

Problem-Solving Resolution Process

*Jeffco Public Schools
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Colorado Wellness Center for Girls™

My name is Andrea Philleo - Founder and Executive Director of the Colorado Wellness Center for Girls and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in Colorado.

The Colorado Wellness Center for Girls is a wellness-based full day program for girls (ages 12-21) who are struggling with depression, anxiety, withdrawal, self-harm, suicidal ideation and the everyday challenges of adolescence.

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I'm hoping we can spend our time together providing you with very practical tools and information on how to really understand the signals (thru behavior) that our children are sending us.

Thank you to Jefferson County Public Schools for their ongoing efforts in bringing valuable information and resources to the community!

Beneath every behavior is a feeling. And beneath every feeling is a need.

And when we meet that need rather than focus on behavior, we begin to deal with the cause and not the symptom.

-Ashleigh Warner

www.cwcgirls.com

After 20+ years working as a social worker I would like to walk you through an integrated model of care that will help you engage with your child.

Our hope is to get to the source of the real issue versus trying to control behavior.

→ “My parents don’t listen.”

→ “My kids won’t talk to me.”

Concerning behavior is usually communicating two things:

1. there's an expectation the child is having difficulty meeting
2. is in need of a good working attachment to their parent

And that means that there's a problem that needs to be solved. In the Collaborative Problem Solving model, problem solving is **collaborative** and **proactive**. Equally important, it improves the relationship you have with your child.

To start let's talk about messages:

It's important to understand the main messages expressed through adolescent behavior.

- I want attention - positive and sometimes negative
- I need to belong
- I want independence
- I'm trying to figure out who I am
- I'm going to challenge my parents and authority
- I'm hurting
- I'm suffering
- I'm overwhelmed
- I want to take risks

Collaborative Problem Solving +

The CPS Model can help you:

- ❖ Teach you and your child/teen to find constructive solutions to problems
- ❖ Initiate positive conversations with your child when they're struggling
- ❖ Identify emotions
- ❖ Reframe your child's "behavior problem"
- ❖ Identify issues that may be unresolved that prevent family connections
- ❖ Help your child strengthen their undeveloped skills
- ❖ Come up with solutions that actually satisfy you and your child

Before We Start:

1. This is NOT a behavior modification system
2. This is a framework, not a blueprint, and requires detective work
3. It's going to be a trial and error process
4. It's collaborative (not unilateral)
5. BE PATIENT

*Kids WOULD do well if they COULD do well
(Your child would prefer to be doing well)*

Behavioral Conditions

Identifying and solving problems that are causing those behaviors

Conditions in which behaviors occur:

- ❖ Unmet Expectations
- ❖ Unsolved Problems (problems that have yet to be solved - waiting to be solved with our help)

Children can do well if we give them the tools

- ❖ Punishment equates to feelings of worthlessness, “I’m bad, lazy or dumb”.

THIS NOT ONLY DOESN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM - IT DOESN'T IDENTIFY IT EITHER

We may have temporarily extinguished the behavior but not for long because we didn't help them identify or resolve the underlying problem.

<https://livesinthebalance.org/walking-tour/>

#1

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Behavioral Conditions

Identifying and solving problems that are causing behaviors

Behavior:

- ❖ Behavior acts in response to a situation or stimulus
- ❖ It's the **SIGNAL** that they are having difficulty meeting an expectation (academic, sitting, following rules, , etc.)
 - It's a form of communication (like a fever)

What is the child trying to tell us?

- ❖ We need to figure it out by breaking the behavior code
- ❖ Ask ourselves and get curious on "Why is this occurring?"
- ❖ What are the conditions that are causing the problem?

Think of a “problem” you would like to work on with a child

THINK PROACTIVELY (99%)

- 1. What exactly are you trying to accomplish?**
- 2. What are you trying to do or get your child to do (or not to do)?**
- 3. Who needs to get involved? Are there other people that can support you?**
- 4. What issues are most pressing?**
- 5. Choose ONE and only ONE problem you would like to work on.**

What is the Collaborative Problem Solving Process?

It's a step by step approach in **identifying the behavior, sharing concerns** and **collaborating on a solution** that addresses the unmet expectations and lagging skills.

