

Section 1: Analysis & Insights

Executive Summary

Thesis

Children who exhibit explosive, inflexible, or chronically frustrated behaviors are not choosing defiance or manipulation—they lack crucial cognitive skills in flexibility, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving. The foundational principle “kids do well if they can” reframes concerning behaviors as communication signals indicating that specific expectations exceed the child’s current adaptive capacity. When children cannot meet expectations, explosive behaviors emerge not from unwillingness but from skill deficits in executive functioning, language processing, emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, or social skills.

Unique Contribution

Greene revolutionizes behavioral intervention by dismantling the dominant paradigm of consequence-based discipline (rewards and punishments) and replacing it with the Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) model. Rather than attempting to modify behavior through external motivators, CPS identifies the specific lagging skills preventing adaptive responses and the precise unsolved problems triggering concerning behaviors. The approach then addresses root causes through structured collaboration with the child, teaching skills through the problem-solving process itself. This represents a fundamental shift from:

- Behavioral symptoms to underlying skill deficits
- Reactive crisis management to proactive problem prevention
- Unilateral adult solutions to co-created partnerships
- Motivation-based explanations to capability-based understanding
- Generic interventions to precision-targeted problem-solving

The ALSUP (Assessment of Lagging Skills & Unsolved Problems) instrument provides diagnostic clarity that traditional behavioral assessments lack, transforming vague frustration into specific, actionable intervention targets. The three-plan framework (Plans A, B, and C) offers decision architecture for every expectation, eliminating the false binary of “enforce or surrender.”

Target Outcome

Transform adversarial, explosive parent-child relationships into collaborative partnerships characterized by:

- Dramatic reduction in frequency and intensity of concerning behaviors
- Development of child’s adaptive skills through repeated problem-solving practice
- Enhanced caregiver confidence and reduced parenting stress
- Restoration of family functioning and positive relational dynamics
- Proactive problem prevention replacing reactive crisis management
- Child’s growing capacity for flexibility, perspective-taking, and negotiation

- Sustainable behavior change rooted in skill development rather than compliance training
- Transferable approach applicable across home, school, and community settings

Chapter Breakdown

Chapters 1-2: Foundation and Paradigm Shift

Purpose: Establish inadequacy of traditional behavioral explanations and introduce revolutionary framework.

Key Content: - Narrative introduction through Jennifer’s family story illustrates typical trajectory of explosive child and failed conventional interventions - Dismantles “kids do well if they want to” motivation-based explanations - Introduces paradigm shift to “kids do well if they can” capability-based understanding - Explains how concerning behaviors represent incompatibility between expectations and child’s current skills - Distinguishes lagging skills from intentional misbehavior - Challenges assumption that children need motivation rather than skill development

Practical Value: Provides emotional recognition for struggling families; creates openness to alternative framework; establishes compassionate lens for viewing child’s difficulties.

Chapters 3-4: Assessment and Problem Identification

Purpose: Provide concrete diagnostic tools for identifying specific lagging skills and unsolved problems.

Key Content: - Introduces ALSUP instrument with comprehensive lagging skills checklist across domains: executive functioning, language processing, emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, social skills - Teaches precise unsolved problem identification using “Difficulty [verb] [specific expectation]” format - Explains why problem statements must exclude behaviors and theories - Demonstrates splitting clumped problems into discrete, solvable issues - Illustrates how diagnostic labels (ADHD, ODD, autism, anxiety) describe symptoms but don’t specify intervention targets - Emphasizes that lagging skills and unsolved problems provide actionable roadmap

Practical Value: Transforms vague behavioral concerns into specific targets; enables precision intervention; prevents generic one-size-fits-all approaches.

Chapters 5-7: Intervention Framework and Methodology

Purpose: Dismantle conventional approaches and introduce three-plan framework with detailed Plan B methodology.

Key Content:

Chapter 5: Why Traditional Approaches Fail - Explains why consequence-based interventions (reward systems, time-outs, loss of privileges) don’t address skill deficits - Describes how punishment escalation damages relationships without building capacity - Clarifies that

lagging skills cannot be motivated away through incentives - Distinguishes between teaching skills and demanding compliance

Chapter 6: Three-Plan Framework - Plan A (Unilateral Adult Imposition): For genuine emergencies only; high relationship cost; doesn't teach skills - Plan C (Strategic Expectation Reduction): Temporarily drop lower-priority expectations to reduce overall demand; not "giving in" but resource allocation - Plan B (Collaborative Problem-Solving): For high-priority problems; three-step process addressing both parties' concerns

Chapter 7: Plan B Detailed Methodology

Step 1: Empathy (Information Gathering) - Introduce unsolved problem neutrally without mentioning behavior - Use genuine curiosity to understand child's perspective on what makes expectation difficult - Drill down with reflective listening and follow-up questions - Avoid inserting adult theories or rushing to solutions - Goal: Accurate understanding of specific obstacle from child's viewpoint

Step 2: Define Adult Concerns (The Invitation) - Share adult's concern or perspective using "The thing is..." or "My concern is..." - Keep statement brief and specific to this problem - Focus on impact, not behavior itself - Avoid lecturing or introducing multiple concerns - Goal: Ensure child understands adult's perspective

Step 3: Invitation to Collaborate (Solution Generation) - Brainstorm mutually satisfactory solutions addressing both concerns - Evaluate whether proposed solutions are realistic and address both perspectives - Ensure genuine collaboration, not disguised adult directive - Confirm mutual agreement before implementation - Goal: Co-created solution that teaches problem-solving skills through practice

Practical Value: Provides replicable structure for collaborative intervention; addresses why old methods failed; offers decision framework for every expectation.

Chapters 8-9: Implementation Guidance and Troubleshooting

Purpose: Address nuances, common obstacles, and frequently asked questions.

Key Content: - Responding to "I don't know" answers - Managing when child becomes dysregulated during Plan B - Avoiding Plan B during crisis moments (proactive, not reactive) - Recognizing when slipping back into Plan A patterns - Handling situations requiring multiple problem-solving sessions - Adjusting approach for children with limited verbal skills - Addressing concerns about fairness, consistency, and authority - Managing when solutions don't work (return to Plan B to refine) - Dealing with co-parent disagreement on approach - Balancing multiple unsolved problems simultaneously

Practical Value: Prevents common implementation failures; normalizes learning curve; provides troubleshooting guide for inevitable obstacles.

Chapters 10-11: Application Across Systems

Purpose: Extend model to family systems and educational settings.

Key Content:

Chapter 10: Family Dynamics - Addressing siblings' perceptions of fairness - Managing when one parent is more resistant to approach - Solving problems that involve multiple family members - Dealing with extended family who use traditional approaches - Teaching siblings collaborative problem-solving - Preventing triangulation and coalition-building

Chapter 11: School Settings - Collaborating with educators to implement CPS at school - Addressing school-specific unsolved problems (academic tasks, peer interactions, transitions, following directions) - Responding to school resistance based on behavioral management systems - Explaining why approach doesn't undermine consistency or fairness - Advocating for child while partnering with school - Implementing Plan C for lower-priority school expectations - Using Plan B proactively for predictable school problems

Practical Value: Ensures consistency across environments; addresses real-world complexity; provides advocacy framework for parents.

Chapter 12: Integration and Sustainability

Purpose: Consolidate learning and provide framework for long-term implementation.

Key Content: - Maintaining approach during stressful periods - Recognizing and addressing regression to old patterns - Updating ALSUP as problems resolve and new ones emerge - Celebrating progress while acknowledging ongoing work - Teaching child to initiate Plan B ("Can we talk about this?") - Extending collaborative problem-solving to other relationships - Understanding that developmental transitions bring new unsolved problems - Viewing CPS as sustainable lifestyle, not temporary fix

Practical Value: Prevents abandonment of approach during challenges; supports long-term skill development; normalizes ongoing nature of collaborative parenting.

Nuanced Main Topics

1. From Motivation to Capability: The Paradigm Shift

Core Concept: Traditional behavioral frameworks assume children with concerning behaviors are motivated to misbehave—they possess the skills to behave appropriately but choose not to deploy them. This assumption leads to consequence-based interventions designed to increase motivation through rewards and punishments. Greene fundamentally challenges this paradigm with the principle "kids do well if they can." When children exhibit explosive or inflexible behaviors, they are signaling that specific expectations exceed their current adaptive capacity. The issue is not motivation but capability—these children lack crucial cognitive skills in executive functioning, emotion regulation, language processing, cognitive flexibility, or social skills.

Why It Matters: This paradigm shift transforms the entire intervention target. If the problem is motivation, the solution is consequence management. If the problem is capability, the solution is skill development through collaborative practice. The shift also fundamentally

alters the adult’s emotional stance toward the child—from frustration at perceived defiance to empathy for genuine difficulty, from adversarial to supportive positioning.

Subtle Implications: - Diagnostic labels (ADHD, ODD, autism, anxiety, depression) describe symptom patterns but don’t specify which skills are lagging or which problems remain unsolved. Two children with identical diagnoses may have completely different lagging skills and unsolved problems requiring different interventions. - The paradigm shift challenges the medical model’s dominance in behavioral health. If specific skill deficits and unsolved problems provide more actionable information than diagnostic categories, the focus shifts from diagnosis-driven treatment protocols to individualized assessment and collaborative problem-solving. - Parents often experience profound relief when reframing their child’s behavior from willful defiance to skills-based difficulty. This cognitive shift reduces parental shame, anger, and sense of failure while opening space for compassionate, effective intervention. - The capability framework has second-order effects on siblings, extended family, and school personnel—once they understand the child isn’t “getting away with” misbehavior but genuinely struggling with skill deficits, resistance to differentiated approaches often dissolves.

Practical Application: When your child exhibits explosive behavior, ask “What skill is my child lacking that would allow them to respond differently?” rather than “How can I motivate better behavior?” This single question redirects attention from consequence manipulation to skill assessment and collaborative problem-solving.

2. The ALSUP: Precision Diagnostic Tool

Core Concept: The Assessment of Lagging Skills & Unsolved Problems (ALSUP) provides structured methodology for identifying specific intervention targets. The lagging skills section covers five domains: executive skills (shifting cognitive set, working memory, organization, planning), language processing (expressing concerns, understanding what’s being said, managing language demands), emotion and self-regulation (managing emotional response, considering range of solutions), cognitive flexibility (handling unpredictability, adapting to change), and social skills (seeking adult attention appropriately, interpreting social cues, empathy). The unsolved problems section identifies specific expectations the child struggles to meet consistently, using the format “Difficulty [verb] [specific expectation].”

