OPTIONS FOR HANDLING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

PLAN A:
Solve the problem unilaterally

PLAN B:
Solve the problem collaboratively

PLAN C:
Set the problem aside for now
Good parenting and good teaching mean being responsive to the hand you’ve been dealt
PLAN B

Solve the problem collaboratively

1. Empathy Step
   (gather information so as to identify child’s concerns)

2. Define Adult Concerns Step
   (identify adult concerns)

3. Invitation Step
   (collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory)
GOAL:
Gather information from the kid so as to achieve the clearest possible understanding of his concern or perspective on a given unsolved problem.

INTRODUCTION:
The Empathy step begins with the words “I’ve noticed that” followed by an unsolved problem and an initial inquiry (“What’s up?”).
PLAN B

The Empathy Step

What happens after “What’s up?”

- The kid says something
- The kid says nothing or “I don’t know”
- The kid says, “I don’t have a problem with that” or “I don’t care”
- The kids says, “I don’t want to talk about it”
- The kid responds defensively (“I don’t have to talk to you!”)
PLAN B

The Empathy Step: The Kid Says Something

DRILLING STRATEGIES:

- Reflective listening and clarifying statements
- Asking about the who, what, where/when of the unsolved problem
- Asking about why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others
- Asking the kid what s/he’s thinking in the midst of the unsolved problem
- Breaking the problem down into its component parts
- Discrepant Observation
- Tabling (and asking for more concerns)
- Summarizing (and asking for more concerns)
PLAN B

The Empathy Step: I Don’t Know/Silence

WHAT TO DO:
- Don’t freak
- Keep drilling

IF HE’S STILL NOT TALKING, FIGURE OUT WHY:

Adult Impediments
- You used Plan A
- You used Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
- The Introduction wasn’t specific, free of theories, free of maladaptive behaviors, split

Child Impediments
- He doesn’t trust you and/or the process yet (he has a lot of experience with Plan A)
- He really doesn’t know
- He needs the problem broken down into its component parts
- He needs time to think (adults better get comfortable with silence)
- He’s having difficulty putting his thoughts into words

WHAT IF HE’S STILL NOT TALKING?
- Educated guessing/hypothesis testing
PLAN B

The Empathy Step: Other Responses to “What’s Up?”

"I don’t have a problem with that” or “I don’t care”
- that’s the beginning of his concern or perspective…start drilling!
- the kid almost certainly has a problem with all the conflict surrounding the unsolved problem

“I don’t want to talk about it”
- first, assume he has a good reason
- next, give him permission not to talk
- see if he’ll talk about why he doesn’t want to talk about it
- Don’t do anything today that will reduce the likelihood of the kid talking to you tomorrow

Defensiveness (“I don’t have to talk to you!”)
- he may need reassurance that you’re not using Plan A
  - “I’m not telling you what to do”
  - “You’re not in trouble”
  - “I’m not mad at you”
  - “I’m just trying to understand”
PLAN B

The Define Adult Concerns Step

GOAL:
Enter the adult’s concern or perspective into consideration (possibly beginning with “The thing is…” or “My concern is…”)

WHAT’S HARD:
Adults frequently don’t know what their concerns are...adult concerns are not merely a repetition of the expectation

- Adult concerns typically fall into one of two categories:
  - How the problem is affecting the kid (e.g., health, safety, learning)
  - How the problem is affecting others (e.g., health, safety, learning)

- The Define Adult Concerns step is a Solution-Free Zone, too...the first two steps are reserved exclusively for concerns
GOAL:
Collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory

WHAT’S HARD:

- The Wording:
  - Should recap two concerns so as to summarize the problem to be solved (Starts with: “I wonder if there’s a way…”)
  - The kid is given the first opportunity to generate solutions (“Do you have any ideas?”), but resolution of the problem is a team effort (collaborative)
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES

livesinthebalance.org
cpsconnection.com
thekidswelose.com