

**Uncovering the Challenge Beneath the Behavior: A Skills-Based Approach**

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 Marshall University

WV ECPBLS  
 West Virginia Center for Excellence in Professional Behavior and Learning Support

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**WV ECPBIS Project is a collaboration between:**

West Virginia DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WEST VIRGINIA AUTISM TRAINING CENTER  
 AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

West Virginia Behavior/Mental Health Technical Assistance Center

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**Our Mission**

Empowering Individuals  
 Establishing Systems  
 Enhancing Skills

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### Agenda

- Behavior Equation
- Skill vs Will
- Informal Assessment of Problems to be Solved
- Pause and plan
- Preventing challenging behavior by building skills

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### Behavior Equation

- Skills  $\geq$  Demands/Expectations/Stressors = **Desired Behavior**
- Skills  $\leq$  Demands/Expectations/Stressors = **Challenging behavior**



Ablon, J. S., & Pollastri, A. R. (2018). The school discipline fix: Changing behavior using the collaborative problem solving approach. W. W. Norton & Company.

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**Show me a challenging kid, and I will show you they have delays or differences in...**

**Attention and working memory skills**

- Emotion and self-regulation skills
- Cognitive flexibility skills
- Language and communication skills
- Social thinking skills



(Ablon, J. Stuart. 2016...Research on Skill Deficits)

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**M**  
MARSHALL

**Floodlight Attention**

- Fuels rapid learning between 0-5




**Flashlight Attention**

- Starts to develop at 4-5 years old
- Necessary for most school tasks
- Requires regulation and effort
- Guided by sensory experience
- Sustained attention = ability to refocus over and over



Sumpter, Tera. (2021) Seeds of Learning: Processing Model for Speech, Language, Literacy, and Executive Functioning. ELH Publishing, LLC

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**M**  
MARSHALL

**• Working memory:**

- hold, manipulate information
- Store in and retrieve from long-term memory

**Verbal working memory:** sounds, inner voice

**Non-verbal working memory:** symbols, pictures, mind movie, meaning and concepts, internal visual map of the world, hindsight and foresight, imagination



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**M**  
MARSHALL

**Building Skills to balance the equation**

- Automatic vs. Intentional responses to stress
- Inhibition: the ability to interrupt current behavior, stop, plan and choose another behavior
- Plan ahead, set goals, initiate first steps
- Build through practice in situations that matter



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**MARSHALL**

### Make it automatic



- How do I start?
- How do I know I'm making progress?
- How do I know I'm finished?

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**MARSHALL**

### Balancing the behavior equation

<b>Improve</b>	• Improve the child's ability to meet our expectations
<b>Help</b>	• Help the child build resilience and solve problems with long term solutions and decreasing adult supports
<b>Build</b>	• Build thinking skills
<b>Strengthen</b>	• Strengthen relationships with adults and peers.
<b>Reduce</b>	• Reduce challenging behavior

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**MARSHALL**

### Dead end thinking vs. Skills based reframe

<p><b>Dead end thinking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of motivation</li> <li>• Disrespectful</li> <li>• Aggressive</li> <li>• Needy/attention seeking</li> <li>• Immature</li> <li>• Selfish</li> <li>• No family discipline</li> <li>• Controlling</li> </ul>		<p><b>Skills based thinking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trouble getting started?</li> <li>• Difficulty with impulse control?</li> <li>• Difficulty regulating?</li> <li>• Developmental delays or differences?</li> <li>• Difficulty with perspective-taking?</li> <li>• Still learning skills?</li> <li>• Difficulty being flexible?</li> </ul>	
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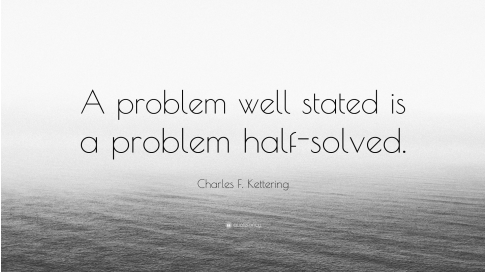
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A problem well stated is a problem half-solved.

Charles F. Kettering



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### What are we going to work on? What are we going to let go?

- Plan A: Insist on the adult solution (challenging behavior will increase, no skills are taught)
- Plan B -- (challenging behavior will decrease as skills increase)
  - Empathize, clarify the child's concern
  - Share adult concern
  - Brainstorm the solution (solution kit)
- Plan C- Strategically drop the expectation (challenging behavior will decrease, no skills will be taught)
- Process will look different depending on the skill level of the child



Ablon, J. S. (2018). *Changeable: how collaborative problem solving changes lives at home, at school, and at work.*

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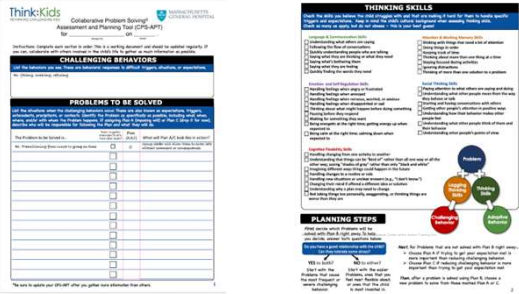
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www.thinkkids.org 15

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**Step one:**

- List Challenging behaviors

Instructions: Complete each section in order. This is a working document and should be updated regularly. If you can, collaborate with others involved in the child's life to gather as much information as possible.

**CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS**  
List the behaviors you see. These are behavioral responses to difficult triggers, situations, or expectations.  
Ex. Yelling, sucking, refusing

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**Step 2: Determine your Problems to be solved**

- What are the situations where the challenging behavior occurs?
- Ask yourself:
  - Who is there?
  - What time of day?
  - What are the expectations?
  - Where are we in the building?
  - When is it happening?
  - What is going on inside the child?
  - What is going on outside the child?
- At what point does the child get dysregulated? (Walk yourself back to the most recent time the child was "calm")

**PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED**  
List the situations where the challenging behavior occurred. These are situations in which the behavior occurred. List the situations in which the behavior occurred. List the situations in which the behavior occurred. List the situations in which the behavior occurred.

The Problem to be Solved is...	How often?	How long?	How often?	How long?	How often?	How long?
When the challenging behavior is going on...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Step 3: What skills are we asking children to use in our routines? What skills are they struggling with?**

**Daily Schedule**

- 8:00-8:15 a.m. Children's arrival—greeting—wash hands—settling
- 8:15-8:45 a.m. Class meeting—message board
- 8:45-9:15 a.m. Breakfast/quiet hands
- 9:15-9:30 a.m. Group group time
- 9:30-10:30 a.m. Direct Motor Instruction/activities
- 10:30-10:45 a.m. Play Centers
- 10:45-11:00 a.m. Quiet time
- 11:00-11:30 a.m. Recess/Calanmark hand/activities
- 11:45-12:00 noon Lunch
- 12:00-12:15 p.m. Restroom/quiet hands/Rest
- 12:45-1:00 p.m. Story
- 1:00-1:15 p.m. Read/quiet center activities/Book/activities quiet activities and individual activities
- 2:00-2:15 p.m. Read Time/quiet/Story
- 2:15-2:30 p.m. Music/Play the Day
- 2:30-2:45 p.m. Snack/Dismissal

**THINKING SKILLS**

Identify the thinking skills that are being used in the routine. List the thinking skills that are being used in the routine. List the thinking skills that are being used in the routine.

**PLANNING SKILLS**

Identify the planning skills that are being used in the routine. List the planning skills that are being used in the routine. List the planning skills that are being used in the routine.

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**The problem is:**

- The child wanders, hides, or otherwise does not participate in clean-up time



**Skills involved:**

- Awareness of time (5-minute warning)
- A plan for what to do with 5 minutes
- How to get started
- Memory of what comes next on the schedule
- Ability to stop a preferred activity
- Flexibility to start a potentially non-preferred activity
- Ability to imagine/remember what clean looks like

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**The problem is:**

- The child does not participate in back-and-forth interactions during play



**Skills involved:**

- Awareness a peer wants a turn
- Inhibiting the impulse to continue their turn
- Future thinking to imagine their next turn
- Delayed gratification: giving a turn might improve relationship with peer
- Flexibility to imagine that play can involve others

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**The problem is:**

- The child does not sit on their spot at morning meeting



**Skills involved:**

- Ability to ignore competing sensory stimulation
- Ability to refocus attention when it wanders
- Ability to inhibit movement, speech, vocalizations, etc.
- Awareness of peers
- Language skills to understand verbal directions
- Working memory to hold info in mind and use it to participate

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### Step 4: What strengths does the child have?

- What calms the child?
- What do they move towards?
- What do they move away from?
- Can they do part of a skill?
- Can they do a skill sometimes, but not always?
- Can they do the skill for a short period of time, but not as long as expected?
- What does their play look like?
- Are there medical or environmental factors contributing?

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### Building Routines

**Directions**  
 Consider the most likely obstacle to an activity for each member of your child's activity system. You may decide to do the activity for your child on a daily basis, but it may occur only once. Write the name of the activity in the left column labeled "Activity." In the next column, "Routines within the Activity," list the steps that you will use to help your child learn to do the activity. Think about things that your child likes to do. Write the name of the "Steps of the Routine" column. Write the name of the "Notes" column. Write the name of the activity in the top right of the notes column. Write the name of the activity in the top right of the notes column. Write the name of the activity in the top right of the notes column. Write the name of the activity in the top right of the notes column.

**Example:**

Activity	Routines within the Activity	Steps of the Routine	Notes
Open my book	Hold the book Open the book Turn the page	1. Hold the book together 2. Pick up the book 3. Turn the page 4. Hold the book together	1. Hold the book together 2. Pick up the book 3. Turn the page 4. Hold the book together
Close my book	Hold the book Close the book	1. Hold the book together 2. Pick up the book 3. Turn the page 4. Hold the book together	1. Hold the book together 2. Pick up the book 3. Turn the page 4. Hold the book together

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### Step 5: Make a plan to balance the behavior equation...