Why It Matters: Without precision assessment, interventions remain generic and ineffective. Vague concerns like “he’s defiant” or “she has meltdowns” provide no actionable direction. ALSUP transforms behavioral frustration into specific targets: which exact skills are lagging, which precise expectations trigger difficulty. This clarity enables targeted intervention and measures progress accurately.

Subtle Implications: - Unsolved problems must exclude behaviors and theories. “Difficulty accepting no” is a proper unsolved problem. “Difficulty accepting no, which leads to tantrums” includes the behavior. “Difficulty accepting no because he wants his own way” includes a theory. Including behaviors or theories triggers defensiveness during subsequent Plan B conversations and derails collaboration. - Problems must be split rather than clumped. “Difficulty with morning routine” is too vague. “Difficulty getting out of bed when asked,” “Difficulty transitioning from breakfast to getting dressed,” and “Difficulty tol-

erating hair brushing” are discrete, solvable problems. - The process of completing ALSUP often reveals that children have been operating with significantly depleted adaptive capacity. Parents frequently check numerous lagging skills and identify dozens of unsolved problems. This awareness itself is therapeutic—it explains the child’s overwhelm and justifies strategic expectation reduction through Plan C. - Lagging skills are best understood as neurodevelopmental delays, not permanent deficits. With appropriate support and repeated practice through Plan B, many children develop these skills over time, though likely on a different timeline than neurotypical peers.

Practical Application: Set aside 30-60 minutes to systematically complete ALSUP without your child present. For lagging skills, check items that apply without overthinking. For unsolved problems, list every expectation your child struggles with consistently. Then review unsolved problems to ensure each follows the format, excludes behaviors and theories, and is specific rather than clumped. Prioritize the top three problems based on safety, frequency, and impact on family functioning.

3. The Three-Plan Framework: Decision Architecture

Core Concept: Every parental expectation can be addressed through one of three plans. Plan A involves unilateral adult imposition—adults impose their will, often through physical intervention, raised voice, or consequence threat. Plan A solves problems quickly but at high cost: doesn’t teach skills, damages relationships, and often triggers explosive responses. Plan C involves strategic expectation reduction—temporarily dropping lower-priority expectations to reduce overall demand on child’s limited adaptive capacity. Plan C is not “giving in” or “permissive parenting” but resource allocation, creating space to address high-priority problems effectively. Plan B involves collaborative problem-solving—structured three-step process where adults and children partner to solve problems in ways addressing both parties’ concerns.

Why It Matters: The framework eliminates the false binary of “enforce or surrender” that traps many parents. When problems arise, parents often feel they must either impose their will (risking explosions and relationship damage) or abandon expectations entirely (feeling they’re failing to parent). The three-plan framework offers sophisticated decision-making: use Plan A for genuine emergencies only, Plan C for strategic prioritization, and Plan B for durable problem-solving that builds skills.

Subtle Implications: - Plan A is sometimes necessary for immediate safety (child running toward traffic, physically harming another), but it should be rare. Overuse of Plan A indicates either too many expectations simultaneously or misunderstanding that Plan A doesn’t teach skills for future situations. - Plan C generates significant parental anxiety. Adults fear that dropping expectations signals they’ve “given up” or their child is “getting away with” poor behavior. Reframing Plan C as strategic prioritization reduces this anxiety. Elite performers in any domain succeed partly because they know what not to focus on—Plan C applies this wisdom to parenting. - The goal is eventually moving most expectations to Plan B. As high-priority problems resolve, expectations on Plan C can graduate to Plan B. As child’s skills develop, fewer expectations trigger difficulty, reducing the number of unsolved

problems requiring intervention. - Plan B used proactively is fundamentally different from Plan B attempted during crisis. Proactive Plan B during calm moments builds problem-solving capacity and prevents explosive episodes. Plan B attempted during meltdowns fails because the child lacks access to higher-order cognitive skills necessary for collaborative problem-solving during high emotional arousal.

Practical Application: List all current expectations for your child. Categorize each expectation by plan. Safety-critical expectations receive Plan A (should be very few). Lower-priority expectations creating frequent conflict receive Plan C temporarily. High-priority non-safety expectations receive Plan B proactively during calm moments. This sorting itself often reveals that you've been attempting to enforce far too many expectations simultaneously, depleting your child's adaptive capacity.

4. The Empathy Step: Information Gathering as Foundation

Core Concept: The empathy step, the first phase of Plan B, involves gathering accurate information about what makes a specific expectation difficult for your child. Adults introduce the unsolved problem neutrally ("I've noticed you're having difficulty [specific expectation]"), then use genuine curiosity, reflective listening, and follow-up questions to understand the child's perspective on the obstacle. The goal is not to agree with the child's perspective or immediately solve the problem, but to accurately understand what makes this particular expectation hard from the child's viewpoint. The step concludes when the adult can articulate the child's concern in the child's words, not adult interpretation.

Why It Matters: Solutions generated without accurate understanding of the problem's nature are unlikely to work. If you don't know why your child struggles with a specific expectation, any solution is a guess. The empathy step transforms guesswork into informed problem-solving. Additionally, the process of being genuinely heard and understood is itself therapeutic—children who feel chronically misunderstood often escalate behaviors to force adults to pay attention. Demonstrating genuine interest in their perspective reduces this need.

Subtle Implications: - The empathy step is called "empathy" not because adults must agree with the child's concern but because adults must demonstrate genuine curiosity about and validation of the child's subjective experience. "That does sound hard" doesn't mean "I agree you shouldn't have to do this"—it means "I understand this is genuinely difficult for you." - Adults frequently insert their own theories during the empathy step, short-circuiting information gathering. "Is it hard because you'd rather play video games?" is not genuine curiosity—it's an adult theory disguised as a question. Genuine curiosity sounds like "What makes that hard for you?" or "Help me understand" or "Tell me more about that." - Children often respond to initial empathy attempts with "I don't know." This is frequently accurate—many children with lagging language processing skills genuinely struggle to articulate their internal experience. "I don't know" requires patient follow-up: "That's okay, let's think about it together" or "What happens when you try to [expectation]?" or offering multiple-choice possibilities based on your knowledge of the child. - The empathy step cannot be rushed. Adults anxious to reach solutions often cut this step short, gathering insufficient

information. Adequate time investment here (often 10-20 minutes) determines whether subsequent solutions work. Rushed empathy produces uninformed solutions requiring multiple iterations.

Practical Application: Choose one high-priority unsolved problem. During a calm moment, introduce the problem neutrally and resist the urge to speak for at least 30 seconds after introducing it. Listen to your child’s initial response without interrupting, correcting, or proposing solutions. Reflect back what you heard and drill down with follow-up questions until you understand the specific obstacle from their perspective. If you find yourself inserting theories or rushing to solutions, pause and return your focus to understanding their experience.

5. Collaboration as Skill-Building Process

Core Concept: Plan B’s third step involves generating mutually satisfactory solutions addressing both the child’s concern and the adult’s concern. The process begins with inviting brainstorming (“I wonder if there’s a way...” or “Let’s think about how we can solve this”), encouraging the child to propose solutions first, evaluating each proposal against both concerns, and refining until reaching a realistic solution that both parties agree addresses both perspectives. The solution must be specific, actionable, mutually satisfactory, and realistic.

Why It Matters: Solutions imposed unilaterally (Plan A) generate compliance at best, resistance at worst, and teach nothing about collaborative problem-solving. Solutions co-created through Plan B generate buy-in because the child participated in their development. More importantly, the repeated practice of collaborative problem-solving itself teaches crucial skills: perspective-taking (understanding that others have legitimate concerns), cognitive flexibility (generating multiple possible solutions), evaluation (assessing whether solutions address all concerns), and negotiation (refining proposals to work for everyone).

Subtle Implications: - The process is the intervention. Greene emphasizes that Plan B’s value isn’t just solving the immediate problem but providing repeated practice in collaborative problem-solving skills. Children with lagging skills in these domains develop them through scaffolded practice during Plan B conversations. - Adults must genuinely share problem-solving power. A common Plan B failure involves adults disguising their predetermined solution as collaboration: “What if we tried [adult’s solution]?” immediately after the invitation step. Children detect this manipulation, generating cynicism about the collaborative process. Genuine collaboration means the adult doesn’t know the solution in advance and remains open to child-generated solutions. - Solutions must address both concerns. A frequent implementation error involves accepting solutions that only address one party’s concern. If the solution doesn’t address your concern, it won’t be sustainable. If it doesn’t address the child’s concern, they won’t implement it. Both parties must genuinely feel the solution is fair and workable. - Solutions should be trialed as experiments, not permanent decrees. “Let’s try this for a week and see how it goes” creates space for refinement without either party losing face if the solution needs adjustment. Many problems require multiple Plan B iterations before finding a solution that truly works.

Practical Application: During the collaboration step, resist proposing your solution first.

Encourage your child to generate possibilities. When evaluating proposals, clearly explain how each solution does or doesn't address both concerns rather than simply rejecting ideas. If your child proposes a solution that addresses their concern but not yours, say "That would solve your problem, and I want to solve your problem. But I'm not sure it solves my concern about [your concern]. Can we think about a way to solve both?" This models collaborative refinement rather than unilateral rejection.

6. Proactive vs. Reactive: Timing Determines Success

Core Concept: Plan B must be implemented proactively during calm moments, not reactively during or immediately after explosive episodes. Proactive Plan B identifies predictable unsolved problems and addresses them before the next triggering situation occurs. Reactive approaches attempt to problem-solve when the child is already dysregulated, accessing only lower-brain survival responses rather than higher-order cognitive skills necessary for collaborative problem-solving.

Why It Matters: During high emotional arousal, the brain's executive functioning capacities become largely inaccessible—this is neurobiological reality, not a choice. Attempting collaborative problem-solving during meltdowns fails because the child literally cannot access the cognitive flexibility, language processing, and perspective-taking skills required. Reactive approaches therefore consistently fail and convince adults that "this approach doesn't work with my child." Proactive approaches succeed because they work with the brain's functional capacities rather than against them.

Subtle Implications: - The shift from reactive to proactive requires accepting that concerning behaviors are predictable rather than random. Most families can identify 3-5 unsolved problems that trigger 80% of explosive episodes. Once identified, these problems can be addressed proactively before the next triggering situation. - Proactive intervention feels counterintuitive during crisis. When a family is experiencing daily meltdowns, adults feel they should address the behavior immediately after it occurs. But this is precisely when the child cannot engage productively. Waiting until the next calm period feels like ignoring the problem, but it's actually the only timing that enables effective intervention. - The transition from reactive to proactive generates short-term discomfort. Adults must tolerate explosive episodes without addressing them in the moment (beyond ensuring safety), trusting that proactive Plan B will prevent future episodes. This requires faith in the process during the several weeks when old problems are still occurring but haven't yet been solved proactively. - Proactive Plan B changes the family's temporal orientation. Rather than constantly responding to the last crisis, families begin anticipating and preventing the next difficulty. This shift from crisis management to strategic problem prevention is itself therapeutic for family functioning.