Steps:

1. Identify the expectation the child is having difficulty meeting
2. Be a Detective - Use this open ended question: "I've noticed you're having **difficulty** with **X**, **what's up?**"
3. Gather child's concerns, acknowledge what they've said and validate
4. Share your concerns
5. Invite them to brainstorm potential solutions

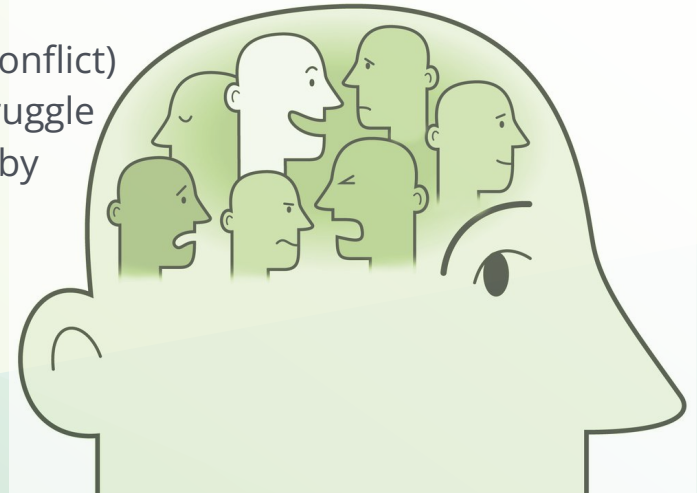
G A I Ls: How we can help ourselves

- ❖ Gremlins:
 - Your inner critic or fear you are not enough: It's that little voice inside your head that tells you plain and simple, "You are not good enough.... So don't even bother trying." This is the voice that keeps you safe & small... and stuck. Fear.
- ❖ Assumptions
 - Things from the past you bring to the present: Because something happened a particular way in the past, it will happen again. Fear.
- ❖ Interpretations
 - An opinion or judgement that you create about an event, situation, person or experience and believe it to be true. You believe your child is X. (unmotivated)
- ❖ Limiting Beliefs
 - Something that you accept about life, about yourself, about your career, about your world, or about the people in it, that limits you in some way. My child does not respect me or I've gotten frustrated before so I don't want to try again. My child loves his father/mother more.

Critical Moment Dialogue

In critical moments, we want to be our best self.

- ❖ This Requires:
 - Getting grounded
 - Looking at our own triggers
 - Observing ourselves
 - Making a shift that allows for connection (vs. conflict)
 - Remember we are not getting into a power struggle (no one is trying to win) Things do not change by force or pure will.



Show Empathy

- ❖ Your job is to demonstrate that you're really interested in and curious about your child's concerns.
- ❖ Why? Because kids are our best source of information and we're trying to foster CONNECTION, TRUST and SECURE ATTACHMENT.
- ❖ Think about when you allow yourself to open up. What does the other person do? When do you trust? When are your defenses down?
- ❖ If they feel blocked from telling you, we will have a harder time identifying the unresolved problem.

“Listen with the intent to understand. Not the intent to reply.”

-Stephan Covey

Why and When are kids challenging?

- ❖ **Why are challenging kids challenging?**
 - Lacking the skills to not be challenging
- ❖ **When are challenging kids challenging?**
 - When expectations outstrip skills (we all look bad when this happens)
 - Most expectations are set by adults AND some kids set their own expectations

The Importance: It's ok to have expectations, as long as we help them meet them

Why we should Collaboratively Problem Solve

WALKING TOUR - LIVES IN THE BALANCE

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Please take out a blank sheet of paper and think about your concern. I would like you to practice as we go along.

There should be 4 sections

Section One: I've noticed your having difficulty with X, what's up?

Section Two: Your child's concerns

Section Three: Your concerns (equally valid)

Section Four: Agreed upon solutions to the problem

PLAN B CHEAT SHEET Collaborative & Proactive Solutions

Step 1 - Empathy Step/Child's Perspective

- ❖ Reflective listening and clarifying questions, who, what, where and when
- ❖ What are they thinking in the midst of the unresolved problem
- ❖ Not immediately trying to **extinguish behavior** - were trying to get to the bottom of it.

Example: I noticed you're having difficulty helping clean up after dinner, what's up?

Notice there is no judgement in this question. It is open-ended and does not make any assumptions about WHY they are having difficulty. Neutral observation.

