

Changing Perspectives: Implementing Collaborative and Proactive Solutions with Vulnerable Populations

Sophie Miller, LCSW- R, Director of Quality Assurance

Amy Gottheimer, LCSW, Program Director IMT

Natalie Nokes, MHC, Case Manager IMT

Henry Stemler, LMSW, Clinical Supervisor IMT

History and Introduction

- Created by Ross Greene, Ph.D.
 - www.livesinthebalance.org
- Introduced to CUCS in 2016
- Piloted at 3 sites in 2017

The underlying belief of CPS is that people will do well if they can, and they want to do well!

Principles

- Focus on solving problems rather than correcting behavior
 - Upstream vs. downstream
- To help with a problem, everyone needs to be on the same page first
- Collaboration
- CPS is proactive, and builds on itself

Top 5 skills that foster the better side of human nature

- Empathy
- Appreciating how one's behavior is affecting others
- Resolving disagreements in ways that do not cause conflict
- Taking another's perspective
- Honesty

Why use CPS with adults?

1. Collaboration and problem solving instead of concrete implementation of rules enhances our relationship with the participants.
2. Lagging skills are lagging skills regardless of someone's age.
3. Our participants have often been in environments where their input wasn't a primary focus.
4. Empathy!

Case Study - Jason

- 34 year old, street homeless, Jamaican male
- History of violence and lack of stability
- Schizophrenia and drug use
- Interests are drawing, magazines, and Youtube videos
- Goal - move inside

So, where do we start?

Three step process:

1. Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)
2. Conversation (Plan B)
3. Monitoring

The ALSUP

- Worksheet/discussion guide completed by providers
- Focus on things you can impact
- Start from the top and review each skill
- Identify as many difficulties as possible for each skill
- Start with the lagging skill and match to the unsolved problem, not the other way around

Using the ALSUP

- After checking off a lagging skill, identify examples of unsolved problems
- Ask what are times the person is having difficulty with ...
- Unsolved problems may relate to multiple lagging skills
- Don't look past the behaviors, this is not the time to hypothesize

What are the lagging skills?

- Executive functioning
- Language processing
- Emotional regulation
- Cognitive flexibility
- Social

Executive Functioning Skills

- Handling transitions, shifting from one mindset/task to another
- Doing things in a logical sequence or prescribed order
- Persisting on challenging or tedious tasks
- Poor sense of time
- Maintaining focus
- Considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)
- Considering a range of solutions to a problem

Language Processing Skills

- Expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words

Emotional Regulation Skills

- Managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally
- Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration

Cognitive Flexibility Skills

- Seeing “grays”/concrete, literal, black & white thinking
- Deviating from rules/routine
- Handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty
- Shifting from original idea, plan, or solution
- Taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action
- Inflexible, inaccurate interpretations/cognitive distortions or biases

Social Skills

- Attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances
- Starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills
- Seeking attention in appropriate ways
- Appreciating how his/her behavior is affecting others
- Empathizing with others, appreciating another person's perspective or point of view
- Appreciating how she/he is coming across or being perceived by others

Using the ALSUP

- Use the language that will be used directly with the participant
 - Free of challenging behaviors (i.e. difficulty)
 - Free of our theories (no jargon)
 - Split, not clumped
 - As specific as possible (who, what, where, when, but not why)

Identifying Unsolved Problems with Participants

- Ask both participant and collaterals:
 - What are people bugging you about?
 - What are people giving you a hard time about?
 - What are you getting in trouble for?

Case Study ALSUP

- Lagging Skill: Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words
- Unsolved Problem: Difficulty explaining reasons for leaving the intake at Safe Haven.

Break Into Groups!

Review the ALSUP and identify a client that has exhibited difficulties

Next Step: Solving the Problem

- Plan A: Solve the problem unilaterally
- Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively
- Plan C: Set the problem aside for now

Plan A

- We are deciding what the solution is.
- Not a partnership
- Can create more challenges
- Is uninformed

Plan C

- Setting the problem aside, for now
- This is about prioritizing, not capitulating
- Stop-gap, something to come back to later

Plan B

Three step process:

1. Empathy Step

(gathering information about the person's concerns)

2. Defining Your Concerns Step

(what's your side and why is it important)

3. Invitation Step

(collaborate on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory)

1. Empathy Step

- Goal: Gather information from the participant so that you both have the clearest possible understanding of their perspective/concern
- Introduction: Start by reviewing the unsolved problem identified in the ALSUP and ask, “what’s up?”