Practical Application: After your next difficult situation with your child, resist the urge to discuss it immediately. Instead, note the unsolved problem that triggered the episode. Wait for a calm period—often hours or days later—and then initiate Plan B proactively: "I've noticed you're having difficulty [expectation]. Can we talk about that?" This timing enables productive problem-solving that reactive approaches cannot achieve.

7. Systemic Implementation: Beyond Individual Child

Core Concept: While CPS focuses on the child's lagging skills and unsolved problems, successful implementation requires systemic change. Adults must develop their own skills in emotional regulation during collaborative problem-solving, patience with the process, and communication techniques for effective empathy and invitation steps. Families must align on the approach—mixed implementation where one parent uses CPS while another uses Plan A typically confuses the child and reduces effectiveness. Schools, extended family, and other systems in the child's life ideally adopt consistent approaches or, minimally, avoid actively undermining CPS implementation.

Why It Matters: A child developing flexibility, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving skills in one environment but encountering punitive consequence-based approaches in another experiences inconsistency that slows skill development and creates confusion about expectations. While the child's lagging skills are the primary focus, adult skill development in implementing Plan B determines whether the child receives the repeated practice necessary for neurological skill building.

Subtle Implications: - The approach's success depends heavily on adult emotional regulation. Parents who remain highly reactive, quickly escalate to yelling, or struggle to maintain curiosity during the empathy step will find Plan B ineffective not because the model is flawed but because they haven't yet developed the adult capacities required for implementation. Many families benefit from parental therapy or coaching focused on the adult's emotional regulation alongside child-focused CPS. - Siblings require explanation and, often, their own Plan B processes. When one child receives differentiated treatment (more Plan C, more collaborative problem-solving), siblings perceive unfairness unless they understand that different children have different lagging skills and unsolved problems requiring different approaches. Many families benefit from teaching all siblings Plan B, providing everyone with collaborative problem-solving skills. - School implementation is frequently the most challenging systemic issue. Many schools operate on behavioral management systems emphasizing consequences, reward charts, and consistency defined as "all children receive identical responses to identical behaviors." Advocating for CPS at school requires educating staff that the approach teaches skills rather than undermines consistency, addresses the child's specific needs rather than provides unfair advantages, and generates better long-term outcomes than behavioral systems. - Extended family resistance often stems from generational differences in parenting philosophy and concern that parents are "being too soft" or "letting the child get away with" misbehavior. Helping extended family understand the paradigm shift from motivation to capability, and recognizing that traditional approaches have already failed with this child, often reduces resistance.

Practical Application: Before beginning CPS implementation, assess your own emotional regulation capacity honestly. If you frequently lose your temper, struggle to stay calm during conflicts, or find yourself highly reactive to your child's behavior, consider seeking your own therapeutic support for developing emotional regulation skills alongside implementing CPS. If co-parenting, have explicit conversations with your partner about alignment on the approach before beginning—mixed implementation creates confusion and reduces effective-

ness.

Section 2: Actionable Framework

The Checklist

Daily Practices

Morning Routine - ☐ Review today's potential unsolved problems before they occur - ☐ Identify which expectations will use Plan C today (strategic reduction) - ☐ Prepare for proactive Plan B on one high-priority problem during calm moment - ☐ Check your own emotional state; use self-regulation strategies if needed - ☐ Remind yourself: "Kids do well if they can"

During Interactions - ☐ Notice when approaching an unsolved problem; pause to determine which plan (A, B, or C) - ☐ If using Plan B, ensure both you and child are calm - ☐ Practice genuine curiosity during empathy steps - ☐ Avoid inserting theories or rushing to solutions - ☐ Reflect back what you hear before moving forward - ☐ State your concern briefly and specifically - ☐ Invite collaboration rather than imposing solutions

Responding to Concerning Behaviors - ☐ Ensure immediate safety without lengthy discussion - ☐ Avoid Plan B during or immediately after explosive episodes - ☐ Note which unsolved problem triggered the episode - ☐ Wait for calm period to address proactively - ☐ Resist urge to lecture or impose consequences - ☐ Use brief, neutral language: "Looks like we have a problem to solve" - ☐ Schedule proactive Plan B for later when both parties are regulated

Evening Reflection - ☐ Review what worked and what didn't today - ☐ Identify successful Plan B moments; celebrate progress - ☐ Note when you slipped into Plan A; consider what triggered it - ☐ Update list of unsolved problems as situations evolve - ☐ Prepare for tomorrow's anticipated challenges - ☐ Practice self-compassion; this is a learning process

Weekly Review - ☐ Assess progress on high-priority unsolved problems - ☐ Determine if any problems have resolved; celebrate these wins - ☐ Identify new unsolved problems that have emerged - ☐ Re-prioritize problems based on current impact - ☐ Review which expectations remain on Plan C - ☐ Consider if any Plan C problems can graduate to Plan B - ☐ Assess your own skill development in implementing Plan B - ☐ Seek support or resources if feeling stuck

Connection Building

Understanding Your Child's Experience - ☐ Complete or update ALSUP to identify current lagging skills - ☐ Review which skill domains are most challenging for your child - ☐ Notice patterns in when concerning behaviors occur - ☐ Identify environmental factors that deplete your child's adaptive capacity - ☐ Recognize sensory, social, or cognitive triggers - ☐ Observe your child's successful problem-solving in other contexts - ☐ Note what helps your child stay regulated

Demonstrating Empathy and Validation - [] Use reflective listening: “So you’re saying...” - [] Validate feelings without necessarily agreeing with behavior: “That sounds frustrating” - [] Ask genuine questions rather than rhetorical ones meant to make a point - [] Give space for your child to express their perspective - [] Resist the urge to correct their feelings or perceptions immediately - [] Show you understand what makes expectations difficult for them - [] Acknowledge when you’ve misunderstood; model humility

Collaborative Partnership Behaviors - [] Involve your child in identifying their own unsolved problems over time - [] Ask for their input on which expectations feel hardest - [] Celebrate when you successfully solve problems together - [] Acknowledge your child’s contributions to solutions - [] Follow through on agreed solutions; demonstrate reliability - [] Return to refine solutions that aren’t working rather than blaming - [] Model collaborative problem-solving in your other relationships

Trust and Safety Building - [] Reduce frequency of Plan A; demonstrate you’re not in adversarial stance - [] Follow through on Plan C; show that dropped expectations stay dropped - [] Avoid bringing up past behaviors during current Plan B - [] Separate the person from the problem: “We have a problem to solve” not “You have a problem” - [] Maintain consistent approach rather than oscillating between permissive and punitive - [] Admit when you make mistakes in implementing the approach - [] Demonstrate that collaborative problem-solving is safe, not a trap

Boundary Setting

Strategic Expectation Management - [] Identify non-negotiable safety expectations (very few) - [] List all current expectations you hold for your child - [] Categorize expectations by genuine importance vs. habit/preference - [] Place lower-priority expectations on Plan C temporarily - [] Ensure you’re not attempting to enforce too many expectations simultaneously - [] Review Plan C list regularly; remove expectations that no longer matter - [] Graduate Plan C expectations to Plan B as capacity increases

Plan A: When Unilateral Imposition Is Necessary - [] Reserve for genuine emergencies only (immediate safety threats) - [] Use physical intervention if needed to prevent harm - [] Keep language minimal and neutral during crisis - [] Do not attempt to teach, lecture, or process in the moment - [] Return to collaborative approach after safety is ensured - [] If using Plan A frequently, reassess whether expectations are appropriate

Plan B: Maintaining Expectations Through Collaboration - [] Introduce unsolved problems neutrally without judgment - [] Complete all three steps of Plan B; don’t skip empathy or adult concerns - [] Ensure solutions address both your concern and your child’s concern - [] Make solutions specific and actionable, not vague - [] Trial solutions as experiments; build in check-back points - [] Return to refine solutions that aren’t working - [] Recognize that some problems require multiple Plan B iterations

Consistency and Follow-Through - [] Implement agreed solutions reliably - [] If circumstances change, discuss with child rather than unilaterally abandoning agreement - [] Maintain the same approach during stressful periods when tempted to revert to Plan A - []

] Align with co-parent on which plan applies to which expectations - [] Request that other caregivers (grandparents, babysitters) respect your approach - [] Communicate Plan C and Plan B decisions clearly to child - [] Track which problems have been solved to demonstrate progress

Implementation Steps

Step 1: Conduct Comprehensive ALSUP Assessment

Purpose: Identify specific lagging skills and unsolved problems to replace vague behavioral frustration with actionable intervention targets.

What You Need: - ALSUP form (available at livesinthebalance.org) - 60-90 minutes of uninterrupted time - Quiet space for reflection without child present - Co-parent participation if applicable - Notebook or digital document for recording insights

Detailed Process:

1. **Download the ALSUP instrument** from Lives in the Balance website or use the checklist in the book appendix.
2. **Review the lagging skills section systematically** across all five domains:
 - Executive skills: shifting cognitive set, working memory, organization/planning, separating affect from content, considering consequences
 - Language processing: expressing concerns and needs, understanding what's being said to them, managing complexity of language
 - Emotion/self-regulation: managing emotional response to frustration, considering range of solutions, accessing thinking when frustrated
 - Cognitive flexibility: handling transitions and unpredictability, adapting to changes in plan/expectation, shifting from original idea
 - Social skills: seeking adult attention appropriately, interpreting social cues accurately, perspective-taking, empathy
3. **Check each lagging skill that applies to your child.** Don't overthink this—if the skill is challenging for your child compared to same-age peers, check it. You're not labeling your child negatively; you're gaining diagnostic clarity.
4. **Notice patterns across domains.** Many children have clustered challenges—for example, deficits in executive functioning often co-occur with cognitive flexibility challenges. These patterns inform understanding of why certain expectations are particularly difficult.
5. **Resist the urge to feel overwhelmed** by the number of checked skills. These skills have always been lagging—awareness is progress, not deterioration. Your child has been attempting to meet expectations while lacking these foundational capacities, explaining the explosive behaviors.
6. **Shift to the unsolved problems section.** Now identify specific expectations your child struggles to meet consistently. Think about recurring difficult situations: morning

routine, homework, bedtime, screen time transitions, sibling interactions, hygiene tasks, accepting no, waiting, sharing, etc.

