as the "Collaborative Problem Solving method" (now called the "Collaborative & Proactive Solutions" approach) seeks to provide the child with more opportunities for gaining a sense of control and input, while helping the parents experience more movement and success as they move past stuck points and overwhelming barriers towards getting along or working together.

Dr. Greene helps us understand when there is a developmental "lag" at play, helping us recognize the boundaries of what our child is currently capable of and where

growth can be fostered. He also helps define what he calls "unsolved problems," which essentially are the specific expectations our kids are struggling to meet, followed by figuring out the when and why behind them.

As Dr. Greene explains, "If challenging behaviour is set in motion by lagging skills and not lagging motivation, then it's easy to understand why rewarding and punishing a child may not make things better. Since challenging behaviour occurs in response to highly predictable unsolved problems, then the goal is to solve those problems." He lays out three plans for addressing unsolved problems; A, B, and C (see infographic on left). The most effective is plan B, inviting the child to participate in solving the problem and teaching the child important problem-solving skills.

Look at the three plans and find which ones you find yourself gravitating towards. Are there opportunities for you as caregivers or parents to explore ways of practicing your plan B approach more often? Note over time, if you find that your child becomes more capable of working with instead of against the grain. Perhaps in the process, you'll discover some lagging skills that need your support rather than your discipline to see growth and improvement. ●

RESOURCE LINKS:

[Raising Human Beings](#), by Dr. Ross Greene
[CPS Assessment & Planning Tool](#)
[Think Kids](#) resource for Parents on Collaborative Problem Solving
[Lost at School](#) resource
[Neurodiverse Families](#) video series

Karen Peters

