



collaboration  
is everything

# Parenting, Teaching and Treating Kids with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges

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“The only prerequisite is an open mind.”  
-The Explosive Child

# Why Collaborative Problem Solving?



- Compassionate
- Evidence Based
  - Relationally enhancing
  - Builds skills
- Biologically informed
- Trauma informed
- Does “No Harm”

# A Helping Relationship



**Regardless of therapeutic modality, the best predictor of success in helping people is the relationship between care-giver and client.**

- Helping is messy and takes time
- Helping is a *working alliance*
- Helping is a two-way *collaborative process*
- Helping is not something that helpers do *to* kids
- Helping is a process where care-givers and kids work through challenges *together*

# Parenting, Teaching and Treating Kids with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges

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

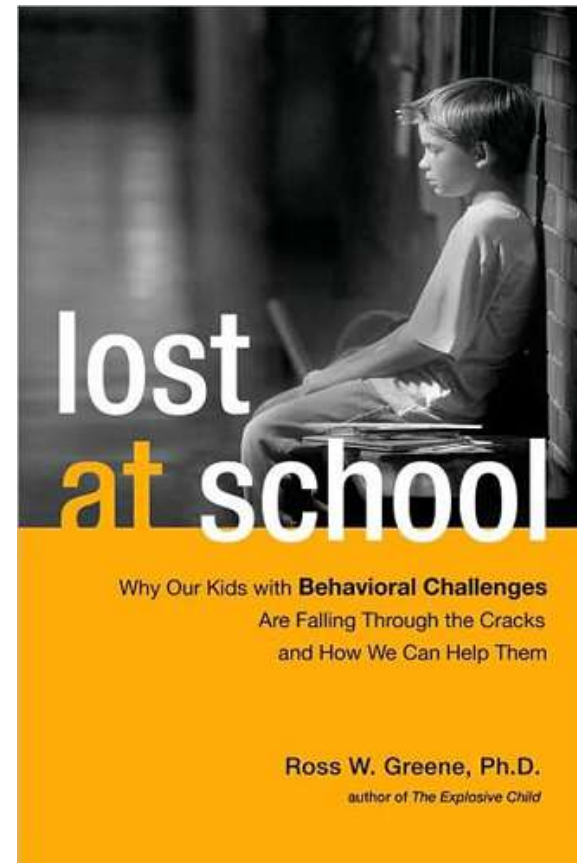


# The Collaborative Problem Solving Approach

Ross Greene Ph.D.

## Books:

- Lost at School
- The Explosive Child
- Treating Explosive Kids (Greene/Ablon)



**Children do well if they can...**

.

**Children do well if they can...**

*...if they can't, we adults need to figure out what's getting in the way, so we can help.*



***Your explanation guides your  
intervention...***

# **Your explanation guides your intervention...**

How you respond to the behavior  
depends on what you think is  
causing it.

# Traditional Thinking: “Children do well if they want to”



Due to non-contingent, inconsistent, passive parenting/supervision, the child has learned that explosive and noncompliant behavior is an effective means of seeking attention, avoiding certain tasks or coercing adults into “giving in.”

## **Logical Intervention:**

Motivate more compliant behavior through the use of intensive, consistent programs of rewards, punishments, and ignoring.

# Operant Strategies have Limits!

Operant strategies  
can :

- teach basic lessons
- facilitate extrinsic motivation



# Limits of Operant Strategies

- Highly likely that the child already knows the basic lessons and is aware of the consequences for this behavior. Reward and punishment programs can teach basic lessons, but weren't ever intended to teach complicated skills.
- The more extrinsic motivation is applied, the less intrinsic motivation the child develops
- It is highly likely that the child is *already* motivated (not to be miserable). "MAP"
- Motivational programs make the possible more possible, but they don't make the impossible possible

# Operant Strategies

- This works...for the majority of adults and kids in our society. Not as well matched for many of the kids we see.
- When kids do not respond to these interventions:

**Kids get labeled and blamed.**  
**Parents get labeled and blamed.**



(sigh) you're not  
flapping hard  
enough.

I'm trying  
to fly  
dad!

Penguins



A pair of hands is shown holding a lit candle. The candle is white and has a bright yellow flame. The hands are positioned around the candle, with fingers visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only  
light can do that.**

**Hatred cannot drive out hatred; only love  
can do that.**

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**



"Never ever think outside the box."

# Unconventional Wisdom: It's a Learning Disability

- Research in neuroscience has shown that challenging kids are delayed in the development of crucial cognitive skills including flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving
- (Or)
- The child/person has the skills, but has significant difficulty applying these skills when they are needed the most

A close-up photograph of a green leaf, showing a detailed network of veins. The veins are a lighter shade of green, creating a complex, branching pattern against the darker green background of the leaf. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture and structure of the leaf's surface.