7. Word each unsolved problem using the format: “Difficulty [verb] [specific expectation].”

Examples: - “Difficulty transitioning off screens when time is up” - “Difficulty accepting no regarding snacks before dinner” - “Difficulty tolerating hair brushing” - “Difficulty completing homework independently” - “Difficulty accepting no, which leads to tantrums” (includes behavior) - “Difficulty accepting no because he wants his way” (includes theory) - “Difficulty with morning routine” (too clumped)

8. **Eliminate any mention of concerning behaviors** from problem statements. The problem statement should describe only the expectation the child finds difficult, not how they respond when they can’t meet it. Behaviors (tantrums, aggression, shutting down) are how the child communicates difficulty—they’re not the problem to solve.
9. **Remove all adult theories** from problem statements. Anything following “because” or explaining why you think the child struggles represents your interpretation, not objective problem identification. These theories often trigger defensiveness during later Plan B conversations.
10. **Split clumped problems into discrete issues.** “Difficulty with morning routine” is too broad. Break it into: “Difficulty getting out of bed when called,” “Difficulty choosing clothes,” “Difficulty transitioning from breakfast to getting dressed,” “Difficulty tolerating toothbrushing,” etc. Each specific problem requires its own Plan B.
11. **List all identified unsolved problems** without self-censoring. Even if the list is long (20-30 problems is common), write everything down. This comprehensive list explains why your child seems constantly overwhelmed—they are encountering unsolved problems all day long.
12. **Review your complete list for precision and clarity.** Each problem should be specific enough that you could introduce it to your child in one clear sentence. Vague problems generate confused Plan B conversations.
13. **Prioritize your top three problems** based on:
 - Safety considerations (problems involving danger to self or others)
 - Frequency (problems occurring multiple times daily)
 - Impact on family functioning (problems that significantly disrupt daily life)
 - Current stress level (problems causing most parental frustration right now)
14. **Designate all remaining problems as Plan C** (temporary back burner). You cannot effectively address 25 problems simultaneously. Strategic prioritization is essential. Plan C doesn’t mean these expectations are unimportant forever—just that they’re lower priority right now.

Example Application:

Sarah completes ALSUP for her 8-year-old son Marcus and identifies lagging skills in: difficulty shifting from an original idea, difficulty managing emotional response to frustration, difficulty considering a range of solutions, difficulty expressing concerns/needs in words, and difficulty handling unpredictability.

Her unsolved problems list includes: - Difficulty accepting that we're having something different for dinner than he expected - Difficulty transitioning off video games when time is up - Difficulty completing homework when he finds it frustrating - Difficulty tolerating his sister playing with toys he's not currently using - Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning - Difficulty accepting that plans have changed (unexpected schedule shifts) - Difficulty waiting for his turn when he wants something immediately

She prioritizes: 1. Difficulty accepting that plans have changed (happens almost daily, triggers biggest meltdowns) 2. Difficulty transitioning off video games (happens daily, causes significant conflict) 3. Difficulty completing homework when frustrated (affecting school performance and taking hours each night)

All other problems go on Plan C temporarily. Sarah announces to Marcus: "For now, we're not going to worry about morning wake-up time or sister's toys or what we're having for dinner. We'll talk about those things later."

Common Obstacles: - **Too vague:** "He's defiant" → Must identify specific expectations he struggles to meet - **Including behaviors:** "Difficulty accepting no without tantrums" → Remove "without tantrums" - **Adult theories:** "Difficulty sharing because he's selfish" → Remove "because he's selfish" - **Clumping:** "Difficulty with school" → Split into specific problems like "Difficulty starting assignments," "Difficulty working independently," "Difficulty asking for help" - **Feeling overwhelmed:** Long lists are normal; prioritizing top three makes it manageable

Success Indicators: - You can state each unsolved problem in one clear sentence - Problem statements contain no behaviors or adult theories - You have 3-5 high-priority problems identified - Remaining problems are designated Plan C - You feel clarity rather than vague frustration about your child's challenges

Step 2: Implement Strategic Plan C for Lower-Priority Expectations

Purpose: Reduce overall demand on your child's limited adaptive capacity by temporarily setting aside lower-priority expectations, creating cognitive and emotional space to address high-priority problems effectively.

What You Need: - Completed ALSUP with prioritized problems - Understanding that Plan C is strategic resource allocation, not "giving in" - Ability to tolerate temporary reduction in expectations - Co-parent alignment on which problems receive Plan C - Plan to announce Plan C decisions to your child

Detailed Process:

1. **Review your complete unsolved problems list** from ALSUP. You should have 3-5 high-priority problems and numerous lower-priority problems.
2. **Understand the rationale for Plan C.** Your child's concerning behaviors indicate they are already operating at the edge of their adaptive capacity. Every expectation you hold requires cognitive and emotional resources. When you're attempting to enforce 20-25 expectations simultaneously on a child with lagging skills, you guarantee frequent explosive episodes. Plan C strategically reduces demand, allowing your child's limited capacity to focus on high-priority issues.
3. **Reframe Plan C psychologically.** Many parents resist Plan C because it feels like "giving in," "being permissive," or "failing to parent." Reframe: Elite performers in any domain succeed partly because they know what not to focus on. Olympic athletes don't train every skill equally—they prioritize based on strategic importance. Plan C applies this wisdom to parenting. You're not abandoning expectations; you're prioritizing strategically.
4. **Identify problems appropriate for Plan C.** Good Plan C candidates:
 - Don't involve safety concerns
 - Are lower priority relative to other problems
 - You can genuinely release temporarily without resentment
 - Cause frequent conflict but limited actual impact
 - Can be addressed later after capacity increases
5. **Avoid Plan C for problems you cannot genuinely release.** If you designate something Plan C but continue to enforce it in the moment, you create confusion and undermine the entire framework. Only place expectations on Plan C if you can truly let them go temporarily.
6. **Announce Plan C decisions clearly and briefly to your child.** Don't make this a big dramatic conversation. Simple and straightforward: "For now, we're not going to worry about [expectation]. We can talk about that another time."

Examples: - "For now, we're not going to worry about keeping your room clean. We'll come back to that later." - "For now, I'm not going to bug you about what you're having for breakfast. We'll figure that out another time." - "For now, we're not going to worry about you wearing matching socks. That's off the list."

7. **Keep explanations minimal.** Resist the urge to justify, explain at length, or predict when you'll revisit. Simply state the decision. Over-explaining often triggers debate or the child questioning whether you'll really follow through.
8. **Redirect any debate.** If your child argues about Plan C decisions or questions them, use simple redirect: "We can talk about that later if needed. For now, it's not something we're going to worry about."
9. **Document which problems are on Plan C.** Keep a written or digital list so you and co-parents remember which expectations you've set aside. This prevents accidentally enforcing Plan C expectations in the moment.

10. **Resist impulse to enforce Plan C expectations when they arise.** This is the hardest part of Plan C. When your child appears for breakfast having chosen candy, when their room is a disaster, when they refuse to share with siblings—you must tolerate it if these are Plan C problems. Your instinct will be to enforce. Remind yourself this is temporary strategic prioritization.
11. **Notice the reduction in conflict frequency.** Within days of implementing Plan C, most families observe significantly fewer explosive episodes. This isn't because problems have disappeared—it's because you're attempting to enforce fewer expectations simultaneously, operating within your child's adaptive capacity rather than exceeding it constantly.
12. **Communicate Plan C decisions to co-parents, caregivers, and other adults.** Everyone in the child's life should know which expectations are temporarily set aside to prevent inconsistency. "We're focusing on three problems right now and setting aside others temporarily" helps others understand your strategic approach.
13. **Revisit Plan C problems periodically.** As high-priority problems resolve through Plan B, capacity increases for addressing additional problems. Every 4-6 weeks, review your Plan C list. Some expectations may no longer matter. Others can graduate to Plan B now that capacity has increased.

Example Application:

The Chen family has identified three high-priority problems: difficulty completing homework when frustrated, difficulty transitioning to bed at bedtime, and difficulty accepting no regarding screen time. Their Plan C list includes:

- Difficulty eating vegetables at dinner
- Difficulty keeping bedroom organized
- Difficulty using polite language (frequently says "shut up")
- Difficulty sitting still during meals
- Difficulty wearing weather-appropriate clothing

Mom announces: "For now, we're not going to worry about vegetables at dinner, your room organization, language you're using, sitting at the table, or what you're wearing. Those things aren't our focus right now."

First evening: Child says "shut up" to sibling. Mom's instinct is to reprimand. She reminds herself this is Plan C, takes a breath, and ignores the language. Later that week, child appears wearing shorts in 45-degree weather. Dad starts to insist on long pants, remembers it's Plan C, and says nothing. The first week is uncomfortable—parents feel they're being too permissive. But they notice explosive episodes decrease from 2-3 per day to 3-4 per week because overall demand has decreased.

After six weeks, homework and bedtime problems have significantly improved through Plan B. The family reviews their Plan C list. They decide vegetable eating and language still don't matter much. But bedroom organization is now impacting the child's ability to find homework materials. They move "Difficulty keeping bedroom organized" from Plan C to

Plan B and begin proactive problem-solving about it.

Common Obstacles: - **Guilt about lower expectations:** Remind yourself this is temporary and strategic - **Extended family criticism:** Educate that you're prioritizing based on child's capacity - **Inconsistent application:** If you can't truly release an expectation, don't put it on Plan C - **Child confusion:** Be clear which expectations are Plan C vs. still enforced - **Forgetting mid-moment:** Keep Plan C list visible to reference when impulse to enforce arises

Success Indicators: - Frequency of concerning behaviors decreases - You feel less constant conflict with your child - You can tolerate reduced expectations without resentment - Other household members understand and respect Plan C - You have cognitive and emotional energy to focus on high-priority Plan B work

Step 3: Execute Proactive Plan B on High-Priority Problem

Purpose: Collaboratively solve one high-priority unsolved problem through structured three-step process, addressing both adult and child concerns while teaching problem-solving skills through practice.

What You Need: - One clearly defined high-priority unsolved problem from ALSUP - Child in calm, regulated state (not during or after explosive episode) - Your own emotional regulation sufficient for genuine curiosity - Private, quiet setting without distractions or observers - 15-45 minutes of available time - Commitment to completing all three steps without skipping

Detailed Process:

STEP 1: THE EMPATHY STEP (Information Gathering)

1. **Choose optimal timing.** Plan B must occur when both you and child are calm. Not during conflict. Not immediately after an explosive episode. During a peaceful morning, after school before homework stress, or weekend afternoon—whenever both parties are regulated and available.
2. **Find a private, distraction-free setting.** Sit somewhere comfortable without screens, siblings, or other interruptions. Some children engage better during side-by-side activities (walking, driving, drawing) rather than face-to-face conversation.
3. **Introduce the unsolved problem neutrally** using your precisely worded problem statement: "I've noticed you're having difficulty [specific expectation]."

