

Module 1 Transcript

Reducing Reliance on Crisis Management Practices in Massachusetts' Schools. Module 1: An Overview.

[Brian, Special Education Teacher, Vermont] So when I first started teaching in special education, I was trained in restraint and seclusion with little training on how to use any other methods, very little how to not get in a heightened escalated state in the first place. And so right out of college, my first job's restraint and seclusion was normal to me, and it was part of the job. And I used it way more than I would like. I never liked to use it. However, I didn't know there were other methods out there.

[Jody, Special Education Teacher, Georgia] I just thought that was my use for a while in residential facilities and the behavior programs is, you know, they're going to call you on the radio, you got to run and you're going to have to hold a kid. You don't even get a chance to talk to them. You don't know what's happening. And I mean, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of restraints and to be able to say, that's not even something we need to do, I think was huge.

[Justin, SEL Coach, Connecticut] You know, when you arrive at work, you shouldn't be worried about your safety. You shouldn't be worried about having to, you know, restrain or seclude a student.

[Amy, Director of Special Services, Maine] Restraints and seclusions are not therapeutic. In fact, I'm always concerned that when students are involved in restraints and seclusions in our school that they're experiencing a traumatic event.

[Brian] If you're still using restraint and seclusion, I would have to say that's not trauma-informed. You're inadvertently inflicting further trauma on the students or the children.

[Amy] The last kid that you want to use a restraint or a seclusion on is a student who's experienced trauma in their life. And those are the kids that are most likely to be restrained or secluded.

[Lindsey, School Psychologist, Massachusetts] The most heartbreaking thing to see is students who have been on the receiving end of a lot of those restrictive interventions saying things like, I'm a bad kid, I'm stupid, I hate my life, I hate myself. And just what it really does to their self-esteem is really heartbreaking. And just knowing that no educator sets out to have that impact on kids, but it can just come when we don't know a better way of helping that student.

[Stephanie, Director of Education, Connecticut] Crisis can be avoided if you're really kind of looking at the right thing. And I think schools spend a lot of time looking at the wrong thing and then just continuing to do more of the same.

[Brian] So over time, when I was using restraint and seclusion, I started to realize how traumatizing it was for the students, but I also started to realize how traumatizing it was for me. And so I made a personal decision to use it less and try to not use it at all. And what I found was that I was building better relationships with students. Students trusted me more and we weren't, you know, my students and myself weren't being put in positions where restraint and seclusion was even remotely required.

[Zachary, Lead BCBA, Massachusetts] I think the most important change that's necessary for schools to reduce their reliance on seclusion and physical management is better staff training on supportive, proactive, social-emotional interventions that allow students to feel heard and supported and met where they're at with instructional programming that helps to build their skills.

[Stephanie] I think what gives me hope for other schools out there is that we've seen how powerful even an initial mindset shift can be. And just talking about behavior differently led to a dramatic reduction in our rates of restraint and seclusion by nearly 90%.

I'm Dr. Ross Greene, clinical psychologist and founder of the nonprofit Lives in the Balance. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, we've created three video modules to help you and your school reduce reliance on seclusion and other reactive crisis management practices. That's something we've helped schools, prisons, residential facilities, and inpatient psychiatric units accomplish all over the world.

Because this is work we do every day, we know that the kids are hard and the work is hard. That's why some educators working with our most difficult students believe that crisis management practices are just part of the job. We don't agree.

Being in the heat of the moment is not a given, even with our most challenging students. There are many schools and treatment facilities that work with equally challenging students that are not using restraint and seclusion. So the fact that the kids are difficult doesn't automatically mean you're going to be in crisis management mode. The fact that the kids are difficult should be a primary motivation for being in crisis prevention mode. Now the hard part is how you may have been trained, me too, and some of the structures you inherited in your school that may be pointing you away from preventing crises and toward managing them. Those are things we can do something about.

We know that educators can be stressed and burned out and have had more initiatives thrown at them than any other profession. So we wouldn't blame you for thinking "here comes another one". But we also know that no educator would ever want to harm a student, and that no educator shows up at school eager to de-escalate, restrain, or seclude a student. Reducing reliance on those practices is something all of us working with kids can get behind, both for you and the kids.