Child's Concerns, Acknowledge and Validate

- ❖ Allow the child space and time to put their thoughts into words
- ❖ Listen for key concerns
- ❖ Acknowledge what their saying by paraphrasing their concerns and repeating it back to them
 - “So to clarify, you’re having difficulty meeting X because by the time dinner is over, you’ve woken up early, gone to school, went to soccer practice and you haven’t had any time to yourself and that’s a time when your friends are free to talk. Did I get that right?”
- ❖ Validate them: “That makes total sense and I can see why this has been such a struggle for you to meet this expectation.”
- ❖ Is there anything I missed?

What we've learned...

- ❖ Tired, no time for themselves, their friends are online when they are being asked to clean up (we probably did not know any of this information beforehand)
- ❖ We're not asking them what they need - that question is more likely to prompt them to offer a solution rather than a concern... we're not there yet.
- ❖ Ask if they have any other concerns?
- ❖ Summarize

Step 2: Define the Problem/Concerns of Adult

I've noticed you're having difficulty helping clean up after dinner, what's up?

- ❖ Get curious on what it is they are really struggling with
- ❖ Stay open minded
- ❖ Remove judgment and allow them to show you their perspective
- ❖ Don't rush

Adult Concerns

- ❖ Share with them why this expectation is in place and the importance of meeting it (Remember, you have prepared for this)
- ❖ “The thing is...” or “My concern is....”
- ❖ Get your concerns out on the table
- ❖ Explain to your child why you have this concern or expectation

Most Adult Concerns fall into two categories:

- How the problem is affecting the child
- How the problem is affecting others

Step 3: Invitation Step to Brainstorm Potential Solutions

- ❖ Invite them to help you brainstorm ideas on a potential solution
- ❖ Stick as closely to the concern that was identified in the first 2 steps
- ❖ Give them some time and encourage their ideas to be put into play
- ❖ Start to narrow it down to just one solution to try
- ❖ Once you have one solution, COMMIT!
- ❖ During this step, you can identify potential barriers and how to hold each other accountable
- ❖ Write it down and keep it handy.
- ❖ Hold your ground. Sometimes we operate out of fear or frustration. Changes take time and new patterns take time to take hold. We don't transform overnight.

Possibility #1: Your child has opened up and you have come to mutual problem solving ideas

Great!

Thank you child for engaging in the process.

Ask them how they felt.

The BIGGEST thing you can do for your kids is to keep an open, trusted connection with them.

There are no obstacles just challenges that can be worked out.

Think big and start small.

Remember, your child is not done yet, so don't confuse the phase with the child!

Possibility #2: Child says “I don’t know”

- ❖ Check your tone and wording: maybe they feel Judged, accused of something or they think their in trouble?
- ❖ Split the problem into parts
- ❖ Check your timing: Advance notice is helpful
- ❖ Child really doesn’t know what their concern is. Maybe they’ve never thought about it.
- ❖ Might be reluctant to say what’s on their mind: they had a bad history with expressing a concern
- ❖ Try and suspend your emotional reaction as much as possible
- ❖ Get comfortable with silence, may child needs more time to think
- ❖ Ask them “let’s think about it.” What do you know about this kid? **It’s O.K. to take an educated guess at what their concerns are.**

Possibility #3: “I don’t have a problem with that”

- ❖ Keep drilling and asking questions.
- ❖ Chances are the concern lies within the **conflict** it’s creating (constant nagging, fighting, “I can never do anything right”)
- ❖ Maybe it’s causing them to feel embarrassed or ashamed

Possibility #4: “I don’t want to talk about it right now”

- ❖ Fortunately, they don’t have to talk about it right now and it’s a good idea to let them know that.
 - Many kids start talking the minute they have permission NOT to talk.
- ❖ Can ask: Why don’t you think you want to talk about it?
 - A lot of kids talk about WHY they don’t want to talk about something, which is very informative in its own right.

**Then, after they’re through talking about that, they’re comfortable enough to start talking about what they didn’t want to talk about in the first place.

- ❖ Ask if you can come back to it later? Set a time and place.

Possibility #5: “I don’t have to talk to you”

- ❖ Let’s think about why a kid would become defensive in response to adult requests for information on a particular unresolved problem.

Remember: Beneath every behavior is a feeling. And beneath every feeling is a need.

