

Problem Solving with Dr. Ross Greene

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SUMMARY

Dr. Ross Greene discusses the Collaborative Proactive Solutions (CPS) method for problem-solving in parent-child relationships, emphasizing the importance of listening to children's voices and involving them in finding solutions to their challenges. He critiques traditional parenting approaches that rely on power dynamics and offers insights into how understanding the compatibility between children's skills and environmental expectations can lead to better outcomes.

- Traditional parenting often emphasizes power, leading to a loss of children's voices in decision-making.*
- The CPS method encourages parents to listen to children and involve them in solving problems, fostering empathy and collaboration.*
- Greene introduces the concepts of "unsolved problems" and "incompatibility," suggesting that challenging behaviors signal unmet expectations.*
- The CPS approach consists of three plans: Plan A (unilateral solutions), Plan B (collaborative solutions), and Plan C (prioritizing problems).*
- Effective problem-solving involves three steps: empathy (gathering information), defining adult concerns, and inviting collaborative solutions.*
- Greene emphasizes the importance of addressing problems proactively rather than reactively, especially outside of heated moments.*
- The CPS method has been shown to improve not only behavior but also parent-child communication and relationships.*
- Solutions that fail provide valuable information, indicating the need for adjustments to better fit the child's unique needs and capabilities.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting mojo podcast i'm really excited today to do a deep dive on the topic of problem solving with none other than dr russ green who developed the collaborative proactive solutions or cps method that he describes in his books the explosive child and raising human beings which describe interactions between

parents and children and the books lost at school and lost it found which look at children's experiences at school dr green was on the faculty at harvard medical school for over 20 years and he's the founding director of the non-profit lives in the balance he's been featured absolutely everywhere in the popular press and he lectures and consults throughout the world when he's not confined to his home in portland maine welcome dr green thanks for having me on

and so i wonder if we can kind of dive in at the deep end here a little bit and talk about power in relationships

i'm wondering if you can tell me how do you see power in traditional parent-child relationships and what about in the relationships between parents and children after they read your books or after you've worked with them well you know power's been a big deal in relationships for a long time and particularly between parents and kids um

i think that what many people refer to as old school or traditional parenting relies a lot on power power meaning adults telling kids what to do in other words i say jump you say how high um unfortunately somebody very important has their voice lost in that equation the kid and if we continue to simply parent that way then we perpetuate the cycle

of power and i am one who extends my work beyond parents and kids to society at large i think that in our society we see many populations that have felt that they have been oppressed with power as the main ingredient many populations many uh groups of people who have felt like their voices have not been heard and they have not been included um and so i think that we are

reaping what we have sown in the power department and it ain't good um and i think that at this point in society a lot of those groups rightfully so are saying we won't be quiet anymore we demand to be heard and i personally think that that is a very good thing but i especially think it's a good thing as it relates to kids who in some ways are demanding

that not as powerfully as other populations are when it's adults but the good news is there's really no downside to hearing kids and to involving them in solving the problems that affect their lives it's actually quite frankly all upside so what i hope happens after people read my books is that they um begin listening to kids better i think of listening as the purest form of empathy and that we involve kids in solving the

problems that affect their lives and recognize that that actually prepares them for the real world in ways that are a whole lot better than simply imposing solutions on them um yeah and it seems a big part of that vision that you have is is this reframing of uh problems from being well you have a problem with your behavior and that's what needs to change to this idea of compatibility and incompatibility can you tell us how you see that sure well the

incompatible incompatibility and compatibility language is not original that comes from some very brilliant thinkers who were writing way before i was writing uh people whose last names are thomas and chess and bert bell and gottlieb and samaroff um people who set forth what might best be thought of as what's called goodness of fit theory which was originally a statistical model but that was then applied to kids and temperament

but it actually is kind of simple it basically says that outcome a person's outcome is the product of the degree of fit or match between characteristics of the individual and characteristics of their environment now i'm a little bit reductionistic when it comes to that when it comes to characteristics of the individual i'm talking mostly about skills when it comes to characteristics of the environment i'm talking about the expectations the environment is placing on a particular individual

when kids have the skills to meet our expectations there is compatibility and we would expect an adaptive outcome when kids do not have the skills to meet our expectations there is incompatibility and then there is what i call incompatibility episodes otherwise known as challenging behavior under what is known as the signal by my way of viewing things behavior is

just the signal just the fever just the means by which a kid is communicating something fairly straightforward i'm stuck there's an expectation i'm having difficulty meeting so if we power through that and if we only focus on the kids behavior once again the kid's voice is lost we may improve compatibility that way but not forever i can assure you of that when we are willing to listen to what the kid has to say

