Rethinking Challenging Behavior:
Children Do Better When they Feel Better

October 22, 2019 - 2:15-3:45PM Mt Hood A
Prepared by Soobin Oh
Introductions

Name
Place of Practice
Role
Your interest in this session
ONE WORD: Name a character quality you think is important for children to have.
A Child's Behavior is an Iceberg

What you see:

Feeling loved
Feeling satisfied
Feeling confused
Feeling detached
Feeling secure
Feeling sad
Feeling connected
Feeling angry
Feeling joyful
Am I safe? Am I loved?
Can I do things for myself?
Am I capable? Am I nourished?
Do I belong? Am I respected? Do I have power? Am I secure? Am I included?
Are my thoughts valued? Am I understood? Do I matter?

(What’s really going on)

Image source: Parenting from Scratch (2014).
Executive Functioning
It can be helpful as educators and in connecting with parents and children themselves to discuss and “see” the brain.

Prefrontal Cortex: Executive Functioning
Limbic System: Fight, Flight, or Freeze
When we “flip our lid,” we lose many of our abilities:

- **Capacity for problem solving**, emotional control, and complex thought
- **Coordination** and initiation of complex, voluntary movement
- **Processing and detection of multisensory information** (including visual/tactile/auditory)
- **Language** comprehension
- **Sound nuance and quality**, i.e., detection of (loudness, tone)
The Number One Goal When a Child is Upset:

The child must calm down

THEN

we can move on to problem-solving

and taking responsibility.
Mirror neurons in the prefrontal cortex cause us to mimic and experience others’ emotions like they’re our own

- Observer’s neuron fires as if the observer were taking the action itself
- This means when we observe stress or calmness the feeling is “contagious”
- So, our calmness models the calmness we want them to have
- If we *add* to the child’s stress, however, we run the risk of creating toxic stress.
Mirror neurons can release a brain chemical called “cortisol” that can negatively impact health and development if brains have prolonged exposure.

- **Positive**: Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.
- **Tolerable**: Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.
- **Toxic**: Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.

- “Excess” cortisol can result in internalizing symptoms (anxiety or depression), externalizing symptoms (aggression or attention problems), fatigue, hunger, sleep deprivation, lowered immune response, and even more.
- High levels of stress, and thus cortisol, warrants a mental health approach.
For a child who flips their lid often, planning ahead and kindness are key

1) Plan beforehand
   • Know what will help YOU to calm down (and avoid the “mirror neuron” trap)
   • Know where the child can go to safely calm themselves
   • *Note that participatory conversation with the child and the parent only works if you have a good relationship with the child*

2) In the moment
   • Focus on helping the child calm down
   • Possibly move the child: They may need to calm down elsewhere
   • Use very few words: Interaction should be limited to comfort

3) RIGHT when the child returns
   • Provide LOTS of kindness, love and affection.--even some praise!
   • THEN move into problem solving
One Potential Strategy

Cozy Cove, Soft Spaces, and Places to Calm Down: Providing an Opening for the child to return to action
Why I can’t do this...

What opportunities do I currently have to give children (who need it) time and space to calm down when they flip their lid?
Mistaken Goals
Where does our motivation come from? What are we motivated to do? Are there different types of motivation?
We are all hardwired to feel belonging and significance.

And when we don’t, *we sometimes engage in behaviors that we mistakenly believe will help us.*
“Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse? Think of the last time you felt humiliated or treated unfairly. Did you feel like cooperating or doing better?”

Positive Discipline
Jane Nelson
A child acting upon mistaken goals often accidentally engages in behavior that is counterproductive to their goal.

When we see “misbehavior,” children are following a mistaken belief they have about how to achieve belonging and significance.

Even if their behavior is counterproductive.

“A misbehaving child is a discouraged child.”

- Rudolf Dreikurs
Mistaken goals are when children believe that they must engage in a certain behavior to achieve belonging and acceptance.