In this first module we're providing you with an overview of the general game plan for helping you get there. In the second module we'll be going into much greater detail around some of the specifics of the model I'll be describing. It's called Collaborative and Proactive Solutions, or CPS, and I first described it in my book *The Explosive Child* way back in 1998. In the third module, we're going to get into the weeds on implementation.

The CPS model represents a departure from business as usual, so it does require that we examine existing structures and practices to facilitate implementation of the model. So why is it important to dramatically reduce or eliminate the use of crisis management practices? You might be thinking that the answer is fairly obvious, but we don't want to take anything for granted.

First and foremost, the rationale for using such practices is that they improve safety for staff and kids. There are no data to support this belief. None. In fact, the data that exists suggest the exact opposite. Close to a hundred kids have died in the US over the past three decades while being restrained or secluded. That's not safer. While death is the most extreme potential outcome of such practices, it doesn't take into account the well-documented trauma and physical injuries that occur to both kids and adults when such practices are used.

Second, many staff have been led to believe that de-escalating, restraining, and secluding are crisis prevention practices. They are not. As you'll see during this module, those practices occur very late in a highly predictable sequence that begins with an expectation a student is having difficulty meeting.

Third, crisis management procedures are not best practice for kids or educators. Best practice means being early, getting in front of things rather than reacting to them.

So as you know, Massachusetts is committed to reducing reliance on crisis management practices. Though that's a change for many educators, and change can be stressful, it's a step in the right direction. But it doesn't mean finding alternative crisis management practices. It means creating the mentalities and structures that virtually eliminate the need for crisis management practices in the first place.

[Jody] I've seen adults who are used to just doing only seclusion, and when they're told that they can't do it or they can't restrain, they don't have any other tools to use, not like those were good tools at all anyhow.

[Stephanie] I think staff have responded really well to wanting to move away from restrictive interventions I think the concern I hear really more is staff are just worried, right, they want to keep everybody safe, and if they're having fewer restrictive interventions available to them, what does that look like? It's natural, I think, for people to wonder, you know, what do I do?

[Lindsey] Staff really want another way of doing things and they understand the need. I think challenging and concerning behavior is one of the most stressful parts of being a teacher right

now. So we know that there's something different that we need to be doing. They care deeply about students, and they know that restrictive interventions are not making things better.

[Dr. Ross Greene] So now let's think about things we can change to reduce reliance on crisis management practices. Let's start by defining some very important terms. This is the beginning of the beginning.

Let's start with timing. I'm going to be distinguishing between early and late. Any intervention that's late is crisis management. Any intervention that is early is crisis prevention. True crisis prevention takes place way before a kid starts becoming escalated, way before a kid exhibits a concerning behavior. This is confusing for people, because a lot of us were trained to believe that crisis prevention begins with de-escalating. By the time you're de-escalating a kid, you're very late. By the time you're placing a kid in a seclusion or using a restraint, you're later still.

Let's define what we mean by concerning behavior. Concerning behavior is a frustration or distress response. It tells you that a student is having difficulty meeting a particular expectation. Frustration responses can be lucky or unlucky. Lucky frustration responses include whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying. Unlucky frustration responses include screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, biting, throwing, destroying, and running. All those frustration responses, whether lucky or unlucky, are communicating the exact same thing. There's an expectation a student is having difficulty meeting. But it's the kids with unlucky frustration responses who are at greatest risk for crisis management practices.

For a long time, we've been focused on modifying concerning behavior, modifying frustration responses. We do that through what are called contingent consequences in the form of level systems, token systems, points, stickers, punishments, all aimed at giving kids the incentive to behave appropriately. The fact that behavior is a frustration response tells you it's late. The kid is already frustrated.

A lot of structures in schools are focused on concerning behavior. They point us toward being late, and not just seclusion, de-escalating, and restraint, but also detention, suspension, and expulsion. It's a lot more productive to focus on what's causing a student's frustration or distress response in the first place. And I mentioned it a moment ago, it's the expectations they're having difficulty meeting. We call those expectations unsolved problems.