involve the kid in the solutions we are doing nothing less than improving compatibility but we are also improving our understanding of this kid improving communication with the kid um improving our relationship with the kid once again all good yeah and i think that that that's so important and immediately when i started thinking about that it reminded me of the zero to three parent survey that they ran in 2015

and uh they they uncovered an expectation gap for parents of young children and i went back to it and pulled out some stats and it said 56 of parents believe that children have the impulse control to resist a desire to do something forbidden before the age of three thirty six percent think kids under two can do that um forty two percent believe two year olds should be able to control themselves instead of having a tantrum twenty four percent believe that one

year old should be able to do this so how does this expectations gap uh kind of interact with intersect with uh the theory that you're you're talking us through well once again when our expectations are out of whack based on what a kid can actually do we're going to get challenging behavior because that's the signal that things are out of whack and that really is the best way to think of challenging behavior it's the kids way of communicating

something is out of whack now here's what's interesting those are aggregate statistics but i want to add another layer those are statistics about all parents in general and suggest to us that our expectations for our kids may be unrealistic but there's another layer to that and that is the individual kid because the individual kid is bringing unique characteristics to the mix as well there may actually be some one-year-olds who are able to come

control their impulses i haven't come across many but maybe there are some if that kid can do that and parents are expecting that then even though the parents expectations are out of whack as it relates to most kids their expectations are in line for their kid and that's really what it comes down to yes the data that you cited tell us that our expectations may be out of whack in general but what really life comes down

to is your kid your expectations and whether your kid can meet them not whether the neighbor across the street the kid of the same age and same gender or same anything can beat them we're talking about your kid here and if your kid is exhibiting challenging behavior your kid is communicating that something is out of whack now the reason that's important is because for a long time we have viewed tantrums in toddlers

as simply them trying to get their own way trying to exert their will it changes the color of things quite a bit when we recognize the challenging behavior is the kids way of communicating that things are out of whack and that we have to take a deeper dive into what we're asking of the kid our expectations and what the kid can actually deliver the goods on yeah i think there are two two ideas that you're getting out here one is

parenting the child that's in front of you not parenting the average of children or the child you wish you had that you know you wish that your two-year-old could uh not have a tantrum when when they're feeling like something's not right and then secondly the view that this behavior that that needs to change air quotes is not the child's problem it indicates a problem in the relationship a problem that the two of you are having so

and um yes but i'm even more specific than relationship the behavior communicates that our expectations and the kids capacity to meet them are out of whack with each other yeah okay and by the way that's why i've always said i think this is in the explosive child probably in raising human beings too i can't remember what i wrote and what book but um my definition of good parenting is being responsive to the hand you've been dealt

yeah as you said not being responsive to the hand you wish you'd been dealt but dealing with the child who's right in front of you yeah okay and so now we're going to get kind of into the meat of the um of the cps approach and so we're going to talk through you know what is plan a what is plan b what does than see and then i'm gonna i want to because i'm because i'm super curious

and the people who listen to the show are super curious we're gonna spend a bit of time in the theory here and then uh we're going to get into some questions that listeners have submitted on ways that this is not working in their families and how we can problem solve that so firstly can you please help us understand what is plan a plan b and plan c sure well um what i have parents do as part of the cps model

is proactively identify the expectations that their child is having difficulty meeting reliably and i call those unsolved problems also known as problems that have yet to be solved also known as problems that are waiting to be solved and that's why those problems are still causing challenging behavior because they're not solved yet so the first thing i have parents do is make a list of unsolved problems and that is an indispensable first step the reason it's indispensable is

because we want parents solving those problems proactively not reactively without the list we're still stuck in the heat of the moment whenever a problem pops up the list is also important for another reason and that is that we're going to have to prioritize if our kid has a meaningful number of unsolved problems problems that have been long standing you know many of these problems are three four five years old not talking about the chronological age of the kid

talking about how long the kid has been having difficulty meeting this expectation um we don't want to deal with them in the heat of moment again we want to do it proactively but also we don't want to work on them all at once if we try working on them all at once none of them are going to get solved and in one way or another that's what often happens is parents end up working on all of them at once

in the heat of the moment when they pop up and none of them get solved and i have a funny feeling that some of the questions people are going to be asking later about things that are not working for them may trace back at least in part to what i'm saying right now we need the list we need to prioritize we want to be solving problems proactively it is very difficult to do that if you don't have your list

