

Collaborative Problem Solving

Wednesday, March 13, 2007, I had the opportunity to attend a morning workshop titled “Collaborative Problem Solving” provided by the Seton Resource Center. This approach was presented as a method for shaping appropriate behavior with explosive children. Such children are described as difficult children and adolescents who lack important cognitive skills essential to handling frustration and mastering situations requiring flexibility and adaptability. However, much of what is explained applies to the shaping of behavior for all children.

The core concept for this approach to managing behavior is: “Children do well if they can.” I think we all can agree with this statement. CPS (Collaborative Problem Solving) focuses attention on the “Why” of behavior. Instead of asking, “What’s it going to take to motivate this kid to behave differently?” CPS asks, “What’s getting in this kid’s way of behaving appropriately? Why is this so hard for him?” And then the question is: “How can I help?” As stated in the book, The Explosive Child, the CPS model proposes that challenging behavior should be understood and handled in the same manner as other recognized learning disabilities.

For more information about CPS you can buy the book, The Explosive Child, by Drs. Ross Greene and Stuart Ablon and/or you can go to the website www.ccps.info/index.html. As part of the treatment process for these children Greene and Ablon provide a Pathways Inventory for determining skills children are lacking or are weak at expressing. Such an inventory helps determine the treatment process – the skills that the child needs to be taught. As the name indicates, the treatment process is collaborative between the child and the “teacher.”

The Pathways Inventory addresses the following areas when evaluating children: executive skills, language processing skills, emotion regulation skills, cognitive flexibility skills, and social skills. The inventory includes content like:

- *difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another, adapting to new circumstances or rules;*
- *often has difficulty expressing thoughts, needs, or concerns in words;*
- *difficulty staying calm enough to think rationally (when frustrated);*
- *concrete, black-and-white thinker, often takes things literally;*
- *difficulty attending to or misreading of social cues/poor perception of social nuances/difficulty recognizing nonverbal social cues.*

As you can see, a child would not have to be defined as an explosive child to have difficulty in some of these areas. Take a look at some of the material for this theory to see if it has any value to you and your situation. I have a copy of The Explosive Child that I can loan. Call the school office if you are interested in borrowing my copy.