Examples: - "I've noticed you're having difficulty transitioning off video games when time is up." - "I've noticed you're having difficulty accepting that plans have changed." - "I've noticed you're having difficulty completing homework when it gets frustrating."

4. **Pause and wait** for your child's response. Count to 10 slowly in your head. Don't rush. Many children need processing time to formulate a response, especially those

with lagging language processing skills.

5. **Listen without interrupting.** Whatever your child says first—even if it’s “I don’t know,” “No I’m not,” or something that seems off-topic—listen fully without interrupting, correcting, or defending.
6. **Reflect back what you heard.** Use phrases like:
 - “So you’re saying...”
 - “Let me make sure I understand...”
 - “It sounds like...”

This demonstrates you’re genuinely listening and allows your child to confirm or clarify.

7. **Drill down with curious follow-up questions.** Your goal is understanding the specific obstacle from your child’s perspective. Useful questions:
 - “What’s hard about that?”
 - “Can you tell me more about that?”
 - “Help me understand what happens when...”
 - “What goes through your mind when...”
 - “What makes that difficult for you?”
8. **Avoid inserting your theories.** Resist asking:
 - “Is it hard because you’d rather keep playing?” (Theory: child is prioritizing fun)
 - “Is it hard because you don’t like homework?” (Theory: child is avoiding work)
 - “Are you just trying to get out of it?” (Theory: child is manipulating)

These are adult theories disguised as questions, not genuine curiosity.

9. **Clarify vague responses.** If your child says something unclear like “It’s just stupid” or “I hate it,” don’t accept that as full information. Follow up: “What feels stupid about it?” or “Help me understand what you hate.”
10. **Handle “I don’t know” responses.** Many children genuinely struggle to articulate their internal experience. If you receive “I don’t know”:
 - Normalize: “That’s okay. A lot of kids find it hard to put this stuff into words.”
 - Offer processing time: “Want to think about it for a minute?”
 - Provide multiple-choice possibilities based on your knowledge: “Some kids tell me it’s hard because [possibility A]. Other kids say [possibility B]. Does either of those sound right, or is it something else?”
 - Try alternative phrasing: “What happens when you try to [expectation]?”
11. **Continue gathering information until the obstacle is clear.** Don’t rush to solutions. Many Plan B conversations require 10-20 minutes in the empathy step alone. You’re done with empathy when you can articulate your child’s concern in their words, not your interpretation.
12. **Summarize your understanding** before moving to the next step: “Let me make sure I’ve got this. You’re saying that when it’s time to turn off video games, it’s hard

because you're usually in the middle of something you can't save, and it feels really frustrating to lose your progress. Did I get that right?"

13. **Confirm accuracy with your child.** "Did I get that right?" or "Is there anything I'm missing?" Give them space to correct your understanding.
14. **Acknowledge the difficulty** without necessarily agreeing: "That does sound frustrating" or "I can understand why that would be hard." This is validation, not agreement that the expectation should be eliminated.
15. **Pause if your child becomes dysregulated** during this step. If your child starts escalating emotionally, pause: "I can see this is hard to talk about. Let's take a break and come back to this later." Return when both parties are calm again.

STEP 2: DEFINE ADULT CONCERNS (The Invitation)

1. **Transition from empathy to adult concerns** with bridging statement: "I understand that's hard for you" or "That makes sense" or "I hear you."
2. **Introduce your concern** using clear framing:
 - "The thing is..."
 - "My concern is..."
 - "Here's what worries me..."

3. **State your specific concern** about this particular problem in 1-3 sentences maximum:

Examples: - "The thing is, when you're on screens past the time limit, you're not getting enough sleep, and I've noticed you're exhausted the next day." - "My concern is that when homework doesn't get done, your teacher emails me, and then you get behind in class." - "Here's what worries me: When you can't accept that plans changed, we miss the activity entirely because we spend all the time managing the meltdown."

4. **Focus on impact or consequence**, not the behavior itself. Don't say: "My concern is that you have tantrums." Do say: "My concern is that when you get upset about plans changing, you miss out on activities you usually enjoy."
5. **Keep it brief.** Resist the urge to lecture, list multiple concerns, or rehash old arguments. One specific concern, clearly stated.
6. **Avoid threats or consequence mentions.** Don't say: "My concern is that if you don't do homework, I'm going to take away your phone." The concern is the impact, not the punishment you might impose.
7. **Exclude character judgments or generalizations.** Don't say: "My concern is that you're being irresponsible" or "My concern is that you never listen." Stay specific to this problem.
8. **Check your child's understanding:** "Does that make sense?" or "Can you see why I'm concerned about that?"

9. **Clarify if your child misunderstands your concern.** If they think you're just trying to control them or don't care about their concern, restate: "I do care about your concern. I don't want you to lose your game progress. And I'm also concerned about [your concern]. So we need a solution that solves both problems."
10. **Resist the urge to elaborate.** Once you've stated your concern and confirmed understanding, stop. Don't add three more concerns. Don't explain at length. Don't justify. Move to collaboration.
11. **Acknowledge if concerns seem competing:** "So we both have concerns" or "It sounds like we have two things to figure out—how to help you not lose game progress and how to help you get enough sleep."

STEP 3: INVITATION TO COLLABORATE (Solution Generation)

1. **Invite brainstorming** with open-ended language:
 - "I wonder if there's a way to solve both problems..."
 - "Let's think about how we can work this out so it addresses your concern and mine..."
 - "Can we put our heads together and figure out a solution?"
2. **Encourage your child to propose solutions first.** "What do you think we could do?" or "Do you have any ideas?"
3. **Consider each proposed solution seriously,** even if your immediate reaction is skepticism. Don't immediately reject. Explore first.
4. **Evaluate whether the solution addresses your child's concern** by asking or reflecting: "Would that solve your problem about losing game progress?" Listen to their answer.
5. **Evaluate whether the solution addresses your concern:** "I like that idea. I wonder if it would solve my concern about you getting enough sleep. What do you think?"
6. **Explain clearly if a solution doesn't address both concerns,** without dismissing it entirely:
 - "That would solve your problem, and I want to solve your problem. But I'm not sure it addresses my concern about [your concern]. Can we think of a way to adjust it?"
 - "I appreciate that idea. I'm wondering if there's a way to do that and also handle [your concern]."
7. **Avoid immediately rejecting ideas.** Instead of "That won't work," try "Let's think about that. How would that handle [your concern]?" Explore modifications before rejecting.
8. **Propose your own ideas only if your child is stuck** or has exhausted their suggestions. When you do propose solutions, frame them as possibilities, not directives:

- “What if we tried...”
 - “I’m wondering if...”
 - “Some kids have told me they tried [solution]. Would something like that work?”
9. **Ensure solutions address both concerns.** This is the most common Plan B failure point. Adults often accept solutions that only address the child’s concern, leading to implementation failure. Both parties must feel their concern is addressed.
 10. **Test solution realism.** Many children propose solutions that sound good but aren’t actually feasible. Ask:
 - “Do you really think you could do that?”
 - “What would you need to make that work?”
 - “Have you tried something like that before? How did it go?”
 11. **Make solutions specific and actionable,** not vague. “I’ll try harder” is not a solution. “I’ll set a timer for 10 minutes before screen time ends so I can save my game” is specific and actionable.
 12. **Refine vague proposals into concrete plans:**
 - Child: “I’ll just be better about it.”
 - Adult: “What would ‘being better’ look like specifically? What would you do differently?”
 13. **Confirm mutual agreement** once you’ve reached a solution both parties find workable: “So we’re going to try [specific solution]. Is that right?”
 14. **Summarize the agreed solution clearly** so both parties have the same understanding:
 - “Okay, so the plan is: You’ll set an alarm for 10 minutes before screen time ends. When it goes off, you’ll save your game and wrap up. Then when I say time’s up, you’ll be ready to turn it off. And I’ll make sure to give you the 10-minute warning reliably. Does that sound right?”
 15. **Plan when to implement** and when to check back: “Let’s start this tonight. Then in a few days, we can check in about whether it’s working.”
 16. **Express appreciation for working together:** “Thanks for talking this through with me” or “I like how we figured this out together.”
 17. **Document the solution** (mental note or written) so you remember what you agreed to.

Example Complete Plan B:

Problem: Difficulty transitioning off video games when time is up.

Empathy: “I’ve noticed you’re having difficulty turning off video games when time is up. What’s hard about that?”

Child: “I don’t know. I just don’t want to.”

Parent: “What happens when I say time’s up?”

Child: “Usually I’m in the middle of something.”

Parent: “Tell me more about that.”

Child: “Like, I’m in a game and I can’t save it, so if I turn it off I lose everything.”

Parent: “So you’re saying when it’s time to turn off, you’re often in the middle of something you can’t save, and you’d lose your progress. That sounds frustrating.”

Child: “Yeah, it is.”

Parent: “Is there anything else that makes it hard?”

Child: “Sometimes you just say ‘turn it off now’ and I have no warning.”

Parent: “So you’re also saying it’s hard because you don’t have warning ahead of time to find a stopping point. Did I get that right?”

Child: “Yeah.”

Define Adult Concerns: “I understand that’s frustrating. The thing is, when you stay on screens past the time limit, you’re not getting enough sleep, and I’ve noticed you’re exhausted the next day at school. That’s my concern. Does that make sense?”

Child: “I guess.”

Invitation: “So we have two things to figure out—how to help you not lose your game progress, and how to help you get enough sleep. I wonder if there’s a way to solve both problems. What do you think we could do?”

Child: “You could just give me more time.”

Parent: “More time would help you finish your game. I wonder if it would solve my concern about sleep. What do you think?”

Child: “I don’t know.”

Parent: “What if we tried something where you had warning ahead of time so you could find a save point?”

Child: “Like what?”

Parent: “What if I gave you a 10-minute warning before screen time ends so you could wrap up?”

Child: “That might work. But sometimes games take longer than 10 minutes.”

Parent: “That’s true. What if the 10-minute warning was your signal to not start anything new? Just finish what you’re in the middle of or find a save point?”

Child: “Okay, that could work.”

Parent: “Would that solve your problem about losing progress?”

Child: “Yeah, I think so.”

Parent: “Would you be able to turn it off when time’s up if you had that warning?”

Child: “Probably.”

Parent: “So let’s try this: I’ll give you a 10-minute warning before screen time ends. That’s your signal to wrap up and find a save point. Then when I say time’s up, you’ll turn it off. And I’ll make sure to give you that warning reliably. Does that sound fair?”