and if you haven't prioritized then there's basically three approaches to those problems and i've called them for a long time plan a plan b and plan c and what i've done with the plans is i've identified that basically the three ways in which parents try to deal with problems with their kids it really does come down to a b or c in the cps model you're really only using b and c you're not really using

plan a very often if at all when you're implementing this model i'll explain what each plan is in a second um but i also want to make an important point before i explain the plans notice these are for unsolved problems if a kid is meeting a particular expectation reliably you don't need one of the plans because it's not an unsolved problem it's a met expectation so if a kid is brushing his or her teeth as well and as often as

we'd like him or her to before going to bed at night you don't need one of the three plans it's not an unsolved problem it's a met expectation no plan needed if a kid is doing homework as well and as often as we'd like him or her to you don't need a plan it's not an unsolved problem it's a met expectation the only thing you need the plans for are for the expectations the kid is having difficulty meeting reliably

so plan a is where you're solving the problem unilaterally plan b is where you're solving the problem collaboratively plan c is where you're setting the problem aside at least for now plan c is important because it is the prioritizing plan it ensures that we are not working on everything at once it ensures that we have prioritized it's us saying we're not working on that

unsolved problem right now because we have bigger fish to fry prioritizing is a very important part of the model but on any problem that we are not working on with the kid right now because we have removed that expectation it won't cause a challenging episode because we've removed that expectation at least for now not forever but for now that's brilliant and and i'm extrapolating the reason for doing this

is because if you're trying to work on everything at once i mean it's like a nag fest for your child right so you know we need to do this we need to do that you're not meeting my expectation here and it just becomes overwhelming i would imagine from both the parents and the child's perspective correct and here's the interesting thing a lot of the overwhelming part gets taken care of just by helping caregivers identify unsolved problems first of all it moves

them away from behavior which feels unpredictable to them but it also organizes the effort i've had many parents look at me and say so that's it those are all the problems that are causing challenging behavior in my household and i'll say well unless there's some you haven't thought of yet yes those are the problems causing challenging behavior in your household and after we prioritize them we're going to solve them incrementally and then you are going to

see a dramatic decrease in challenging behavior in your household not because of stickers not because of timeouts because those don't solve problems those just modify behavior but because solved problems don't cause challenging behavior only unsolved problems do that's why you're in the problem solving business in this model not the behavior modification business plan c is important because you can't work on everything at once

that leaves us with only two other plans a and b both represent a way to solve a problem with a kid but as you've already heard with plan a you're solving the problem unilaterally with plan b you're solving the problem collaboratively what i spend most of my waking hours helping people learn how to do is solve problems collaboratively we kind of seem to default into this plan a right it's it's the if if we don't make a conscious effort

to plan b plan a is probably what's just going to happen we do but there's another important point to be made there and that is if we find ourselves in the heat of the moment we greatly increase the likelihood that we're going to head for plan a because it's already hot we're under duress we're in a rush so heat of the moment points people toward plan a more than anything else the rest is habit okay so let's break this habit how are

we going to plan b what are the steps involved there are three steps for solving a problem collaboratively they are called the empathy step they define at all concern step and the invitation step as i always say the names of the steps don't matter so much the ingredients matter a lot the main ingredient of the empathy step is information gathering gathering information from your child about what's making it hard for your

child to meet a particular expectation i think the empathy step is the most fun but i also think it is the hardest the reason i think it is the most fun is because i'm always fascinated when parents hear things from their kid that were completely unanticipated a good example of that i was doing a podcast with a father who does podcast must have

been a year ago and he was telling me about his three-year-old daughter who was having difficulty brushing her teeth before going to bed at night and but he thought he knew what was making it hard for her to brush her teeth before going to bed at night he was positive that it was the taste of the toothpaste so like 10 or 12 flavors later she was still having difficulty brushing her teeth before she went to bed at night so

finally he did the empathy step i've noticed you're having difficulty brushing your teeth before going to bed at night what's up and it turned out what he learned from her is that when he used the electric toothbrush on her it got water all over her face and she hated it and i said to him well now there's a concern that 12 different flavors of toothpaste would never address yeah yeah the reason the empathy step is hard is because we adults frequently

don't know how to do it if you are accustomed to simply telling your kid what to do and your kid is accustomed to simply being told what to do then early on especially many empathy steps can get off to a bit of a ragged start because your kids just waiting for you to lower the boom and you're not sure what strategy to use to extract information from your kid and we can go through all of that if we