1. Empathy Step

- What happens next?
 - Participant says something
 - Participant says nothing
 - Participant says that there isn't a problem
 - Participant says they don't want to talk
 - Participant gets defensive

1. Empathy Step: Participant says something

- Drill down to understand their perspective!
 - Use Reflective Listening and clarifying statements
 - Find out the who, what, when, and where of the problem
 - Ask about the conditions in which the problem occurs, and how it doesn't occur in other conditions
 - Ask what the participant thinks is driving the problem
 - Ask about discrepancies you've observed
 - Break the problem down in to it's components

1. Empathy Step: Participant says something

- This is not the time to focus on solutions, really seek to understand what the participant's experience is.
- Stay neutral and non-defensive, this step is about active listening, not you
- Don't rush - if the participant hasn't fully been heard, you're not doing Plan B
- This steps ends when you've summarized and the participant agrees that there isn't anything else to add.

1. Empathy Step: Participant says nothing/I don't know

- Where does this come from?
 - Never thought about this before
 - No one has asked before
 - It has been a long time since the participant's thought about their own concerns
 - Needing time to think
 - Having difficulty putting thoughts into words
- Keep drilling!
- To yourself, ask:
 - Was the introduction specific enough, not focused on behavior, free of theories?
 - Did you actually use Plan A?
- Get comfortable with the silence

1. Empathy Step: Defensiveness

- “There’s no problem”
 - Opportunity for drilling!
 - There’s likely a problem with the conflict that goes on around the problem...
 - Ask what they would identify as a problem
- “I don’t want to talk”
 - Assume there’s a good reason
 - Give permission not to talk
 - Try to talk about why they don’t want to talk about it
 - Table and come back to it another day
- “I don’t have to talk to you”
 - Give reassurance that you’re not doing Plan A
 - You are just trying to understand the issue, not tell the participant what to do
 - Remind the participant this isn’t about being in “trouble” or frustration with the participant

Case Study Empathy Step

- Failed Plan A
- Inherited Constraints
- Meeting Jason in his comfort zone
- Digging
- Concerns Identified - Losing K2 and getting in trouble

2. Defining Your Concerns Step

- Goal: Give information on your concern/perspective

This is likely to fall in either of two categories:

 - How the problem is affecting the participant
 - How the problem is affecting others
- It still isn't time for solutions
 - Power struggles
 - Can you relate the concerns back to the participant?

Case Study Defining Concerns

- Summary of concerns that Jason identified
- Importance of this goal to Jason
- Asking for a solution
- Identifying constraints

3. Invitation Step

- Goal: Collaborate on a solution that is *realistic* and *mutually satisfactory*
 - Recap the previous two steps
 - Ask the participant to give their ideas first
 - Demonstrate that you are as committed to having the participant's concerns addressed as you are your own
 - One solution may not cover all of the concerns you both have
 - Assess the solution so that you're both sure it is realistic and mutually satisfactory
 - End by agreeing to return to Plan B if the solution doesn't work

Case Study Invitation Step

- Brainstorming
- Jason's plan
- Potential problems with Jason's plan
- Solutions to those problems
- Sticking it out

Monitoring

- This is an incremental process (not miracles)
- Plan to fine tune the solution as you go.
- The Plan B process is indirectly teaching the lagging skills (empathy, impact, conflict resolution, changing perspective, honesty)

Keep in mind

- When the behaviors are pervasive, pick one scenario and start there, and then keep going
- Choosing where to start

What we've learned

- Usefulness of the empathy step
- “Emergency Plan B”
- Other issues trump using CPS
- Integration into program
- Important to not focus on behavior but what's upstream

Break Into Groups!

Plan B practice - how would you start the conversation?