

**Collaborative Problem Solving for Inflexible Explosive Children
(Part I)**

This tip sheet introduces Dr. Ross Greene's work. For more information see the references at the end.

"Children do well if they can!! If they can't, we adults need to figure out why, so we can help!" This is a favorite quote of Ross Greene, Ph.D. He feels people need to figure out what each child needs to succeed. Every child responds to different approaches. Learning to be responsive to the hand you've been dealt is how he explains the strategy called Collaborative Problem Solving that he has been using with kids in his practice. Inflexible explosive children come in all shapes and sizes and bring varying diagnoses with them. Examples are Tourette's, Nonverbal Learning Disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Asperger's, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Mood Disorders, Reactive Attachment Disorders, Fetal Alcohol Disorder and more. The diagnosis is less important than determining the skills the child is lacking.

An explosive outburst occurs from children when the demands being placed upon them outstrip their capacity to respond appropriately. This is when a child can "blow." That is why it is important to teach children the skills they are lacking. Some children "lose" it at school while others "lose" it at home. Some swear or scream when frustrated while others lash out physically. Learning what triggers a child is another important tool.

Logical Intervention- If you teach children the skills of flexibility, frustration tolerance and problem solving, in turn you will reduce the likelihood of explosive outbursts. Part of this process is to maintain adults as authority figures. An authority figure is someone who understands the child's problem and tries to help fix it. In the Collaborative Problem Solving model (CPS) explosive / non compliant behavior is viewed as a learning disability with emphasis on teaching lagging thinking skills and solving problems vs. adults imposing their will upon children. Give kids incentives to comply with adults and involve them in resolving the conflict in a collaborative way.

These are the skills to look at:

Executive Skills - reflect the ability to shift from one mindset to another when the environment demands it. It's inefficiency in shifting gears causes problems for kids.

-Organization / planning are crucial to one's ability to define problems, consider possible solutions, and anticipate likely outcomes. If a child says he doesn't know what the problem is, **believe him**. He probably doesn't know! When a child is impulsive, good solutions don't usually come quick enough to him or her!!

-When a child says "**NO**" this really means he needs more time to shift gears. Give him 30-60 seconds. Teach him to say, "Give me a minute". Children are constantly being asked to switch gears at home and at school. Let school know this is how your child's thinking process works.

Language processing skills - reflect the ability to label and categorize emotions. Children lack the words to share how they feel when speaking with adults. Teach kids these feeling words. Children also need to learn how to file and organize their thoughts in their brain so they can pull up an appropriate response to a given situation. Kids with language processing issues have difficulty problem solving a given situation. Teach them responses to use so when they get in a certain situation they'll be able to find a more appropriate response.

Emotion regulation skills - reflect the ability to separate one's emotional response to a problem from the thinking one must perform in order to resolve the problem. Chronic irritability and anxiety in a child may be the by-product of chronic "problems that have yet to be solved." For example, for a child who is bullied and teased in school, helping the child solve the problems of teasing or bullying makes sense.

Cognitive flexibility skills - children needing cognitive flexibility are often called concrete, literal, "black and white" thinkers. These kids have difficulty focusing on the "big picture". They have difficulty handling the "gray" situations in the world such as problem solving, social skills and unclear and unpredictable situations. They are very detail oriented in their work and oftentimes it is difficult to get them to share ideas. They have cognitive distortions with their thinking (i.e. "I'm stupid," "Nobody likes me," "You always blame me," "It's not fair," and "People are out to get me.") "Gray" thinking develops over time with most kids. Kids with extreme cognitive deficits may never develop the ability to think well in the "gray."

Social skills - often involve poor perspective taking and appreciation of how one's behavior is affecting other people; poor appreciation of how one is coming across; poor appreciation of social nuances; or poor social repertoire (starting conversations and entering groups)

How do you make things better? First you the caregiver and perhaps a therapist will need to determine what skills are lacking in the child. This will help you figure out why a child is behaving inappropriately. Kids with social, emotional and behavioral challenges will not necessarily have deficits in all these areas.

In **PART 2** of the Collaborative Problem Solving Approach, which we will share next month, the Pathways Inventory will be presented and explained. The Pathways Inventory is a tool to help you determine the areas your child is most lacking. Triggers (actions that come before a certain behavior) will also be explained and learning how to approach situations using the Collaborative Problem Solving Approach.

Information for this tip sheet was obtained from the Center For Collaborative Problem Solving, www.ceps.info. Also, from Ross Greene and Stuart Ablon's books: *Treating Explosive Kids - The Collaborative Problem Solving Approach* and *The Explosive Child*. Both books are available through the Maine Kids-Kin library.



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