want to but the define it all concern step is where the adult is entering his or her concern into consideration what are we adults concerned about um [Music] why why it's important that this expectation be met why is it important that this expectation be met and what i'm always telling adults is if you're not sure why it's important that this expectation be met then i'm not sure why it is that you have this expectation [Laughter]

yeah that's that's a critical step that often gets forgotten i think that we don't examine ourselves um whether the thing is worth setting an expectation over in the first place well and what's interesting is sometimes we get to the define it all concern step and the parents have just heard what the kid had to say in the empathy step and i say to the parent okay okay mr thompson or mrs thompson what what's your concern about that

and they say you know what i don't think i even care about this anymore but i'm not relying on that because most of the time they do care about it but they've got to say why they care about it and why do they care about it because of how the unsolved problems affecting the kid or how the and or how the unsolved problem is affecting other people now both parties have had voice now both parties have agency we need

that agency thing to work a little bit further for us in the invitation that's where we are putting our heads together collaborating on a solution but the solution must meet two criteria number one it's got to be mutually satisfactory meaning it truly addresses the concerns of both parties number two it's gotta be realistic both parties gotta be able to do what they're agreeing to do here's what i've been saying a lot lately and world history bears me out on

it if the solution is not realistic and mutually satisfactory i promise you this problem is still unsolved but it's not gonna be mutually satisfactory unless we know what the concerns of both parties are which is what we're accomplishing in the first two steps of plan b yeah and uh i i actually i i like the this invitation step the best um it's so much fun to see my daughter come up with ideas for ways that we can get both of our

needs she's six right now we've been practicing this for three years three and a half years and uh yeah it's almost like uh she she she'll ask for something and sometimes i'll just say i don't think i can do that you know can mo i i want to be with you well i'm working right now well could you work upstairs could you could i bring my snack down here she immediately starts you know how can how can i meet my needs for being close

to you and how can you meet your needs to get work done and it's it's amazing to watch just make sure and i'm i'm i'm a stickler about this that sounds like a plan b that took place in the heat of the moment [Laughter] but if your daughter is frequently looking for your attention when you're engaged with something else if that's not an uncommon issue then your best bet is to try solving that proactively because if you're

engaged in something else when she's raising that issue that would be poor timing on trying to get it solved yeah point taken and and i'd love to um maybe dive into just because it's so pertinent to what we're talking about right here and listener question um when when a listener is saying something like you know it's uh we stop at the park on our way home from school and um my child doesn't want to leave and i've tried all the

you know we've agreed in advance maybe even that uh we're going to set a timer for five minutes we're gonna give a certain number of warnings and all the rest of it and i can see to an extent why this is not working because the child wants to keep playing the child's need is not being met by uh the the action of leaving the park and and maybe there are some days when we can be spontaneous and we can stay an

extra half hour and we can grab a pizza on the way home and and that will be a fun evening to have but there are many many other times when that's not going to be the case and the option of leaving the park is never going to be appealing to the child how do we go about doing it the cps method when the the thing that seems like it needs to happen is not something that's going to be

appealing in any way to the child well a few points here um just because it's not a p there's many things we ask kids to do that are not appealing and a good percentage of the time they do them anyways i'm not sure that teeth brushing is particularly appealing yeah but they do it right i'm not sure that homework is particularly appealing but they do it i'm not sure that taking out the garbage on tuesday mornings

is appealing but they do it i'm not sure that getting off the xbox to come in for dinner is appealing but a lot of kids do it [Laughter] but we're using plan b for the ones who are not doing it but just because a kid is struggling to do something doesn't mean it's not appealing many kids do things that are not appealing so the fact that it's not appealing is not a deal breaker because kids do things that are not

appealing to them all the time but now let's let's get into the nitty-gritty first of all i heard a solution i'm going to give you five minute warnings this is one of the most common solutions and also one that works least frequently i'm going to give you a five minute warning now that solution now i'm working backwards would only work if what we heard from the kid in the empathy step was that they always got surprised when

it was time to leave the park and that a five-minute warning would be very helpful which always happens that's that that's the only condition under which that solution would work but i'm missing something what i'm missing here is the empathy step i'm missing what's making it hard for the kid to leave the park in the first place and here's what i frequently find once we do the empathy step and we find out what was really getting in the kids

way we find that the solution we had come up with before we knew what was getting in the kid's way could not possibly have worked because it didn't address what was really getting in the kid's way yeah but there's another piece to the story that was interesting and that is that i can't quite tell if the kid actually ever knows when it's actually time to leave the park because sometimes we get to stay longer and sometimes this is one of