**“Skill not Will”**

# New Wisdom Intervention

- Treat challenging behavior like you would any other learning disability
- Identify the lagging skills contributing to the maladaptive behavior and teach them (collaboratively).
- Identify the problems which precipitate maladaptive behavior (antecedents).
- Use different approach to teach them in increments the kid can handle(**basketball**)
- Work collaboratively (together)

# Disabilities: A Comparison

## Learning Disability in Math

- Assume the student wants to do well but lacks the skills to learn the math in the same way as others.
- Provide specially designed instruction.
- Provide supportive accommodations (more time, extra help, etc.)
- Track progress in math skills.

## Emotional Disturbance

- Assume the child learned the behavior and chooses it willingly.
- Punish the child when she displays behaviors.
- Provide incentives to motivate the child.
- Track failures and misbehaviors.

# Collaborative Problem Solving Model Overview

- Because this model views challenging behavior as the byproduct of a learning disability of sorts, the emphasis is on the child's lagging skills rather than on his behavior.
  - What's going on in this kid's head that we wish wasn't?
  - What isn't going on in this kid's head that we wish was?

## **Goals of Intervention:**

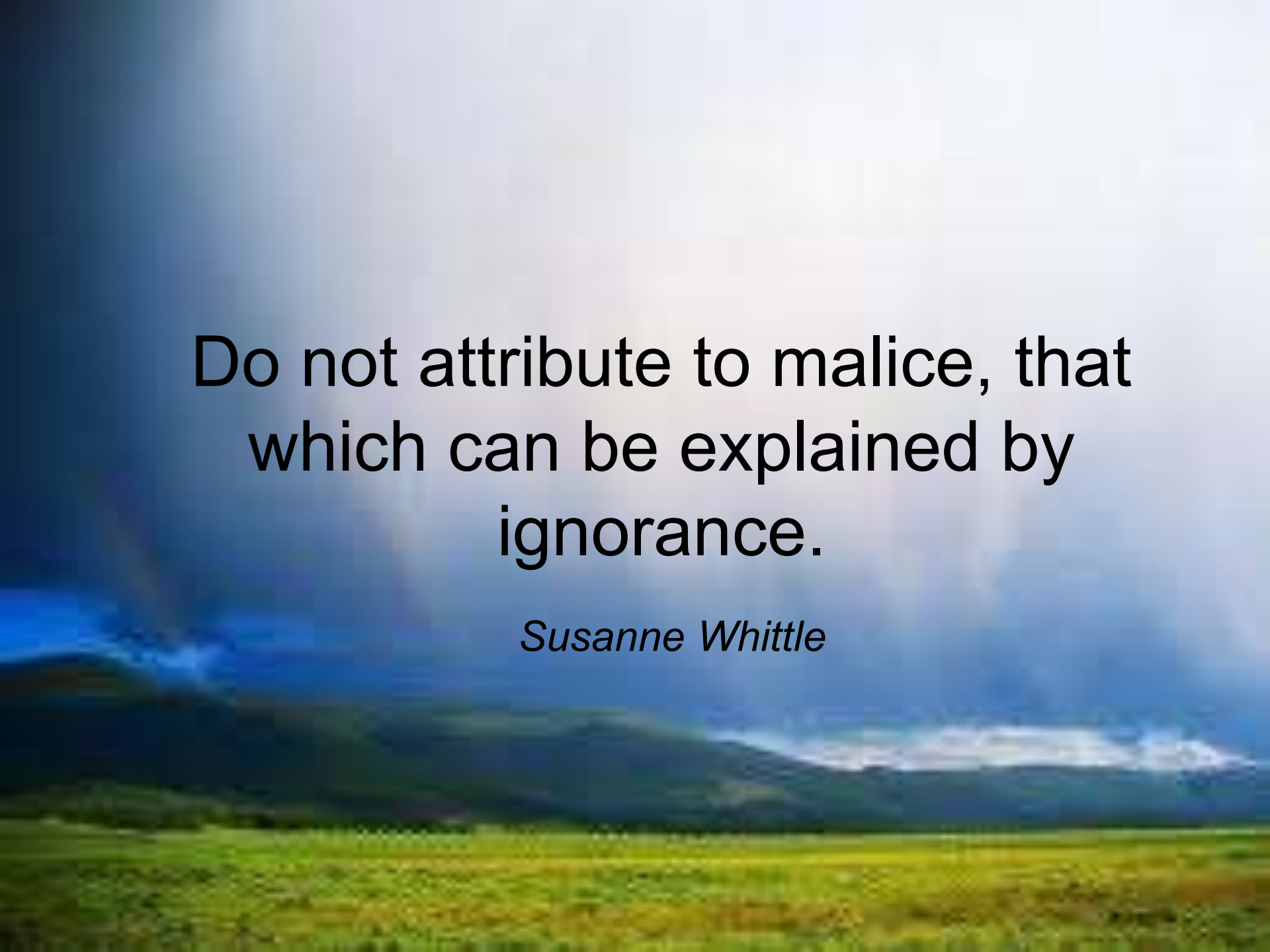
Teach lacking thinking skills and solve problems *with* child rather than simply motivate him to change.

