Rethinking Challenging Kids

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Kids do well if they can...

Your understanding of a problem determines your solution ...

Conventional Wisdom
The most common over-simplified understanding:

Because of poor (passive, permissive, inconsistent) parenting, kids learn to use challenging behavior to get things (e.g., attention) or escape/avoid things (e.g., work).

Logical Solution
The most common over-simplified solution:

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

What Consequences Do and Don’t

DO: Teach basic lessons & provide outward motivation

DON’T: Teach complex thinking skills, build relationships, help kids stay regulated
**Side Effects of Rewards and Punishments**

- Tangible rewards = less inner motivation
- Telling a child they aren’t trying hard enough when, in fact, the difficulties relate to lagging skills, negatively impacts the child’s feelings about themselves and you

**Why Traditional Discipline Doesn’t Work with our Most Challenging Kids:**

Conventional wisdom is wrong!
Challenging kids lack skill not will

**Unconventional Wisdom: It’s a Learning Disability**

- Research in neurosciences has shown these kids are delayed in the development of crucial skills or have significant difficulty applying these skills when they are most needed

**Unconventional Wisdom: It’s a Learning Disability**

Which skills do these kids lack?
- flexibility/adaptability
- frustration tolerance
- problem-solving

**Why the Lagging Skills?**

Chronic, overwhelming stress and trauma arrests brain development which manifests itself as lagging skills

[Imagery of normal vs. deprived brains]

**Logical Intervention**

Treat challenging behavior like you would any other learning disability:
- Assess which skills are lagging
- Use a different approach to teach those skills in increments the kid can handle
The Definition of Discipline is?

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TO TEACH!

Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)
Provides a common philosophy, language, and replicable structure with clear guideposts for adults to:
• Maintain authority and compliance via collaboration rather than power and control
• Help youth (and adults!) build skills
• Build a helping relationship

Philosophy
Kids do well if they can

Assessment

Adaptive Behavior
Trigger or Expectation
Sufficient Skill
Lagging Skill
Challenging Behavior
Assessing Thinking Skills

*Explaining is not excusing!*

Research on Skills Deficits

Challenging behavior is linked with deficits in the following areas of neuro-cognitive skill:
- Language and communication skills
- Attention and working memory skills
- Emotion and self-regulation skills
- Cognitive flexibility skills
- Social thinking skills

Goals of Intervention

1. Pursue high priority expectations
2. Reduce challenging behavior
3. Solve chronic problems durably
4. Build skills
5. Create (or restore) a helping relationship

Goals Achieved by the Three Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>PLAN A</th>
<th>PLAN B</th>
<th>PLAN C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try to get your expectation met</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce challenging behavior</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build skills, confidence</td>
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<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solve problems</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build relationship</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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Planning

(Your Three Options for responding to Triggers/Unmet Expectations)

Plan A: Impose adult will

Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively

Plan C: Drop it (for now, at least)

Fostering Internal Drive

- What motivates us internally? What fosters “grit?”
  - Mastery / competence
  - Autonomy / choice (vs. imposition, feeling controlled)
  - Passion / purpose
  - Relatedness / empathy
What Fosters Internal Drive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
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<th>PLAN C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
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Intervention:
Plan B Ingredients

1. EMPATHIZE: Clarify child concern
2. SHARE adult concern
3. COLLABORATE: Brainstorm, assess and choose solution

Skills Taught while Problem Solving

- Collaborative Problem Solving is skills training!
- Skills are modeled, practiced and developed through experiential learning and a relational process
- The entire process naturally trains organized, reflective, flexible thinking and problem solving

The Neurobiologic Sequence of Plan B

Research Summary

All known published and unpublished studies of child and caregiver outcomes:

- Inpatient:
  - duration of restrictive interventions (includes restraint, short holds, and seclusions)
  - disruptive behavior (e.g., symptoms of ODD and ADHD)
  - parent stress
  - parent-child relationship

- Outpatient:
  - disruptive interventions
  - aggression
  - social skills and community participation
  - parent stress

- Residential:
  - disruptive interventions
  - aggression
  - social skills and community participation

- Juv. Detention:
  - disruptive interventions
  - aggression
  - social skills and community participation
  - parent stress

- Schools:
  - disruptive interventions
  - aggression
  - social skills and community participation
  - parent stress

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