those days when we do have to leave when mom says it's time to leave if that's unpredictable if the kid doesn't know that as we're entering the park then we actually don't have an expectation because we're deciding that the kid needs to respond to the fact that this is random the kid needs to respond to the randomness really well and if this kid is having difficulty responding to randomness really well

then dealing with the randomness in our solution is going to have to be in play as well and now the whole thing about this not being particularly appealing in the first place has taken very much of a back seat yeah i get it the kid would stay at the park forever right but most kids leave the park right and a high percentage of them leave with just a little bit of extra pushing i'm here talking about the

kid who isn't there are many things about that situation that i'd want to hear a lot more about before we'd be able to come up with a solution most importantly what is the kid telling us about what's hard about leaving the park and and what if i mean it's just you know i like playing i like being at the park uh that's not going to be enough in the empathy step okay um that would be the kids initial stab

at what's hard about leaving we are then going to have to probe for more information so that we understand it way better then i really like the park okay so this seems like a good opportunity to talk through drilling is it is that where we're going with this okay do you want to walk us through that certainly where we've ended up um there are eight drilling strategies and the reason there are eight drilling strategies is because i found that a lot

of adults weren't exactly sure what to say to abstract high quality information from their kid and in the case of this example to move us beyond i just really like the park or it's just really hard to leave right and those are legitimate things for the kid to say it's just that they don't take us far enough in terms of understanding what's hard about leaving the park so i'm not going to go through all eight drilling strategies but i'll go through

a few of them including the most important one the most important one is reflective listening some people would call it mirroring simply saying back to the kid whatever the kid just said to you um and adding a clarifying question or statement like how so or i don't understand or i'm confused or can you say more about that here's how it would sound so far i've noticed you're having difficulty now you know it's interesting what i would

do with the parents first is i would say can you please tell me when it is time to leave the park whenever we say so no whenever we say so is too random how long do we have at the park it varies then we actually don't have an expectation right here except that the kid will leave the park when we say so yeah this will go a lot better if we actually have an expectation give me the average

amount of time you spend at the park 30 minutes for the time being let's say that your expectation is that the time at the park will be 30 minutes sound okay just for practice yes i've noticed you're ha now i'm ready to do the empathy step because now i actually have an expectation right notice that it's difficult for you to leave the park after 30 minutes what's up that's what the empathy step sounds like when you're that's that's

your intro to turn the sound off that's your introduction to the empathy step i just really like the park reflective listening you really like the park i know um how so well there's lots of fun games and there's kids who i like to play with there still reflective listening got it there's lots of fun games

and there's kids who you like to play with there i'm gonna go with a different drilling strategy um asking w questions who what where when but i still don't understand what makes it hard for you to leave the park what makes that part hard well first of all i never know how much time i have interesting secondly i'm always hoping

that this is one of the days although you really haven't told me whether it is or not that i could stay longer and third i'm just really having a lot of fun and fourth i know that when we leave the park i'm gonna have to go home and do my homework goodness stop reflective listening again those are a lot of reasons to not want to leave the park um but notice we are now getting into the meat

of it and we've moved well beyond i just really like the park i'm then going to explore all of those things and then as part of the other two steps well here's what it might sound like would it help if you did know how much time we were going to have at the park yes we can do that when could i tell you that like right when we get there or like on the way there

good because you know i think you're right it's different on different times and i am now recognizing that that made it really hard for you not easier i thought i was doing you a favor but i'm now starting to recognize that that actually may have made it harder for you um tell me is there anything about the going home to do homework that is making it hard to leave the park tell me more about that one

well the park is a lot more fun than the homework but sometimes there's homework that i really really don't want to do tell me more about that oh there's just homework that's really hard goodness we are starting to get some traction here and i know that i'm making a little bit more complicated but these are the things that we need to know and if we're simply just to make the point really clear if we're dragging the kid out of the

park kicking and screaming because we are the authority figure we're missing all of this information and the kid is coming to recognize that we aren't listening we are not being responsive to the hand we've been dealt i frequently say to people the number one complaint i get from parents is that their kid won't talk to them and the number one complaint i get from kids is that their parents don't listen i remember saying that in

the book yeah so true isn't it so we would come together on a solution we would see if that solution worked the parents and define it and they in the definitive concern step would have to articulate why it's important that that expectation be met maybe it's that we have to get home to make dinner otherwise we're going to be hungry uh we have to get home because for whatever reason right um