Child: “Yeah.”

Parent: “Let’s try it for the rest of this week and see how it goes. Thanks for talking this through with me.”

Common Obstacles:

Empathy Step: - Child says “I don’t know” repeatedly → Offer processing time, multiple-choice possibilities, alternative phrasing - Child becomes defensive → Check if your problem statement included behavior or theory; rephrase neutrally - Child’s explanation seems illogical → Resist correcting; gather full information before evaluating - You feel impatient → Remind yourself quality information here determines solution effectiveness

Define Adult Concerns: - You list multiple concerns → Stop after one; additional concerns can be separate Plan B conversations - You lecture or repeat old arguments → Keep it to 1-3 sentences maximum - Your concern is just “I want compliance” → Dig deeper for the real impact/consequence that concerns you

Invitation: - You propose your solution immediately → Pause; invite child’s ideas first - Child’s solution only addresses their concern → “That would solve your problem. How would it address [your concern]?” - You accept an unrealistic solution → Test feasibility; ask if child really thinks they can do it - Solution is too vague → Ask for specifics; what exactly would they do differently?

Success Indicators: - Both you and child understand each other’s concerns - The agreed solution addresses both concerns - The solution is specific and actionable - Both parties feel it’s fair and workable - You successfully completed all three steps without skipping or rushing - Conversation ended collaboratively rather than adversarially

Post-Plan B: - Implement the solution reliably - If it doesn’t work, return to Plan B to refine rather than blaming - Celebrate when it does work - Move to next high-priority problem once this one stabilizes

Step 4: Navigate Common Implementation Obstacles

Purpose: Troubleshoot typical challenges that arise during Plan B implementation, maintaining collaborative process despite difficulties and preventing abandonment of approach due to normal learning curve struggles.

What You Need: - Experience attempting at least 2-3 Plan B conversations - Recognition that obstacles are normal, not evidence of approach failure - Willingness to adjust approach based on child's responses - Patience with your own and child's learning process - Support resources (book, website, potentially professional guidance)

Detailed Process:

OBSTACLE 1: Child Repeatedly Responds "I Don't Know"

Why This Happens: - Genuine language processing challenges make it hard to articulate internal experience - Child is accustomed to adult-led conversations and doesn't trust this new collaborative dynamic - Child fears their honest answer will be judged or dismissed - Child actually doesn't know—many haven't been asked to reflect on their internal obstacles before

Solutions: 1. **Normalize the difficulty:** "That's okay. A lot of kids find it hard to put this stuff into words. Let's think about it together."

2. **Offer processing time:** "Want to take a minute to think about it? No rush." Then genuinely wait in comfortable silence.
3. **Provide multiple-choice possibilities** based on your knowledge of your child: "Some kids tell me it's hard because [possibility A]. Other kids say it's hard because [possibility B]. Or maybe it's something totally different. Does any of that sound right?"
4. **Try alternative phrasing:** Instead of "What's hard about that?" try:
 - "What happens when you try to [expectation]?"
 - "What goes through your mind when [situation]?"
 - "Walk me through what it's like when [situation]."
5. **Come back later:** "That's okay. Let's think about it and we can talk later." Some children process better with time.
6. **Try side-by-side activities:** Some children engage better during walking, driving, or drawing rather than direct conversation.

OBSTACLE 2: Child Becomes Defensive or Dysregulated During Plan B

Why This Happens: - Problem statement included behavior or theory, triggering defensiveness - Child interprets empathy step as accusation despite neutral framing - Previous adult-led conversations have been punitive, creating expectation of punishment - Child was not actually as regulated as you thought when conversation started - Topic touches on shame or embarrassment

Solutions: 1. **Pause immediately:** "I can see this is hard to talk about. Let's take a break."

2. **Reassess your problem statement:** Did you include behavior ("difficulty turning off screens without tantrums") or theory ("difficulty turning off screens because you're addicted")? If so, revise to exclude both.

3. **Reassess timing:** Was child actually calm when you started, or still carrying emotion from earlier?
4. **Revise your introduction:** Make it even more neutral and collaborative: “I’ve noticed we have a problem to solve” rather than “I’ve noticed you’re having difficulty.”
5. **Address distrust directly if needed:** “I’m not trying to get you in trouble. I genuinely want to understand what makes this hard so we can figure it out together.”
6. **Return to the conversation later** when everyone is more regulated.
7. **Consider whether this problem is too emotionally charged right now:** Start with a lower-stakes problem to build trust in the process first.

OBSTACLE 3: You Find Yourself Slipping Back Into Plan A Mid-Conversation

Why This Happens: - Old patterns are deeply ingrained; unilateral solution-imposition is your default - Frustration or time pressure triggers reversion to familiar approaches - You’ve completed empathy step and heard child’s concern, but it seems unreasonable to you - You entered conversation with predetermined solution and aren’t actually open to collaboration

Solutions: 1. **Notice when it happens:** Self-awareness is the first step. Common signs you’ve slipped into Plan A: - “You’re going to [directive]” instead of “Let’s figure out how to solve this” - Dismissing child’s concern as invalid - Imposing consequences mid-conversation - Raising voice or using threatening tone

2. **Stop and reset:** “Wait. I’m not doing this well. Let me try again.” Modeling humility and willingness to correct course is itself valuable.
3. **Return to last successful step:** If you got through empathy but then imposed your solution, return to invitation: “I heard your concern about [child’s concern]. Let me state mine, and then let’s brainstorm together.”
4. **Examine your own triggers:** What pushed you into Plan A? Time pressure? Feeling disrespected? Fear of losing authority? Understanding your triggers helps anticipate and manage them.
5. **Practice self-regulation strategies** before attempting Plan B: deep breathing, brief walk, reminder of the approach’s rationale.
6. **If you repeatedly slip into Plan A on a particular problem,** it may indicate you’re not genuinely ready to collaborate on that expectation. Consider whether it should be Plan A (if truly non-negotiable) or whether you need more time to release attachment to a particular outcome.

OBSTACLE 4: Child Proposes Unrealistic Solution

Why This Happens: - Child lacks experience evaluating solution feasibility - Child is proposing what they wish were true rather than what’s workable - Child is testing whether you’re genuinely open to their input

Solutions: 1. **Don't immediately reject:** "Let's think about that. Walk me through how that would work."

2. **Test feasibility collaboratively:** "Do you really think you could do that? Have you tried something like that before?"
3. **Explore what would make it realistic:** "What would you need to make that work?" This sometimes reveals adjustments that could make it viable.
4. **Acknowledge the appeal while noting concern:** "I can see why that would work for you. I'm wondering if it would handle my concern about [your concern]. What do you think?"
5. **If genuinely unworkable, explain clearly:** "I appreciate that idea. Here's my concern: [specific reason it doesn't address your concern]. Can we think of a way to adjust it so it solves both problems?"
6. **Don't pretend to agree:** Accepting solutions you know won't work just to end the conversation results in implementation failure and teaches your child their ideas don't actually matter. Be honest within the collaborative framework.

OBSTACLE 5: Solution Isn't Working After Implementation

Why This Happens: - Solution seemed realistic but wasn't actually feasible in practice - Circumstances changed that weren't anticipated - Solution addressed one concern but not as effectively as you thought for the other - Either party isn't following through reliably

Solutions: 1. **Don't treat this as failure:** Solutions are experiments. Some work immediately. Others need refinement. This is normal.

2. **Return to Plan B proactively:** "We tried [solution] and it doesn't seem to be working. Let's talk about what's getting in the way."
3. **Gather information about what's not working:** "What's hard about [solution]?" Maybe implementation is more challenging than anticipated. Maybe something was overlooked in the original conversation.
4. **Assess your own follow-through:** Have you consistently implemented your part of the agreement? If you agreed to give warnings but haven't, the solution failure is partly on you.
5. **Refine the solution collaboratively:** "So [solution] isn't working because [reason]. I wonder if we could adjust it. What do you think would work better?"
6. **Celebrate partial progress:** If the solution improved the situation even if it didn't eliminate the problem entirely, acknowledge that: "I've noticed it's better than it was. We're making progress."
7. **Be prepared for multiple iterations:** Some complex problems require 3-4 Plan B conversations before landing on an effective solution. Persistence matters.

OBSTACLE 6: Co-Parent Is Not On Board

Why This Happens: - Co-parent is skeptical of collaborative approach, preferring traditional consequence-based discipline - Co-parent believes approach is “too soft” or child is “getting away with” misbehavior - Co-parent doesn’t understand the paradigm shift from motivation to capability - Co-parent lacks patience or emotional regulation for Plan B implementation

Solutions: 1. **Educate before implementing:** Share the book, relevant chapters, or summarize the core concepts. Understanding the rationale increases buy-in.

2. **Emphasize what hasn’t worked:** “We’ve tried consequences, punishments, and rewards for [time period]. The behaviors are still happening. This child needs a different approach.”
3. **Start small:** Implement Plan B yourself on one problem while co-parent continues their approach on others. When they see success, they may become more open.
4. **Focus on lagging skills:** Reviewing ALSUP together often creates shared understanding that the child genuinely can’t, not won’t.
5. **Address authority concerns directly:** “This approach doesn’t eliminate expectations or authority. It changes how we exercise authority—through collaboration rather than coercion.”
6. **Seek professional support:** If possible, have a therapist or counselor trained in CPS meet with both parents to facilitate alignment.
7. **Accept imperfect consistency if necessary:** One parent using CPS while another uses traditional approaches is not ideal, but it’s better than no one using CPS. Many children successfully navigate different approaches with different caregivers.

OBSTACLE 7: School Resists Approach

Why This Happens: - School operates on behavioral management system emphasizing consistency and consequences - Teachers perceive collaborative approach as “giving in” or unfair to other students - School lacks training in CPS and understands it as permissive rather than skill-building - School has limited time/resources to implement individualized approaches

Solutions: 1. **Request collaborative meeting:** Ask for meeting with teacher, counselor, and/or administrator to discuss child’s challenges.

2. **Share ALSUP results:** Present specific lagging skills and school-related unsolved problems. This moves conversation from “your child is defiant” to “your child struggles with these specific skill areas.”
3. **Educate about CPS approach:** Offer to provide book, website resources, or summary of methodology.
4. **Emphasize skill-building vs. behavior management:** “This approach teaches skills through practice, not just manages behavior in the moment.”