Now, what are we talking about here? Any expectation that a kid is having difficulty reliably meeting, even if they can meet the expectation sometimes and not others, is an unsolved problem. A problem waiting to be solved: Difficulty completing the double-digit division problems on the worksheet in math. Difficulty sitting next to Susie during circle time. Difficulty agreeing with Billy on the rules of the four-square game at recess. Difficulty getting started on the lab reports in science. Difficulty getting started on the social studies project on Ponce de Leon. I could go on forever. Most of the expectations that are causing frustration responses in schools can be traced back in one way or another to academics.

The rest are social expectations that students are having difficulty reliably meeting. Those are problems we could be busy proactively identifying and solving. And the beauty of that is that solved problems don't cause concerning behavior. Only unsolved problems do.

Here's a graphic to show you what I'm talking about [graphic on screen titled: Sequence of De-escalation, Restraint, and Seclusion].

What you're seeing on this graphic are five bubbles in a declining sequence. That's actually symbolic. In green, everything that's early [text in green box: Expectation student is having difficulty meeting]. True, crisis prevention.

In red, everything that's late. Crisis management [text in four descending red boxes: 1. Adult pushes student to meet expectation, 2. Child communicates that they are having difficulty meeting the expectation (concerning behavior), 3. Adults try to de-escalate child, 4. Child is restrained or secluded].

You don't want to be late. You want to be early. You don't want to be in crisis management mode. You want to be in crisis prevention mode. So what's early? Well, the green bubble is what's early. That's where we are proactively identifying a student's unsolved problems. I'll be teaching you how soon. And we're proactively doing one of two things with those unsolved problems. We're going to be proactively solving some of them. You'll learn about that soon too. Or, because there's going to be a lot of them when we're first identifying them, we're going to proactively put some of them on hold, at least for now. That's what's going on in the green bubble.

That's what we're going to help you do. That may not be what you're doing now. In a lot of schools, the prototypical first adult response to an expectation a student is having difficulty meeting is to insist harder. Red bubble number one. Push harder. Apparently, this is founded on the belief that pushing kids harder to meet expectations we already know they can't reliably meet, elicits better performance.

Now, generally speaking, especially in the case of kids with unlucky frustration responses, if you push those kids harder to meet expectations you already know they can't reliably meet, you're not going to elicit better performance. You're going to elicit red bubble number two, concerning behavior. Concerning behavior that tells you something you already knew. The kid is having difficulty meeting that expectation.

I want to point out something very important here. Notice the concerning behavior is late. The frustration response, by definition, is late. The unsolved problem that caused it, that already happened. If the concerning behavior is late, then interventions that are focused on modifying concerning behavior are interventions that are focused on what's late.

If the kid's frustration response is unlucky, what are we adults going to do next? Well, based on our crisis prevention, but really crisis management training, we're going to conclude that the kid

is becoming escalated. And what do you do when you think a kid is becoming escalated? You de-escalate them. Red bubble number three. You are now very late. And if you're very late, you cannot possibly be in crisis prevention mode. You're in crisis management mode.

When our de-escalation efforts don't get the job done, and they frequently don't because they're late, what do we do next? We place the kid in seclusion. We restrain the kid. You are now very, very late. And if you are now very, very late, you cannot possibly be in crisis prevention mode. You're in crisis management mode.

A long time ago, 47 years ago, you would have found yours truly working in an inpatient psychiatry unit. It was an adolescent unit. The majority of the kids were bigger than me. Back then, my job title was psychiatric technician, which is a fancy way of saying lowest man on the totem pole. I know a lot of paraprofessionals and ed techs who feel the same way.

Yes, it's us psychiatric technicians, paraprofessionals and ed techs who are often on the hook for jumping into action when, well now there's the word that's the dead giveaway when as in what should we do *when*. *When* tells you you're in crisis management mode I don't want to talk to you about what you're going to do *when*, you already know what you can do *when*, I want to make sure you're good at what to do *before* so you don't find yourself in the *when* territories. *When* a kid began to escalate, I and my psychiatric technician colleagues would either pin the kid to the ground in a restraint or drag the kid into a locked-door seclusion room, all for purposes of calming the kid down.