**Undue Attention:** “I belong only when I have your attention.”

**Misguided Power:** “I belong only when I’m the boss, or at least when I don’t let you boss me.”

**Revenge:** “I don’t belong, but at least I can hurt you back.”

**Assumed Inadequacy:** “It is impossible to belong. I give up.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IF CHILD’S GOAL is:</th>
<th>IF the PARENT/TEACHER feels:</th>
<th>And tends to REACT by:</th>
<th>And if the CHILD’S RESPONSE is:</th>
<th>The BELIEF behind the CHILD’S BEHAVIOR is:</th>
<th>WHAT THE CHILD NEEDS (Hat Messages) AND WHAT ADULTS CAN DO TO ENCOURAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undue Attention</td>
<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>Reminding</td>
<td>Stops temporarily, but later resumes some or another disturbing behavior</td>
<td>I count (belong) only when I’m being noticed or getting special service I’m only important when I’m keeping you busy with me.</td>
<td>Notice Me—Involve Me. Say it only once, then act. Plan special time. Set up routines. Take time for training. Use family/class meetings. Touch without words. Set up nonverbal signals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(to keep others busy or to get special service)</td>
<td>Irritated</td>
<td>Coaxing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Doing things for the child he/she could do for him/herself</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>Intensifies behavior</td>
<td>I belong only when I’m boss or in control, or proving no one can boss me. You can’t make me.</td>
<td>Let Me Help—Give Me Choices. Use family/class meetings. Acknowledge that you can make him/her, ask for his/her help. Offer a limited choice. Withdraw from conflict or calm down. Be firm and kind. Act, don’t talk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(to be boss)</td>
<td>Provoked</td>
<td>Giving in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>Thinking “You can’t get away with it” or “I’ll make you”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Wanting to be right</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Defeated</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>Retaliating</td>
<td>Retalates</td>
<td>I don’t think I belong so I’ll hurt others as I feel hurt. I can’t be liked or loved.</td>
<td>Help Me—I’m Hurting. Apologize. Avoid punishment and retaliation. Show you care. Encourage strengths. Use family/class meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(to get even)</td>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td>Getting even</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disbelieving</td>
<td>Thinking “How could you do this to me?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disgusted</td>
<td>Taking behavior personally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assumed Inadequity</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>Giving up</td>
<td>Recruits further</td>
<td>I don’t believe I can so, I’ll convince others not to expect anything of me.</td>
<td>Have Faith in Me—Don’t Give Up On Me. Encourage any positive attempts, no matter how small. Don’t give up. Enjoy the child. Build on his/her interests. Encourage, encourage, encourage. Use family/class meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(to give up and be left alone)</td>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>Doing for</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>I am helpless and unable, it’s no use trying because I won’t do it right.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helpless</td>
<td>Over helping</td>
<td>No improvement</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Showing discouragement</td>
<td>No response</td>
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Extrinsic motivations may condition children to “do well” for rewards or out of fear of punishment while intrinsic motivation is authentic to a child’s curiosity and interests.

Fear of punishment or anticipation of reward (extrinsic motivators) lead to release of another brain chemical called dopamine (and fear of punishment can also release cortisol)

“Children should learn to do well even when we are not there to enforce it rather than learn to do well because we are enforcing it.”
Being both kind and firm while taking the time to connect with a child before “correcting” them are key strategies.

**Kind AND Firm can look like…**

- “I know you don’t want to go, AND we can walk there together.”
- “You want to keep playing, AND it is time to go inside. Do you want to walk in like a penguin or like a bear?”
- “I care about you, AND now it’s time to eat lunch.”

**Connection before “correction” looks like…**

- Take the time to get eye level with the child.
- Listen first, talk next.
- Validate the child’s feelings without fixing or rescuing.
- Be supportive when allowing children to experience the consequences of their choice.
- Allow for a cooling off period before talking solutions.
- Hugs.
Making “Agreements” instead of “Rules” teaches children to take responsibility rather than rely on extrinsic motivators to do well.
Real “authentic” jobs can create conditions for belonging and significance while teaching responsibility.

- Jobs that gave children a sense of power, belonging, responsibility
- The jobs were desirable.
- Children signing in with me, gave me an opportunity to develop relationships
- Not a competition
Why I can’t do this...

What opportunities do I currently have to promote belonging and significance?
Strategies related to motivation

Strategies related to skill
“Where there’s a skill, there’s a way. Children do well if they can.”

Dr. Stuart Ablon
Think:Kids

Collaborative Problem Solving
The Peace Table
The Peace Table

The culmination of three different tools:
- CSEFEL - Feeling Faces
- CSEFEL - Solution Kit
- “Problem Solving”

Steps to Problem Solving:
- **STEP ONE: CALM DOWN AND BREATHE**
- “How does that make you feel?”
- “Tell THEM, not me!”
- “What’s the Problem?”
- *Restate the problem.*
- “What ideas do we have for a solution?”
- *Let the children come up with the first solutions, then you can suggest some.*
- “We can’t move on until we agree on a solution.”

The important aspect of this is the PROCESS of problem-solving, not just the solution.
The Peace Table

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Feelings Cards

Frustrated  Embarrassed  Sad
Mad  Nervous
Happy  Proud
Scared  Loved  Lonely

This is how I feel today!
Feelings Cards
Solution Kit

2 X 2 SOLUTION KIT CUE CARDS
Solution Kit
Peace Table in Action
CSEFEL

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teachingskills
Potential Topics for Change Ideas: Pick One

- Creating Aesthetic Experiences (Slide 17)
- Promoting Relaxed Alertness (Slide 18)
- Introducing more Intelligent Materials (Slide 22)
- Introducing more Ambitious Instruction (Slide 24)
- Reducing sensory overload in classroom design (Slide 25)
- Teaching the hand model of the brain (Slide 30)
- Reducing potential for stressors (Slide 33)
- Planning for “Flipped Lid” (Slide 35)
- Soft spaces for processing emotions (Slide 36)
- Responding to children’s Mistaken Goals (Slide 45)
- Reducing use of extrinsic motivators (Slide 47)
- Being Kind AND Firm (Slide 49)
- Connection Before Correction (Slide 49)
- Making Classroom Agreements (Slide 50)
- Authentic Jobs (Slide 51)
Commit to a change idea

1. I plan to _____.
2. As a result of implementing my change idea, I think that the following will change: ___________.
3. I can measure the success of my change by _____.

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THANK YOU!