5. **Address fairness concerns:** “Different children have different lagging skills. My child needs this approach the way another child might need glasses or extra reading support.”
6. **Propose starting small:** “Can we try collaborative problem-solving on one school problem and see if it helps?”
7. **Request specific accommodations:**
 - Plan C for lower-priority school expectations
 - Proactive Plan B conversations with child during calm moments
 - Avoiding Plan A (power struggles) on identified unsolved problems
8. **Offer to participate initially:** “I’m happy to join for the first few Plan B conversations to help demonstrate the approach.”
9. **Document formally if needed:** If child has IEP or 504 plan, CPS approach and specific Plans B and C can be written into the educational plan.
10. **Accept that some schools won’t cooperate:** If school insists on traditional approaches despite your advocacy, focus on implementing CPS at home. Home consistency alone produces significant improvement even if school doesn’t adopt the approach.

OBSTACLE 8: You Feel Overwhelmed by Number of Unsolved Problems

Why This Happens: - ALSUP revealed more problems than you anticipated - Progress feels slow; problems aren’t resolving as quickly as hoped - New problems emerge even as old ones resolve - You’re exhausted and doubting whether you can sustain this approach

Solutions: 1. **Remember: All problems were there before ALSUP:** Awareness of problems doesn’t create them. You’re seeing clearly what was always happening.

2. **Recommit to prioritization:** Are you truly addressing only top 3 problems with Plan B and keeping all others on Plan C? Or have you slipped into trying to address too many simultaneously?
3. **Celebrate progress on any problem:** Even one problem moving from frequent conflict to resolved represents meaningful progress.
4. **Adjust timeline expectations:** Lasting behavior change takes time. Most families see meaningful improvement in 6-8 weeks, significant improvement in 3-6 months.
5. **Seek support:** Join online CPS communities, find a CPS-trained therapist, or work with a coach who can provide guidance when stuck.
6. **Practice self-compassion:** You’re learning a complex new skill while managing a challenging family dynamic. Mistakes and setbacks are normal.
7. **Review what’s working:** Make an explicit list of improvements, however small, to maintain motivation during discouraging moments.

Success Indicators: - You can identify specific obstacles and apply targeted solutions - You recover from implementation mistakes rather than abandoning the approach - You maintain collaborative stance even when frustrated - You seek support when stuck rather than giving up - Obstacles decrease in frequency as you and child develop skills

Step 5: Extend Approach to School and Other Systems

Purpose: Collaborate with educators and other adults in your child's life to implement CPS approach across settings, ensuring consistency and addressing setting-specific unsolved problems.

What You Need: - Successful Plan B implementation at home demonstrating the approach works - Completed ALSUP identifying school-related unsolved problems - Willingness to partner with school rather than blame or demand - Patience with school's learning curve about the approach - Advocacy mindset combined with collaborative attitude

Detailed Process:

PHASE 1: Prepare for School Collaboration

1. **Identify school-specific unsolved problems** from your ALSUP:
 - Academic tasks (difficulty starting assignments, difficulty working independently, difficulty asking for help)
 - Transitions (difficulty transitioning between activities, difficulty entering classroom in morning)
 - Social situations (difficulty handling peer conflicts, difficulty waiting turn, difficulty accepting losing)
 - Following directions (difficulty following multi-step directions, difficulty accepting no)
 - Organization (difficulty remembering materials, difficulty managing time)
2. **Document patterns:** Note when, where, and under what circumstances school problems occur. Specific information is more actionable than general complaints.
3. **Gather school perspective:** What are teachers most concerned about? Understanding their priorities helps position your approach as addressing their concerns, not just yours.
4. **Prepare to educate:** Have 1-2 page summary of CPS approach, reference to Lives in the Balance website, or relevant book chapters to share with school.
5. **Identify your specific requests** before meeting:
 - Plan C for lower-priority school expectations
 - Plan B for 1-2 high-priority school problems
 - Avoiding Plan A power struggles on identified problems
 - Specific communication about what's working/not working

PHASE 2: Initiate Collaborative School Meeting

1. **Request meeting** with appropriate school personnel:
 - Child’s primary teacher
 - School counselor or social worker
 - Special education staff if applicable
 - Administrator if teacher alone doesn’t have authority to implement accommodations
2. **Frame the meeting collaboratively:** “I’d like to partner with you to help my child be more successful at school” rather than “You’re not handling my child appropriately.”
3. **Share your understanding of your child’s lagging skills:** “We’ve learned that my child struggles with [specific lagging skills from ALSUP]. This explains a lot of the challenging behaviors you’re seeing.”
4. **Provide specific examples** of school unsolved problems: “My child has particular difficulty transitioning between activities, accepting no regarding computer time, and working independently on writing assignments.”
5. **Explain CPS approach briefly:**
 - “We’ve learned that traditional consequences don’t address skill deficits”
 - “We’ve been using collaborative problem-solving at home with good results”
 - “The approach involves identifying specific problems, understanding why they’re difficult for my child, and solving them collaboratively”
 - “It’s not permissive—we still have expectations, but we solve problems proactively rather than imposing solutions”
6. **Offer resources:** “If you’re interested, there’s a great book called *The Explosive Child*, and the *Lives in the Balance* website has resources specifically for educators.”
7. **Propose starting with one problem:** “I’m wondering if we could try collaborative problem-solving on one school problem to see if it helps. Which problem would be most useful to address from your perspective?”
8. **Explain Plans B and C specifically:**
 - “Plan B means having a conversation with my child during a calm moment about what makes [expectation] difficult, sharing your concern, and brainstorming solutions together”
 - “Plan C means temporarily setting aside lower-priority expectations to reduce overall demand and focus on high-priority issues”
9. **Address predictable concerns:**

Fairness: “Different children have different learning needs. My child needs this approach the way another child might need reading support or occupational therapy. We’re addressing specific skill deficits.”

Consistency: “Consistency means responding to each child’s needs appropriately. What’s inconsistent is using the same approach for all children when they have different capabilities.”

Undermining authority: “The approach doesn’t eliminate expectations. It changes how we enforce them—through collaboration rather than coercion, which actually builds skills.”

Time concerns: “Proactive problem-solving takes less time than managing repeated meltdowns and office referrals.”

10. **Volunteer your participation:** “I’m happy to join for initial Plan B conversations if that would help demonstrate the approach.”

PHASE 3: Implement School-Based CPS

1. **Identify one high-priority school problem** to address first (e.g., difficulty transitioning from recess to classroom).
2. **Teacher conducts proactive Plan B** with child during calm moment (not during or after concerning behavior):
 - Empathy: “I’ve noticed you’re having difficulty coming inside and settling down after recess. What’s hard about that?”
 - Define adult concerns: “The thing is, when you take a long time to settle, you miss instructions and then you’re confused about the assignment.”
 - Invitation: “I wonder if there’s a way to help you transition more smoothly so you don’t miss instructions. What do you think would help?”
3. **Implement agreed solution** and assess effectiveness after several days.
4. **Communicate between home and school** about progress:
 - Weekly check-ins about how solutions are working
 - Adjustments to solutions as needed
 - Celebration of progress
 - Identification of new problems to address
5. **Identify lower-priority school problems for Plan C:**
 - Problems that trigger frequent conflict but limited actual impact on learning
 - Expectations that can be temporarily released without safety concerns
 - Examples might include: keeping desk perfectly organized, sitting completely still during lessons, specific handwriting neatness standards
6. **Implement Plan C at school:** Teacher announces briefly: “For now, I’m not going to worry about [expectation]. We’ll come back to that later.”
7. **Avoid Plan A at school** for identified unsolved problems:
 - Teacher resists power struggles on problems designated for Plan B
 - Focus shifts from compliance enforcement to collaborative problem-solving

- Consequences and punishments are recognized as ineffective for skill deficits

PHASE 4: Monitor, Adjust, and Expand

1. **Schedule regular check-ins** (every 2-4 weeks initially):
 - Review progress on high-priority problems
 - Adjust solutions that aren't working
 - Identify new problems to address
 - Celebrate improvements
2. **Document progress** specifically:
 - Frequency of office referrals
 - Number of meltdowns or explosive episodes
 - Academic productivity
 - Relationship quality with teachers and peers
 - Child's self-reported experience
3. **Address obstacles proactively:**
 - If teacher struggles with Plan B implementation, offer coaching or professional development resources
 - If classroom behavioral system conflicts with CPS, request exemption or modification for your child
 - If substitute teachers don't know the approach, prepare brief summary they can reference
4. **Expand to additional problems** as initial problems resolve:
 - Graduate Plan C problems to Plan B as capacity increases
 - Apply approach to new school challenges that emerge
5. **Involve child in the process** over time:
 - "What school problems would you like to solve?"
 - "What's working at school? What's still hard?"
 - Encourage child to request Plan B from teacher: "Can we talk about this?"
6. **Generalize skills across settings:**
 - Notice how problem-solving skills developed at home transfer to school
 - Observe how collaborative problem-solving with teacher builds child's confidence and skill
 - Recognize that consistent approach across settings accelerates skill development

PHASE 5: Extend to Other Adults and Settings

Extended Family: 1. **Educate grandparents, aunts/uncles, close family friends** who spend significant time with your child: - Share that you're using a different approach based on understanding child's skill deficits - Explain briefly: "We've learned my child isn't choosing defiance—they lack specific skills in flexibility and frustration tolerance" - Request that they avoid punishment/consequence-based approaches during visits

2. **Provide simple guidance:**
 - "If [expectation] becomes an issue, please let me know rather than handling it in the moment"
 - "If you need to address something immediately, use matter-of-fact redirection"

rather than consequences”

- “We’re focusing on [top 3 problems]; other expectations are on the back burner temporarily”

3. **Accept that extended family may not fully adopt approach:** Inconsistency is not ideal, but protected time with aligned caregivers at home and school produces improvement even if grandparents use traditional approaches.

Babysitters/Caregivers: 1. **Brief them on Plan C expectations:** “We’re not worrying about [list] right now. If those come up, just let them go.”

2. **Prepare them for potential problems:** “If [high-priority problem] comes up, here’s what we’ve been doing: [brief description of solution].”
3. **Request they avoid consequences:** “If there are problems I should know about, please just tell me afterward. We’ll address them proactively.”

After-School Programs, Sports, Activities: 1. **Speak with coaches, instructors, program leaders** if child is experiencing problems in those settings.

2. **Share relevant information:** “My child struggles with [specific lagging skill]. You might notice this when [situation].”
3. **Suggest proactive problem-solving:** “If [problem] comes up, I find it helps to talk with my child during a calm moment about what makes it hard and brainstorm solutions together.”
4. **Request patience:** “My child is working on these skills. Progress takes time.”

