

ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



TRANSFORMING PARENTHOOD: EMBRACING EMOTIONS, RESTORING CONNECTIONS



What's Inside ?

10 WAYS TO CONNECT WITH A CHILD WHO IS DIFFICULT TO LOVE



Watch

Being open about struggling as a parent is scary and it can be alienating to feel unhappy when others seem thrilled by their role. This video normalizes unspoken feelings and gives some suggestions for managing grief, shame, and regret.



Read

CCAI social worker, parent, and adoptive older sister Ryan Fontaine, LMHC, discusses the shame commonly expressed by parents when they struggle to connect with their children and how to improve complex parent-child relationships.



Listen

Although parental grief and depression following an adoption are common, it is not frequently discussed. On this podcast, the host presents unspoken emotions often experienced by adoptive parents and encourages seeking support from others.

- 1 Use art for self expression
- 2 Go on outdoor adventures
- 3 Cook or bake together
- 4 Play board games or puzzles
- 5 Create imaginative stories
- 6 Have a dance party
- 7 Engage in physical activity
- 8 Spend time with animals
- 9 Volunteer together
- 10 Plan special 1-on-1 outings

”

Adoption is not a cure for trauma. Adoption can be part of God's redemptive story...but it's not a cure for trauma.

Mindy Wise, Adoptive Mother

Learn to Love Your Difficult Child: The Difference between Love and Acceptance

“Every parent I have met loves their kids. While they have different ways of expressing their love, they all say they feel love—they just know they do. But like me, they may not accept who their child is, or what they care about, believe in or value. It's not easy to love and accept a child who is different than you are or who doesn't appear to fit in or who has behaviors that are hard to be around. We want our love to be enough, but the truth is, without acceptance, it usually isn't enough for our children. They know the difference between love and acceptance.” – Anna Stewart

Parent the Child You Have, Not the Child You Wish You Had

“No matter how challenging your child's behaviors are—and how frustrated you are with her—you need to be able to respond in a way that's effective. Think about how that might change the way you communicate. If you're missing how your child takes in information, it might make you feel as if the two of you are speaking different languages. In your head, you're becoming more and more frustrated, thinking, “I'm saying all the right things, but she's just not getting it!” This has a compounding effect, because that lack of connection means she's also not changing her behavior. As a parent, it's crucial to figure out what “language” your child understands and then use it. If not, you're missing out on connecting with her, and she'll misunderstand what you're trying to tell her. The sad truth is that if you can't find a meaningful way to communicate, you likely won't have a strong relationship with your child.” – Janet Lehman, MSW

The Hardest Child to Love

“The child who is the hardest to love is the one who needs it the most. This is the child who needs the extra hug, the second bedtime story. The one who needs to be taken on a special one-on-one outing no matter how rotten he has been to his sibling that day. The child who is hardest to love is behaving badly because of an underlying and unexplainable need, and it's up to us to satisfy that need.” – Dr. Jennifer Pinto

Drop the Shame

Short Article

A discussion from CCAI's team on the emotions experienced by parents when they do not feel connected to their children. It explores working through the feelings and how to bond despite unexpected barriers. [Read more...](#)



Confessions of Parents Experiencing Regret

12 minute video

Jonathan Decker, a licensed marriage and family therapist, responds to comments about struggles in parenting with validation and guidance for difficult times. [Watch Here...](#)



Shouldn't I Be Happier?

9 Minute Listen

This podcast from Creating a Family normalizes the grief associated with adoption looking and feeling different than you expected. It discusses emotional experiences common with adoptive parents and how getting support is key. [Listen here...](#)



I am grateful for you every day.

Your smile lights up the room.

I am so lucky to have you in my life.

I always have fun spending time with you.

LOVING AFFIRMATIONS FOR KIDS

You are very special and unique.

You always make me laugh.

You are the bravest person I know.

I feel happy when I am with you.

7 WAYS TO SHOW LOVE & Strengthen Family Bonds

BREAKFAST IN BED

Tell your teen to get comfy in bed with their favorite Netflix binge and bring breakfast, lunch, or dinner to their room for them to enjoy at their leisure.



AFFIRMATION HEARTS

Let your kid know how much you love and appreciate them by filling out and placing colorful paper hearts on their bedroom door occasionally as a surprise.

SHARE SWEET TREATS

You can serve any type of dessert, but we love the idea of getting a little more decadent than normal and offering a favorite treat when it's least expected.

CONNECT WITH COUPONS



Provide them with a coupon book that includes coupons for activities you can do together, access to things that are "special" to them, and some that are silly.

HIDE LOVE NOTES

Try hiding love or affirmation notes for them in places they can find when they are not expecting it. It will be a special surprise when they find them unexpectedly.