This was a formative experience for me because I noticed that whether you're locked in a seclusion room or have four adults sitting on top of you, generally speaking, most kids aren't gonna calm down. I'd leave my shift for the day, dust myself off thinking I had done my job well. Then when I'd walk on to the unit for my shift the next day, I'd discover that all of the unsolved problems that caused the kid to spin out of control the day before were still there, waiting for me when I showed up for my shift the next day.

That's because late interventions, whether it's consequences, which by definition are late, or timeouts, or de-escalating, or restraining, or secluding, or detention, suspension, or expulsion, none of those can be expected to solve any of the problems that are causing a kid's frustration response in the first place.

We have got to get you out of crisis management mode. Nothing good happens when you're managing crises.

First, we need to help you recognize that a lot of what's being sold as crisis prevention isn't. Here's another term we need to define. Developmental variability [text on screen: Developmental Variability: every kid is different and has a different developmental trajectory.]. Why do we need to define that term? Because it's what's walking in your door. What's guaranteed to be walking into every school classroom is developmental variability. That means every kid is different. Every kid has a different developmental trajectory. If every kid is different,

then the expectations we're placing on kids should be different. I don't hear people talking about developmental variability very often in schools, given that that's what's walking in the door. It's one of the things we should mostly be talking about.

Here's another definition. Our definition of good teaching is meeting every kid where they're at [text on screen: Good teaching: meeting every student where they're at]. I don't think any educators would argue with that. Most educators would tell me that's hard to do, but that's what differentiated instruction is about. That's what personalized learning is about. That's what special education law is about. So while meeting every kid where they're at is not easy to do, it's a lot easier than not meeting every kid where they're at.

Another term, expectation management. This is huge. [text on screen: Expectation management: giving deliberate thought to whether the expectations we're placing on a student are in range developmentally]. Expectation management means that we need to make sure the expectations we're placing on a student are within reach for that student developmentally, based on their individual developmental trajectory.

How do you know a kid can meet an expectation? That's a judgment call, but I have a simple and imperfect algorithm to help you out. If a kid can meet an expectation, sometimes I think you're safe in concluding that it's in range. Now, just because it's in range doesn't mean they can meet it reliably, but it's in range. If a kid is never meeting a particular expectation, I think you're safe in concluding that it's out of range at this point in that kid's development.

Does that mean you're selling the kid short? No. It means you're meeting that kid where they're at. Does it mean they'll never meet that expectation? No. It means the kid is not going to be meeting that expectation right now.

All right. There's our definitions. Those definitions are going to propel us into what I cover next. But here's a quick summary. If you want to be early instead of late, If you want to be in crisis prevention mode rather than crisis management mode, first, you're going to want to focus on unsolved problems, unmet expectations, rather than on the behaviors being caused by them.

You're going to want to be focused on solving those problems rather than modifying the behavior. Again, solved problems don't cause concerning behavior. Only unsolved problems do.

Third, you're going to want to identify and solve those problems proactively. Once again, I'm going to show you how shortly. This is made possible by the fact that unsolved problems are actually predictable. This isn't the first time Tom has had difficulty completing the double-digit division problems on the worksheet in math. It's the 197th time. It's what we would call an old unsolved problem. And most unsolved problems are old. Their expectations, kids have been having difficulty meeting for a very long time. If there's anything good about them being old, it's that they can be identified proactively, and therefore they can be solved proactively.

Fourth, and we haven't covered this yet, you're going to want to solve those problems collaboratively, rather than unilaterally. We adults have been trained to divine what's getting in a kid's way, and to divine what the solution should be. That's not what we're going to be teaching you how to do. In this model the kid is an integral, indispensable part of the problem-solving process. Even kids you think aren't going to talk to you. Even kids who are non- or minimally-speaking. So the problem-solving is something you're doing with a kid rather than to a kid. Now that's a very big switch for us adults, especially if we were trained to believe that there is a strategy, a support, an accommodation, or an adaptation that will address every difficulty a student encounters.

I'd rather say that there is a solution for every difficulty a student encounters, and you don't have to divine the solution. It's one you'll be working toward in concert with the student.