1. Which problems are we going to solve? (no more than 3)
2. How are we going to respond to Plan A and Plan C problems?
3. Who will attempt a plan B conversation with the child?
4. What thinking skill supports are we going to put in place?
  - a. Language and Communication
  - b. Emotion and Self-Regulation
  - c. Cognitive Flexibility
  - d. Attention and Working Memory
  - e. Social Thinking
5. What materials do we need and who will gather them?
6. When in the daily schedule are we going to practice new skills?
7. How are we going to take data?

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**Who can help?**

- Counselor
- SLP, OT, BCBA, Psychologist
- Itinerant teachers
- Community in Schools
- Social Worker
- Caregivers
- Link
- WV BMHTAC
- WV Autism Training Center
  - [ATC Registration for Services Form | Dynamic Forms \(ngwebsolutions.com\)](#)



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**Strive to Be Curious, Not Furious**

- **Watch**—Become a great observer of child behavior
- **Pause and plan**: use plans A, B and C strategically
- **Wait**—Give the child an opportunity to initiate
- **Prompt** when needed, but work to avoid prompt dependence
- **Follow the Child's Lead**—Let them show you what they can do and what's hard
- **Praise** the process not necessarily the outcome



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When children enter kindergarten, the key question **is not** whether they know the alphabet or can add and subtract.

Instead, the important skills include **impulse control, attention span, emotional regulation**. These abilities don't develop on their own. Instead, the relevant regions of the brain need to be activated — and often, since the brain's networks are strengthened through practice.

<https://www.bu.edu/cdi/>

Amanda Tarullo, P.h.D., director of the Brain and Early Experiences Laboratory at Boston University

@terasumpter\_slp →

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**Resources**

- <https://thinkkids.org/books-resources/>
- [www.challengingbehavior.org](http://www.challengingbehavior.org)
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-executive-function/>
- Ablon, J. S. (2018). *Changeable: how collaborative problem solving changes lives at home, at school, and at work*. New York, New York: TarcherPerigee, an imprint of Penquin Random House LLC.
- Ablon, J. S., & Pollastri, A. R. (2018). *The school discipline fix: Changing behavior using the collaborative problem solving approach*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Barkley, R. A. (2012). *Executive functions: What they are, how they work, and why they evolved*. The Guilford Press.
- Stanier, Michael Bungay. (2016). *The coaching habit : say less, ask more & change the way you lead forever / Michael Bungay Stanier* . Toronto: Box of Crayons Press.
- Sumpter, Tera (2021). *The Seeds of Learning: A Cognitive Processing Model for Speech, Language and Executive Functioning*, ELH Publishing

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**Thank you!**

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**Nonverbal Working Memory**

Developing essential working memory in toddlers is all about increasing their internal schemes and imaginations.

**Expose Them to Objects and Sensory Experiences**

The more objects and sensory experiences a child has, the more internal schemes they will develop. "Touch, taste, smell, and feel" are all great ways to increase their internal working memory. Encourage them to explore objects and sensory experiences.

**Engage in Pretend play**

The best way to engage the imagination and internal working memory is through pretend play. Encourage them to use their imagination and internal working memory to create a story or scenario.

**Story Time, Imaginations, and**

When you read a story to your child, encourage them to use their imagination and internal working memory to create a story or scenario. Encourage them to use their imagination and internal working memory to create a story or scenario.

**Play "What's in the Box?"**

- Teacher has a box with an object in it.
- Child guesses what the object is.
- Teacher gives clues to help the child guess.
- Teacher gives object to the child.
- Teacher repeats the game with a different object.

**Play "What Do I Feel?"**

- Teacher has a container with an object in it.
- Child feels the object.
- Child describes the object.
- Teacher gives object to the child.
- Teacher repeats the game with a different object.

**Toddlers**



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**Developing Executive Functions with Preschoolers**  
**Nonverbal Working Memory**

**Reverse Then to Objects and Sensory Experiences**

For some experiences or objects that are used in play or work, the children may be able to identify the object first and then describe the sensory experience. This is a good way to help them learn to describe the sensory experience. This is a good way to help them learn to describe the sensory experience.

**Make a Group Imagination Picture of an Object**

In this activity, the children of the group will be asked to draw a picture of an object. The children will be asked to draw a picture of an object. The children will be asked to draw a picture of an object.

**"Take a Picture"**

Describe an object. Have the children "take a picture" of the object with their eyes. Have them describe the object. Have them describe the object. Have them describe the object.

**Play "What's in the Box?"**

- Teacher has a box with an object in it.
- Teacher says "What's in the box?"
- Children guess what is in the box.
- Teacher reveals the object in the box.

**Engage in Pretend Play**

Use a box of pretend play objects. Use a box of pretend play objects. Use a box of pretend play objects.

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