- ❖ We’re trying to break the pattern of non-communication
 - Your best approach to defensive statements is not reciprocal defensiveness or threats of consequence but honesty.
 - “Your right, you don’t have to talk to me”
 - “Your right, I can’t make you talk”
- ❖ This reassurance shows that you are just trying to understand.

Rewards

- ❖ Most tangible rewards don't last. The effect wears off.

“The best that carrots — or sticks — can do is change people’s behavior temporarily. They can never create a lasting commitment to an action or a value, and often they have exactly the opposite effect...”

- Alfie Kohn

Use kindness

Give them a hug

Verbal recognition that is strength-based

Send them a text

- ❖ It's not about what we **did** for them (feeding into temporary satisfaction)
- ❖ It's about the way we make them feel! (mostly understood)

Identifying with your child's identity outside their diagnosis

If you can, try and address your child without talking about their diagnosis or their struggle with depression or anxiety.

Some anxiety is healthy and normal. How we handle and manage anxiety is key versus attempting to never be anxious.

Right now, we are living in a culture where these struggles are flooding their lives.

Don't associate all of their behavior with their diagnosis.

Try not to parent out of fear. Anxiety breeds more anxiety especially in families. You can express your concerns without overwhelming your child with your fears. This can translate into more anxiety for your child as now they have to worry about the effect on you as well.

Kids need to know we can handle it, that we are capable of handling what they dish out. Our stability and perspective on things is critical.

So now you have your plan.

Work the plan as best as possible. Remember, it may not stick the first time. Change takes time and is an adjustment to a new way of doing things.

If your child continues to struggle, you may need to continue onto the next step which is identifying lagging skills. We did not have time to do this but is an important step if your child needs more support.

However, thru this process you should have been able to identify the unsolved problem and found acceptable solutions to try at home.

Remember, kids most valuable memory is that you stuck with them. That you remained present during the storm and displayed consistent, loving effort. That they were **WORTH IT.**

Things to know.

It's really important to have this written down. You may need to modify the solutions you have come up with.

One of the things I've noticed about kids is that they feel bad for feeling bad or acting badly. They do not want to disappoint you. They are lacking the ability (unresolved problems).

They really do want to be close to you.

When your kid has swayed so far from themselves, it is time to get help.

If your child is self-harming or talking about suicide, get help immediately.

Try to re-frame your ideas about your kid. They are almost always really good people who are stuck.

Invoke Conscious Parenting. Do the work on yourself. Our kids really want us to be happy and can believe they are the cause of our unhappiness.

Unplug and connect with your kid.

They have much growing to do. Every stage of development has it's high and lows.

“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

- Michael Jordan

How to calm an angry person in 90 seconds or less

1. Everything starts in the brain: we are emotional beings, most of our reactions are based on emotions (some capacity for reasoning and rational). Kids don't have as much free will as we think they do (or hope they do)
2. How to listen ---listen for emotion and reflect on that emotion (Affect labeling: listening for emotional experience by ignoring the words and guessing at the emotions)

For example: You seem **angry**, frustrated, **afraid**, annoyed, etc.

3. Lending them our prefrontal cortex (decision making capacity)
4. Affect labeling is a powerful form of empathetic listening
5. If you are in a safe place, try not to tell them to calm down.
6. Don't try and jump in and fix it. This can lead to emotional invalidation.
7. Take your ego out of it (this is usually not about you)
8. Reflect back what your child says. "You feel angry because your friend excluded you at school today".
9. VALIDATE. VALIDATE. VALIDATE. Whatever it is, is a big deal to them.

Colorado Wellness Center for Girls

Our secondary mission is to provide informative trainings to help teachers, social workers, counselors and parents better support our children. These trainings are FREE to the community and focus on addressing mental health needs including identifying depression and anxiety, supporting kids who are struggling and further details regarding the collaborative problem process.

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720-925-5824 or visit our website at www.cwgirls.com

Thank you for your time and dedication to helping address the epidemic of mental health struggles in our community!

The work of Ross Greene

Website: Lives in the Balance

Book: Raising Human Beings: Creating A Collaborative Partnership with Your Child

Facebook: Lives in the Balance

*Jeffco Public Schools and the Colorado Wellness Center for
Girls - November 16, 2021*

Question and Answer Session