Now you probably already have some questions, and you're going to have a lot more about what you're learning in this module. I wish I could take your questions right now, but that's not the design of this format. We still want to make sure they all get answered.

In this module, I'm going to be describing the basic game plan in modules two and three we're going to get your questions answered and talk more about how to implement what you're learning in your setting.

[Stephanie] I would say that our staff have really embraced this model and I think what's helped with that is just shifting the conversation, right, so like from what do we do when a student is in crisis to what can we do to prevent the crisis from occurring in the first place. Rather than asking, you know, how do we get this kid to comply? Like, how do we get them to do what we're asking them to do? It's really asking, like, what's getting in the way of them doing it? This isn't a kid being defined. It really changes our response from managing a behavior to understanding and supporting the student, because that's ultimately going to lead to better outcomes for everybody, right? For the teacher and the student.

[Jody] Not getting into discussions with behavior at first seemed impossible because, I mean, we're a PBIS school, we're a behavior program, and now we're telling folks who we've trained on behavior not to focus on behavior because it's late. We thought we were being proactive by doing a functional behavior assessment. But if you're focused on the behavior, you're late because you're just focused on a signal, a frustration response. And I mean, at first that was a pretty big pill to swallow.

[Stephanie] I think schools sometimes find themselves intervening later rather than early because the systems are created that way. The barrier isn't a lack of caring. I think there are plenty of schools filled with staff and educators that care really deeply about supporting students, but these are schools that are also investing a lot of resources into crisis response. So, you know, what CPS has made me think about is that when we create systems around responding to crisis, we can unintentionally come to view crises as inevitable. So we plan, you know, schools are planning a great deal of time, spending a great deal of time planning on what

to do when a student is escalated. But less time building structures to identify and solve problems that are causing the escalation in the first place.

[Dr. Ross Greene] Let me tell you about the two ingredients that are going to help you accomplish the four goals you saw on the last slide [shown on screen as Two Key Components]. The first ingredient is to get good at identifying a student's skills and unsolved problems. The second ingredient is to get good at solving problems collaboratively and proactively.

Why is it important to identify skills and unsolved problems? Because that's what's going to make intervention proactive rather than reactive. That's what's going to get you out of the heat of the moment.

Why is it important to identify skills? Because that's what's going to help us adults view these kids who are struggling through much more compassionate, accurate, and productive lenses. They're not lacking motivation. They're struggling with certain skills. Skills that are critical for helping them respond adaptively to problems and frustrations. Skills that the research that has accumulated over the last 40 to 50 years tells us kids with concerning behaviors tend to struggle with. Skills like flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation.

And why are we going to be identifying unsolved problems? Because if we do not identify unsolved problems proactively, we will not solve them proactively, and we will always find ourselves in the heat of the moment, dealing yet again with a student's concerning behavior.

Why are we solving problems collaboratively and proactively? Because that's what's going to create a problem-solving partnership between you and your students. This is not adversarial. This is not enemies. That's what's going to engage kids in solving the problems that are affecting their lives. I'm always asking, why would you want to leave the kid out of the loop on that? That's what's going to help kids and adults come up with solutions that tend to be a whole lot more effective and a whole lot more durable because we adults aren't flying solo anymore.

And as the icing on the cake, when you're solving problems collaboratively and proactively with kids, you're not just solving problems, which is a big deal all by itself. You're not just improving their behavior, also a big deal. You're improving communication. You're improving your relationship with the kid.

But the process of solving problems collaboratively and proactively is also going to enhance the skills these kids are struggling with. You may not need a separate skill enhancement curriculum. The skills are going to be enhanced by engaging kids in the process of solving problems collaboratively and proactively.

[Document on screen] What you're looking at now is the assessment of skills and unsolved problems, or what we call the ASUP. This is the 2024 rendition of the ASUP. I'm going to tell you a little bit about it. I'm going to teach you a little bit about how to use it.