HAVE A MOVIE NIGHT

Set up a movie night at home (or a movie marathon) and let them pick the movie or series. Provide "movie theater" snacks like popcorn, candy, or soda.

SHARE WHAT YOU LOVE

Put together a list of your favorite things (books, songs, movies, hobbies) and have your child do the same. Choose days to share one activity from your list with each other.



Credit: [Valentine's Ideas for Teens](#)

"Collaborative & Proactive Solutions" Model for Challenging Behavior

"Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS) is an evidence-based, trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming model of care that helps caregivers focus on identifying the problems that are causing concerning behaviors in kids and solving those problems collaboratively and proactively. The CPS model is non-punitive, non-exclusionary, trauma-informed, transdiagnostic, and transcultural."

– Lives in the Balance

When are kids challenging?

Children must respond adaptively when our demands or expectations placed on them exceed their skills. As a result, an essential goal for helpers is to **identify the skills** a kid with challenging behaviors lacks. An even more important goal is to determine the specific expectations a kid has difficulty meeting, referred to as unsolved problems, and to help kids durably solve those problems. Unsolved issues tend to be highly predictable, and proactive problem-solving should be the goal.

What do kids lacking skills do?

Challenging behaviors such as whining, pouting, sulking, withdrawing, crying, screaming, swearing, hitting, spitting, kicking, throwing, lying, stealing, and other overwhelming behaviors are communication that a child struggles to meet demands and expectations in some fairly common ways. When a child has difficulty meeting our needs and expectations, the **why** and **when** of the challenging behaviors are more important than what the child is actually doing.

An in depth look at the CPS Model and an explanation of how to implement it for challenging behaviors can be found in "[The Explosive Child](#)" by Dr. Ross Greene

Additionally, visit [CPS Solutions](#) & [Lives in the Balance](#) for additional information on [tools for assessing "lagging skills"](#) and creating a "Plan B" to collaboratively problem solve.

Why are kids challenging?

Kids are missing the skills they need not to be challenging; they wouldn't be difficult if they had the skills. That's because – **Kids do well if they can** – and because doing well is preferable to not doing well. This perspective is different from seeing challenging behaviors as manipulative, attention-seeking, coercive, limit-testing, and poorly motivated. Viewing these behaviors as a lack of skills requires looking at them through a new set of lenses and has dramatic implications for how caregivers go about helping such kids.

"Rather than focusing on kids' concerning behaviors (and modifying them), CPS helps kids and caregivers solve the problems causing those behaviors. The problem-solving is collaborative (not unilateral) and proactive (not reactive). Research has shown that the model effectively improves kids' behavior and relationships with their caregivers and dramatically reduces challenging behavior."

– CPS Solutions

What should we do differently?

If we know that challenging behavior is set in motion by lagging skills, we can expect that rewarding or punishing a child may not improve things. Since challenging behavior occurs in response to **unsolved problems**, the goal is to solve those problems. If we solve them by imposing adult will ("Plan A"), we likely won't solve any issues. Research shows that it is better to solve problems **collaboratively** ("Plan B") so the child is an invested participant who learns skills they were lacking and the solutions are durable.

"Plan B" for behavior CHANGE

Plan B from the CPS Model comprises three basic steps essential to changing behavior. The **Empathy** step involves gathering information from the child to clearly understand their concern/perspective on a given unsolved problem. **Defining Adult Concerns** involves considering adult concerns/perspectives on the problem. The **Invitation** step consists in having the adult and child brainstorm solutions for a realistic and mutually satisfactory agreed-upon solution.

UNDERSTANDING THE CPS MODEL of Problem Solving for Challenging Behaviors

EXAMPLES OF MISSING SKILLS

- ☐ Difficulty maintaining focus
- ☐ Difficulty expressing concerns or needs
- ☐ Difficulty managing emotional response
- ☐ Difficulty persisting on tedious tasks
- ☐ Sensory/motor difficulties
- ☐ Difficulty handling transitions
- ☐ Concrete, literal, black & white thinking
- ☐ Difficulty considering outcomes
- ☐ Difficulty handling unpredictability

EXAMPLES OF GATHERING INFORMATION SKILLS

Use Reflective Listening

- ***"So you said that doing homework is hard because you can't focus. Can you tell me more about that?"***

Asking about the who, what, where, when

- ***"Who was making fun of you?"***
- ***"What is getting in the way of finishing the project?"***

Breaking the problem down into parts

- ***"So writing the answers to the questions on the science quiz is hard for you. Let's think about the different parts of answering questions on the science quiz. First, you have to understand what the question is asking. Is that part hard for you? Next, you need to think of the answer to the question. Is that part hard?"***

Asking about why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others

- ***"You seem to be doing really well in your work group in math...but not so well in your work group in social studies...what's getting in the way in social studies?"***

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