# Challenging Behavior

- Occurs when a demand being placed upon a person outstrip the person's capacity(skills) to respond in an adaptive manner







Do not attribute to malice, that  
which can be explained by  
ignorance.

*Susanne Whittle*

# Goals of Intervention

- Pursue unmet expectations
- Create or restore a helping relationship
- Identify and teach lagging thinking skills
- Durably and collaboratively solve problems
- Reduce challenging behavior

# CPS Treatment Ingredients

- 1. Assessment: identify the specific problems and lagging thinking skills precipitating the challenging behavior**
2. Planning: Know your options for responding to these problems and what each option accomplishes
3. Intervention: Solve problems while building skills, confidence, and relationships

# Research on Lagging Skills

- **Executive Skills**
- **Language processing skills**
- **Emotion regulation skills**
- **Cognitive flexibility skills**
- **Social skills**

The hand you've been dealt!

# Thinking Skills Inventory (TSI)

This is a list of the basic skills that most of us have, and most of use, most of the time. They help us meet the expectations of everyday life with relative calm.

The kids we are talking about, either do not have these skills at or can't access them when they need them most.

# Why the Emphasis on Skills?

Focusing on the lagging skills helps adults get on the same page to:

- understand that a child's maladaptive behavior is a form of learning disability and not intentional, goal-oriented, manipulative, or attention-seeking
- identify specific skills that need to be trained
- understand why incentive programs haven't made things better – and won't
- understand why they need a different approach



# How did the kid get this way?

- What's the cause of lagging skills?  
Nature? Nurture? Yes, but it doesn't matter!

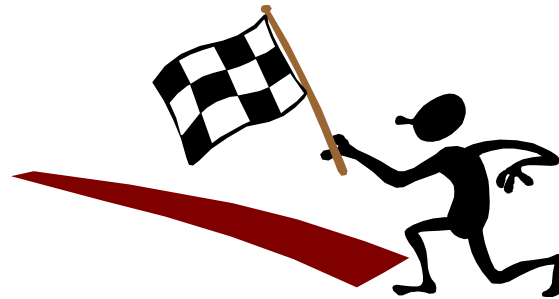


- What does matter is what skills the child lacks and how we can help him/her develop them



# Explanation Litmus Test

- Do we know what we're working on?
- In six months, we hope s/he will be better at....



# Assessment:

## Skills to be trained and Problems to be Solved

**Goal of assessment is to create two lists:**

**1. A list of *problems to be solved***

- **The more specific the problem to be solved the easier it will be to:**
  - Hypothesize about which lagging skills might explain the problem
  - Start a problem solving discussion

**2. A list of *skills to be trained***

- **Don't obsess. Just hypothesize for now to promote a more compassionate, helpful view**

# It Takes Two to Tango: Problems to be Solved

- **Before intervening, you need one more crucial type of information: the situations in which the child tends to have the most difficulty (also known as the precipitants, antecedents, contexts, demands, expectations, setting events, triggers or *problems you want to solve*)**
  - **Examples at home: *homework, screen time, diet, getting up in the morning, bedtime, curfew, sibling interactions etc.***
  - **Examples at school: *circle time, recess, gym, lunch, riding on the bus, getting down to work, staying on task, writing, etc.***

# It Takes Two to Tango: Problems to be Solved

- **What's the difference between a *problem to be solved* and a *skills deficit*?**
  - A problem to be solved is the demand placed upon a child that they have difficulty handling (e.g., *homework, getting down to work after lunch, etc.*)
  - A skills deficit is the reason *why* the child has difficulty handling the demand (e.g., *difficulty handling transitions, difficulty doing things in a logical sequence, etc.*)

# What's the Difference?

	Problems	Skills
<b>What are they?</b>	Antecedents, precipitants, triggers, problems you want to solve	The culprits causing the problems
<b>How do you assess them?</b>	Situational analysis: who, what, when, and where (the more specific the better)	Hypothesizing using the Thinking Skills Inventory (the why)
<b>Why?</b>	Starting point for collaborative problem solving	Fosters understanding and compassion (the shift in thinking)

# Assessing Skills and Problems to be Solved

## Assessment tools to help gather clues:

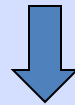
- Thinking Skills Inventory
- Situational Analysis
- Formal Testing (sometimes)
- School and Classroom Data
- File Review
- Interviews with Family and Others
- Team Meetings, the more the better!
- Plan B(Still to come)