What you're looking at here in the top section is skills [image of Step 1: Skills section on screen]. And what you're seeing is that we've moved beyond those four global skills I referenced a few minutes ago, flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance, problem solving, and emotion regulation. We've moved on to 16 more specific skills that are derived from those global skills. And even that is not even remotely an exhaustive list of skills. If we had tried to be exhaustive about all the skills the research tells us, kids with concerning behaviors are struggling with, there are hundreds, and the ASUP would be five or six pages long. But we don't need five or six pages of skills to accomplish the mission of the skills section. The mission of the skills section is to help adults get the right lenses on. The kid is struggling with skills. They are not lacking motivation.

The bottom section, unsolved problems, is where we are going to be writing in, or better yet, typing in [image of Step 2: Unsolved Problems section on screen]. The ASUP is available in an editable, fillable format, so that you can type instead of write, and save and share electronically. That's what we're going to be writing in or typing in every single expectation this student is having difficulty meeting across the course of the school day. And there are going to be a lot of them.

Now, a long list of unsolved problems can be very overwhelming once we caregivers finally get around to identifying them. I think you just did this kid the favor of a lifetime [text on screen: You can find the ASUP in the CPS Implementation Guide]. I think you just did you the favor of a lifetime. You just helped everybody who's working with this kid move beyond the kid's frustration responses to the problems that are causing them. What a favor. No one did it before you.

By identifying those unsolved problems, you are now very well positioned to start solving them. And because you identified them proactively, you can solve them proactively.

Now, I do get some very interesting reactions when school staff are staring for the first time at this very long list of unsolved problems. By the way, it took a long time for that pile to accumulate. Of course it's long. The kid's been struggling for a long time.

Here are some of those interesting reactions. Wow, we didn't realize there were so many. Good, now we realize there are so many. If I had this many unsolved problems and I knew I was going to get hit with them when I showed up at school, I don't think I'd show up. Some don't. I don't think I'd get out of bed. Some don't. Here's a huge one. Can this kid actually meet all of these expectations? Apparently not. If they could, they would. Huge question. If we already know the kid can't meet that expectation, then why are we putting that expectation on that kid? All we're doing is causing frustration responses, and all that goes along with those frustration responses, including all those crisis management practices we talked about earlier. Why would we do that?

That's not best practice for kids. That's not best practice for educators. That's not best practice for anyone.

Finally, the kids got like 40 different unsolved problems. We just identified them. They can't all be of equal importance, right? Right. And that's going to help us prioritize, because we're not going to be able to solve all those unsolved problems at once. We're never going to be working on more than three at any point in time. And the truth is, we're not going to have to solve all 40 or 50, because some are going to solve by solving others. If this kid has 40 or 50 different unsolved problems, I'm guessing you're going to end up solving eight, ten, because some are going to solve by solving others.

A few other tidbits about the ASUP. It's intended to be used as a discussion guide in a meeting. We call it an ASUP meeting. It is not a freestanding checklist. It's not a rating scale. We're not looking to compare this kid's skills and unsolved problems to other kids of the same age or grade. No, the kid is their own reference point. We're meeting every student where they're at.

If you work in a general education school, do you need an ASUP on every kid in the building? Absolutely not. You need an ASUP on the five, ten, 15 kids in your building who are struggling the most, getting in trouble the most, accessing the school discipline program the most. The kids were in the midst of losing. You already know who they are. Those are the kids who need an ASUP, ASAP.

If you work in a special purpose school, you probably need an ASUP on every kid in the building. The reason they're in your building is because no one did an ASUP yet, and probably because they have unlucky frustration responses. The ASUP is huge. That's how we're going to help you get in front of all those unsolved problems that have been causing frustration responses in some of your students. It's how we're going to help everybody get shared, compassionate, accurate, productive lenses on. It's going to help us be early, not late. It's going to help us reduce our use of crisis management procedures.

The ASUP is very different from a lot of the assessment procedures that are used in schools. Procedures that cause us to focus on behavior instead of the problems that are causing it, and therefore procedures that point us toward behavior modification rather than problem-solving, toward being late rather than early.

I get a lot of wow moments during ASUP meetings when people say, so you're saying this kid only gets upset when these unsolved problems pop up? That's right. And you're saying these unsolved problems don't pop up- we know they're coming. That's right. Any unsolved problem you've written in on the assessment of skills and unsolved problems is by definition predictable, or you wouldn't have been able to write it down.