Common Obstacles:

School resistance: - Start with most open/flexible teacher or staff member to demonstrate effectiveness - Document improvements to build case for wider implementation - Request formal accommodations through IEP/504 process if needed - Accept partial implementation; some support better than none

Extended family criticism: - “You’re being too soft” → “Traditional approaches weren’t working. This child needs a different approach.” - “You’re letting them get away with it” → “We’re teaching skills, not ignoring problems.” - “We never had to do all this” → “Different children have different needs. This is what my child needs.”

Inconsistency across settings: - Focus energy on settings where child spends most time (home, school) - Accept that you cannot control every adult’s approach - Consistency in primary settings produces improvement even with inconsistency elsewhere

Success Indicators: - School reports decreased concerning behaviors - Teacher describes improved relationship with child - Child becomes more successful with school expectations - Academic productivity and engagement increase - Child develops problem-solving skills transferable across settings - Reduced phone calls, office referrals, and crisis situations at school

Step 6: Maintain Long-Term Implementation and Prevent Regression

Purpose: Sustain CPS approach over time, preventing regression to old patterns during stressful periods, continuing to address new unsolved problems as they emerge, and deepening collaborative problem-solving as a family lifestyle rather than temporary intervention.

What You Need: - Several months of CPS implementation with meaningful progress - Recognition that new developmental stages bring new unsolved problems - Commitment to ongoing practice rather than viewing CPS as “finished” - Support system for maintaining approach during difficult periods - Self-awareness about triggers that might cause regression to Plan A

Detailed Process:

PHASE 1: Establish Ongoing ALSUP Review Rhythm

1. **Schedule regular ALSUP reviews** (monthly during first 6 months, then quarterly):
 - Block 60 minutes on calendar as standing appointment
 - Review with co-parent if applicable
 - Treat this as essential maintenance, not optional
2. **During each review, assess lagging skills:**
 - Which lagging skills from initial assessment have improved?
 - Have any new lagging skill areas emerged?
 - Which lagging skills remain priority areas for development?
 - Celebrate improvements explicitly
3. **Update unsolved problems list:**
 - Which problems from original list have resolved? Remove these and celebrate.
 - Which problems remain active? Assess progress.
 - What new unsolved problems have emerged? Add these.
 - Developmental transitions (puberty, school transitions, increased independence expectations) predictably generate new unsolved problems
4. **Re-prioritize based on current reality:**
 - Which 3-5 problems are highest priority right now?
 - Which problems should remain Plan C?
 - Which Plan C problems have increased in importance and should graduate to Plan B?
 - Which problems have decreased in importance and can be dropped entirely?
5. **Assess your own skill development:**
 - What aspects of Plan B have become easier for you?
 - What aspects still feel challenging?
 - When do you find yourself slipping into Plan A?
 - What supports would help you continue developing skill?

PHASE 2: Recognize and Respond to Regression Warning Signs

Warning Signs: 1. Frequency of Plan A increasing 2. Concerning behaviors increasing after period of improvement 3. Your frustration/anger toward child increasing 4. Plan B conversations becoming adversarial rather than collaborative 5. Avoiding Plan B and hoping

problems will resolve on their own 6. Reintroducing consequences and punishment language
7. Thinking “This isn’t working anymore”

Why Regression Happens: - Life stress (job changes, financial pressure, illness, relationship conflict) depletes adult emotional regulation - Child developmental transitions create new problems that trigger adult frustration - Initial novelty of approach has worn off; maintaining new patterns requires continued conscious effort - Family crisis shifts everyone into survival mode where old patterns resurface - Success creates complacency; adults stop being proactive as problems decrease

Responding to Regression:

1. **Acknowledge it without judgment:** “I’ve noticed I’ve been using a lot of Plan A lately. That’s my stress showing up, not a decision that Plan A is better.”
2. **Identify triggers:** “What changed that led me to regress? Am I more stressed? Have new problems emerged? Did I stop being proactive?”
3. **Return to ALSUP:** Re-review lagging skills and unsolved problems. Regression often indicates you’ve lost sight of the capability framework and slipped back into motivation-based thinking.
4. **Reconnect with approach rationale:** Re-read key book chapters, review notes from initial implementation, or revisit why you adopted this approach initially.
5. **Identify one high-priority problem to address with Plan B this week:** Taking action breaks the regression cycle.
6. **Seek support:** Connect with online CPS community, therapist, or coach who can provide perspective and encouragement.
7. **Practice self-compassion:** Regression is normal. Notice it, understand it, and redirect without self-criticism.
8. **Address your own stress sources:** If adult stress is triggering regression, addressing those sources (therapy, self-care, practical support) protects CPS implementation.

PHASE 3: Deepen Collaborative Problem-Solving as Family Culture

Involve Child More Actively:

1. **Teach child to identify their own unsolved problems:**
 - “What expectations are hard for you right now?”
 - “What problems should we work on together?”
 - This shifts child from passive recipient to active participant in their own skill development
2. **Encourage child to request Plan B:**
 - “If something is hard, you can always ask me: ‘Can we talk about this?’”
 - Normalizing this request empowers child and prevents problem accumulation
3. **Include child in solution evaluation:**
 - “We’ve been trying [solution] for a while. How do you think it’s working?”

- “What would make it work even better?”
 - This develops metacognitive skills and ownership
4. **Celebrate collaborative problem-solving success explicitly:**
 - “I love how we figured that out together”
 - “Remember when [problem] used to be really hard? Look how much better it is now”
 - This reinforces the collaborative relationship and progress

Apply Collaborative Problem-Solving More Broadly:

1. **Extend to sibling conflicts:**
 - Rather than adjudicating sibling disputes, facilitate Plan B between siblings
 - “Sounds like you two have a problem to solve. What’s hard for each of you? How can you solve it so it works for both?”
2. **Model in your adult relationships:**
 - Use Plan B framework with co-parent, extended family, colleagues
 - Children learn problem-solving through observation as much as direct practice
3. **Apply to family decisions:**
 - Vacation planning, schedule decisions, household responsibilities can all involve collaborative problem-solving
 - This normalizes the approach beyond “behavior problems”
4. **Teach explicitly:**
 - “The way we solve problems in this family is: first we understand everyone’s concerns, then we figure out solutions that work for everyone”
 - Articulating the family problem-solving culture reinforces it

PHASE 4: Manage Developmental Transitions Proactively

Predictable Transition Points That Generate New Unsolved Problems: - School transitions (elementary to middle, middle to high school) - Puberty and adolescence - Increased independence expectations (staying home alone, managing own schedule, driving) - Social complexity increases (dating, peer pressure, social media) - Academic demands increase - Emerging mental health challenges (anxiety, depression)

Proactive Transition Management:

1. **Anticipate new expectations** associated with each transition:
 - What new demands will this transition place on my child?
 - Which lagging skills are most likely to create difficulty with these new demands?
2. **Identify likely unsolved problems before they become crises:**
 - “As you start middle school, you’ll need to manage multiple teachers and track assignments independently. That might be hard given your working memory challenges. Let’s solve that proactively.”
3. **Conduct proactive Plan B for anticipated problems:**
 - Don’t wait for the problem to cause explosions
 - Address during calm period before transition occurs
4. **Increase support during transitions:**
 - More frequent check-ins

- More active problem-solving
 - Temporary return to more Plan C if child is overwhelmed
5. **Normalize that transitions are challenging:**
- “It makes sense that you’re having more difficulty right now. Middle school is a big change. We’ll figure it out together.”

PHASE 5: Sustain Adult Skills and Motivation

Continue Your Own Development:

1. **Seek ongoing education:**
 - Re-read book sections as new challenges arise
 - Engage with Lives in the Balance website resources
 - Attend CPS training if available
 - Join online CPS parent communities for ongoing support
2. **Work with professional support if needed:**
 - CPS-trained therapist for coaching
 - Family therapy incorporating CPS approach
 - Parent consultation services
3. **Practice self-care and stress management:**
 - Your emotional regulation is essential for Plan B implementation
 - Neglecting your own wellbeing undermines your capacity to implement the approach
4. **Maintain connection with other adults using CPS:**
 - Share successes and challenges
 - Learn from others’ experiences
 - Reduce isolation through community

Maintain Perspective During Discouragement:

1. **Track progress explicitly:**
 - Keep journal or note documenting improvements
 - Review regularly, especially during discouraging periods
 - Progress is often incremental; documentation makes it visible
2. **Adjust timeline expectations:**
 - Lasting behavior change takes months to years, not weeks
 - Compare current functioning to 6 months ago, not to perfect behavior
3. **Recognize that perfect implementation isn’t required:**
 - You will make mistakes
 - You will occasionally use Plan A when Plan B would have been better
 - Your child will continue to have concerning behaviors sometimes
 - Progress, not perfection, is the goal
4. **Remember the alternative:**
 - What was family life like before CPS?
 - Would returning to consequence-based approaches actually work better?
 - For most families, even imperfect CPS implementation is dramatically better than pre-CPS functioning

PHASE 6: Graduate to Naturalistic Implementation

Signs You're Ready: - Plan B has become relatively automatic; you don't need to consciously think through steps - Concerning behaviors have decreased dramatically and occur infrequently - Child initiates problem-solving discussions without prompting - Collaborative problem-solving feels like family culture, not technique - You can implement Plan B effectively even during stressful periods

Naturalistic Implementation:

1. Less structured Plan B:

- Conversations flow naturally without rigid adherence to three-step format
- Core principles (understand both concerns, co-create solutions) remain, but execution is fluid

2. Child-initiated problem-solving:

- Child comes to you: "We need to talk about [problem]"
- You respond: "Okay, tell me what's hard about it"
- Collaborative problem-solving proceeds naturally

3. Preventive maintenance:

- Continue quarterly ALSUP reviews to catch emerging problems early
- Address new unsolved problems proactively before they generate crises
- Maintain collaborative relationship foundation

4. Ongoing skill development:

- Child's adaptive skills continue developing through repeated practice
- Lagging skill areas gradually improve
- Child becomes increasingly capable of meeting expectations that were previously difficult

Success Indicators: - Concerning behaviors rare rather than frequent - When they occur, you respond with collaborative problem-solving automatically - Family relationships are positive and collaborative - Child has demonstrably developed skills in flexibility, frustration tolerance, problem-solving - You maintain approach even during stressful periods - New problems are addressed proactively before becoming crises - You feel confident in the approach and your ability to implement it

Final Note: CPS is not a temporary intervention you complete and then stop. It's a sustainable approach to relationships and problem-solving that serves families across the child's entire development. The specific unsolved problems change over time. The lagging skills gradually improve. But the collaborative partnership framework remains valuable throughout childhood, adolescence, and beyond. Many families report that CPS fundamentally transforms not just their relationship with their child, but their entire approach to relationships and problem-solving across all life domains.