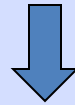
# Assessment

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Behavior



Problem to be Solved



Skills to be Developed

# Lagging Skills and Problems to be Solved

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*“Behind every challenging behavior is either an unsolved problem or a lagging skill”(or BOTH)*





# Dead End Explanations

**He has bipolar disorder.**

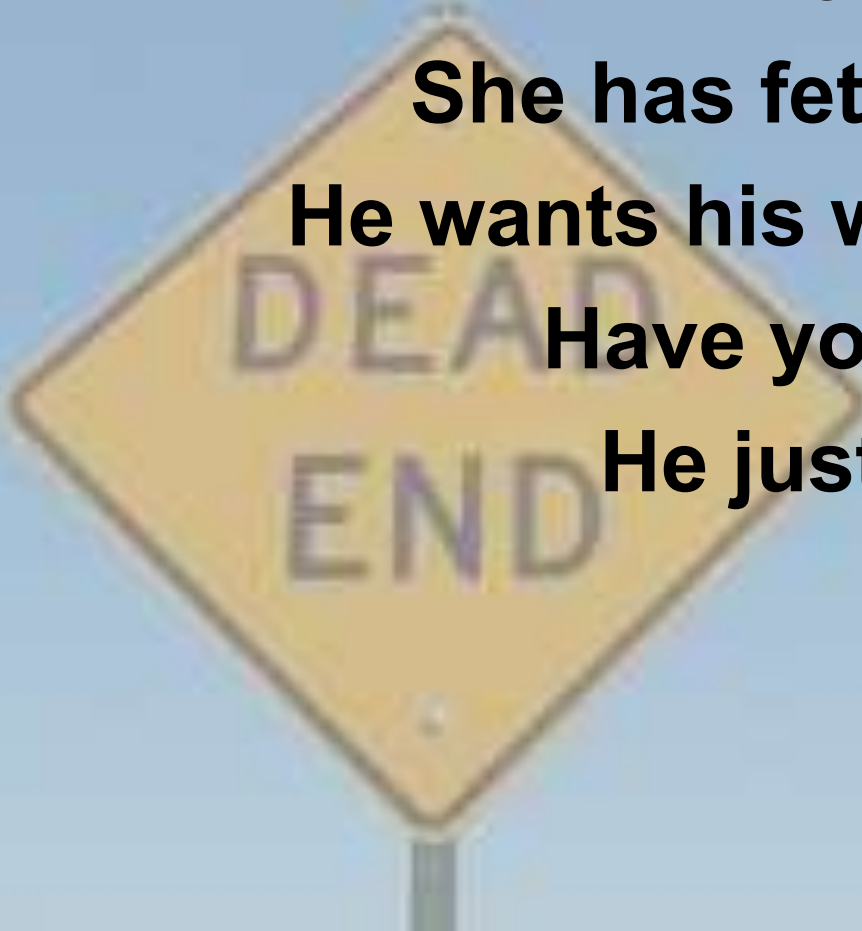
**She has fetal alcohol syndrome.**

**He wants his way/attention/control.**

**Have you met the parents??!**

**He just makes bad choices.**

**She is off her meds.**



While a diagnosis (or multiple diagnoses) may be helpful in terms of prescribing medication and describing behavioral traits... they do not really tell us what to do in order to help the child learn skills that will help him / her manage difficult behaviors.

We see that lagging skills are do not exist in isolation and pertinence only to a specific diagnostic group. We see a co-morbidity in that many clients who are referred for ODD, also meet criteria for Anxiety D/O, etc..

# Thich Nhat Hanh

Shallow understanding accompanies poor compassion; great understanding goes with great compassion.



Book: The Sun My Heart

# Think:Kids

RETHINKING CHALLENGING KIDS

When adults  
rethink  
challenging kids,  
amazing things  
can happen.



*Visit us  
at...*

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

# References

## Books

Treating Explosive Kids (Greene and J. Stuart Ablon)

Lost at School (Ross Greene)

The Explosive Child (Ross Greene)

Born for Love (Bruce Perry)

Relaxation Revolution (Herbert Benson)

The Sun My Heart (Tich Nhat Hanh)



# Resources

For excellent videos, tools, social networking and Thinking Skills Inventory, visit:

- [www.thinkkids.org](http://www.thinkkids.org) (resources)
- [www.mythinkkids.org](http://www.mythinkkids.org) (social networking)
- [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org) (resources)
- [www.childtraumaacademy.org](http://www.childtraumaacademy.org) (articles services)
- <http://www.mgh.harvard.edu/bhi/> (Benson-Henry Institute)