And you're saying that if we solve these problems with the kid, the kid won't get upset over them anymore? That's right. And you're saying we don't have to wait until the problem pops up yet again before we solve it, we can solve it proactively. Correct.

This explains why in an ASUP meeting that I was participating in just last week, after only 15 minutes, an elementary school teacher said, this is completely changing my view about this student, about how I've been treating this student. This is a game changer.

[Lindsey] Always in the forefront of my mind is just how burnt out teachers are and one of the beautiful things that I've seen this model be able to do is really reduce a lot of stress for teachers in the classroom. When teachers learn this new way of thinking about behavior you see their stress decrease so much because they no longer are taking these behaviors personally and they're no longer feeling like they need to control this kid and they need to prevent you know things in the moment they truly understand that okay the behavior is just the kid struggling and then compassion kind of replaces that frustration

[Stephanie] So ultimately our goal is really to build a culture where the focus is really on prevention rather than reaction and the more we can understand why students are struggling, the more we can address those challenges.

[Dr. Ross Greene] You're going to have to prioritize those unsolved problems because you're not going to be able to solve them all at once. You'll prioritize the unsolved problems that are causing safety issues those are your top priority. Safety is a big deal.

If you don't have safety issues, you're either going to go with frequency, the unsolved problems that are occurring the most, or gravity, the unsolved problems that are having the greatest negative impact on this kid's life or the lives of others.

And you'll be keeping track using the second sheet of the CPS model. It's called the Problem Solving Plan [Image on screen of The Problem Solving Plan]. It too is available in an editable, fillable format, and, like the Assessment of Skills and Unsolved Problems. It too, is free.

We've got one more thing to talk about before we're done with this module. How are we going to handle those unsolved problems? I've always said that there are three ways to handle an unsolved problem. I've always called them Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C [Image on screen titled: Options for Handling Unsolved Problems. Plan A: Solve the problem unilaterally. Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively. Plan C: Put the expectation on hold for now].

What I've done here is I've taken the many different ways in which adults handle problems with kids and reduced them to three basic options, A, B, C. It provides a very nice shorthand for thinking about how we are currently handling a particular problem and for considering whether we might want to handle it differently.

Notice these plans only apply to unsolved problems. If a student is meeting an expectation, you don't need one of these plans. It's not an unsolved problem. If a kid is coming to school on time and as well and as often as you'd like them to, you don't need a plan. It's not an unsolved problem. It's a met expectation. If the student is completing their homework as well and as often as you'd like them to, you don't need a plan. It's not an unsolved problem. It's a met expectation.

If the student is completing the double-digit division problems on the worksheet in math as well and as often as you'd like them to, you don't need a plan. It's not an unsolved problem. It's a met expectation. But if there's any expectation a student is having difficulty reliably meeting, you need a plan, and you have three options. Plan A, Plan B, Plan C.

Plan A is where you're solving the problem unilaterally. That's where the adult decides what's getting in the way for the kid, and the adult decides what the solution is. Once again, we divine it. We impose those solutions on the kid, often with a sprinkling of adult-imposed consequences just to sweeten the deal, you're almost never using Plan A when you're implementing this model. Not because you're allergic to it, but because you don't need it anymore.

You've got Plan B. Plan B is where you're solving the problem collaboratively instead of unilaterally. We're going to go into some detail about that momentarily.

Plan C is where you are putting a particular expectation on hold, at least for now. Why would you do that? I can think of three reasons [Image on screen titled: Plan C Put the Expectation on Hold for Now]. One, you can't solve everything at once. If you try to solve everything at once, you'll end up solving nothing at all. So one reason you'd use Plan C is prioritizing [text on screen: Prioritizing/Triaging: You can't solve everything at once.].

Another reason you'd use Plan C is something you've heard about already. Expectation management. You don't want to be putting expectations on a kid that you already know they can't reliably meet. That's just going to cause concerning behavior and, as I've already said, all that goes along with it [text on screen: Expectation management: Taking a very close look at whether a child can meet the expectations being placed on them and removing expectations that are out of reach at this point in their development].

And finally, stabilizing. There are some kids in our schools who are so unstable, so reactive, so volatile, that they're not well positioned to meet almost any expectations right now. [text on screen: Stabilizing: Unsolved problems that have been put on hold don't cause concerning behavior. *Stabilization comes before education*]. I'm glad they're still coming to school, but Plan C for those students means putting almost everything on hold while we're busy about the task of stabilizing the student. Making contact with outside mental health professionals if they're involved, making contact with whoever's doing the prescribing if medication is involved, working with parents, doing whatever we need to do to get this kid back up on their feet so we can slowly start adding expectations back into the mix again. It makes no sense to destabilize a student even further by putting expectations on them that you already know they can't meet. Should schools be in the position of stabilizing kids? If that's what's walking in the door, if you can keep the kid in their home school, you want to do that.

Finally, Plan B. Once again, that's where you're solving the problem collaboratively. Solving a problem collaboratively involves three steps. They are called the Empathy Step, the Define Adult Concerns Step, and the Invitation Step [Image on screen titled: Plan B Solve the Problem Collaboratively].

What's going on in the Empathy Step? As you would imagine, given what you've heard already, that's where we are gathering information from the kid about what's making it hard for them to meet a particular expectation [Text on screen: 1. Empathy Step: Gather information from the child about what's hard about meeting the expectation]. I'm always telling people, be prepared for surprises in the Empathy Step when you discover that what you thought was getting in the kid's way is not what's getting in the kid's way.

[Jody] One of the most aggressive kids I've ever met was doing a program called iReady. And anytime we were doing iReady, there would be a fight. And she would hurt folks. I just ask her, I get to the point really quick. I say, hey, what's happening at this time? And she says, well, it's time to do iReady reading, and I can't read because I don't have my glasses. And I go, wait, you have glasses? She goes, well, we can't have them anymore. We can't afford them. I broke mine, and it's been like two years, and I didn't even know she needed glasses. But there was just a long silence because I never would have got to that information with an FBA.

[Dr. Ross Greene] The Define Adult Concern step is where the adult is entering their concern into consideration. Their concern is the answer to the question, why is it important that the expectation be met? [Text on screen: 2. Define Adult Concerns Step: Identify adult concerns].

Then comes the Invitation step. The kid and caregiver are collaborating, putting their heads together, on a solution that will address the concerns of both parties [Text on screen: 3. Invitation Step: Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory]. Here's what I've been saying a lot lately, and experience bears me out on it. If a solution is not realistic and mutually satisfactory, I promise you this problem is still unsolved.

Solutions arrived at through the use of Plan A can't be mutually satisfactory, because we never heard the kid's concerns, and we didn't work with the kid on a solution that would address the concerns of both parties. That's why Plan A not only causes a lot of concerning behavior, but also doesn't solve problems durably.

[Amy] We are working with the students to help figure out why they're not meeting the expectations and then making a plan with them that will work for that student to help them achieve the expectation that we're placing on them.

[Dr. Ross Greene] If that sounds far-fetched, I get it. When you're stuck in a cycle of managing crises, it's hard to imagine getting out of that cycle. But that is exactly what we're going to help you do. Whether you're a school administrator, a superintendent, a special ed director, a classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, an ed tech, a specialist. Whether your school is doing a lot of crisis management or almost none at all, these modules should help you move in a different, more compassionate, more productive direction.

[Jody] And of course, you know, we had folks who said this can't be done, this is ridiculous. And so when we said the difference is we're going to talk to kids about the problems they have and

the reasons why what's making it hard for them to meet their expectations, people laughed. But then we started doing it and we started realizing we were wrong about all of our assumptions.

[Justin] I consider myself a veteran in special education at this point. Again, I've worked through so many different models and I've been in so many different classrooms that, you know, just the shift in mindset partnered with, you know, the idea that I can actually listen to the student because they do understand themselves more than I could ever. And, you know, learning how to give them space, learning how to make a plan together, I think is, it's been invaluable for me.

[Amy] Now that my mindset has shifted, it's hard to, it's really hard to think about approaching things the way that we used to approach them.

[Closing text on screen: Lives in the Balance logo, livesinthebalance.org]