and then we're putting our heads together to try to address the kids concern and our concern in a way that's realistic and now we're rolling and now we're not dragging the kid out of the park anymore and now we're not using power to accomplish anything we have replaced power with collaboration and taught some really important life lessons in the process and so the kinds of solutions that you would be looking to generate in that specific example

would include i mean if the child's having difficulty with the homework or the timing of the homework that could be something that's addressed what about some of the other issues um related to you know i i really love spending time with my friends and you know those kinds of things that are less maybe easy to find a thing the parent can fix well um depending on what we heard further and that's still slightly surface right but depending on

what we heard further here's what we might hear further sometimes we're in the middle of a game and i want to see the game through to the end and you're trying to make me leave [Music] when the game is not done yet and i really want to know who won all right now i can sink my teeth into this all right because and i've seen this with video games as well this doesn't have to be the part because video games are a game

as well right and and just as an example um if the kid was more aware of how long a time we were going to be at the park and more aware of how much time was left and if those things were a little bit more concrete based on our agreement with the kid and the kid knew that there was only five minutes left i've actually had kids agree to not start playing a 15-minute game with only five minutes left right right

um i've had kids agree that there's a way to finish the game the next day so you know it's interesting there's this universe of solutions that are out there we limit ourselves and our kids tremendously when we don't engage our kids in this process so the problem is i don't know what the solution's gonna be because i've probably worked on that unsolved problem i don't know four or five hundred times and while

there are some common solutions i don't like to mess up all the fun of having people stumble upon solutions themselves i agree with you that invitation step can be pretty fun too because it's always amazing to see what kids can come up with yeah it really is okay so i have about 15 more questions about uh about the research but i'm gonna take one for the team here i'm gonna ask one question about the research that is

really bugging me and then i'd love to spend a bit more time on on the questions the parents submitted so um one thing that i'm super curious about is uh the the idea that where you've explored a number of times in in your peer-reviewed research comparing the effectiveness of uh collaborative and proactive solutions with parent management training which focuses more on changing children's behaviors using tools like direct and clear commands one-on-one time to reinforce pro-social behaviors

time out from reinforces and negative behaviors and over and over again it seems that you find these two uh different very different approaches are about comparably effective at reducing problematic behaviors and of course there's a whole discussion about that there about how we use problematic behaviors as the measure of success and and i'm wondering why this is that this method that is so reliant on behaviorism and particularly on creating these clear

expectations which to me it seems like well that's just another thing i can defy with a child who's already um feeling as though they're not being heard why is this method as effective at reducing problematic behaviors as the cps method and i mean i i'm on board with cps but what why why should i tell parents to use this method

rather than training their children i knew i needed to do this i needed to get to that answer

[Laughter] this is good the reason that in research we have focused on behavior as an important outcome is because that's what researchers focus on and that's what researchers have historically focused on and when you are trying to achieve the gold standard for your model and collaborative and proactive solutions has now achieved the gold standard it is now considered what is

called evidence-based which means that there are enough studies comparing it to the more traditional approach which focuses on behavior and showing that it is basically the equivalent in improving behavior of approaches that focus on behavior it is now considered evidence-based you got to go with the wrong material that the others have gone with in trying to show that you're evidence-based otherwise you're not evidence-based

here's why that's important it is really good but there is another way of doing things that achieves the equivalent results as it relates to behavior as the models that have focused almost exclusively on behavior that is a very positive development because even though the outcome is focused on behavior there's really no choice about that when you're trying to

be evidence based because that's what the models you're comparing yourself to have focused on before you now if you said to me do you think that behavior is the most important outcome to focus on my answer would be for some folks yes but relationship is an important thing to focus on too uh and communication is an important thing to focus on too and the kid feeling a sense of agency

and a kid feeling that his or her voice is being heard is an important thing to focus on too but in these early studies of collaborative and proactive solutions what i was primarily focused on and what other researchers were primarily focused on is seeing how cps matches up against approaches that have been primarily focused on behavior so that's the boat that you're in when you are trying to establish your model as evidence-based having now done that am i freed up to

focus on other things that may in many people's views be even more important than behavior yes okay and so and then i want to take that one step further maybe we shouldn't be surprised that models that focus on changing behavior end up changing behavior and that even though changing behavior isn't our explicit goal here this is as effective as a model that focuses on changing behavior

and it also has these other benefits that are not being captured in this particular study that we can now go and explore is it right to say that it is right to say that and by the way in in studies in our studies we have looked at other variables besides behavior um we have looked at parent child communication we have looked at parent-child relationship and those things did improve significantly more with collaborative and practical solutions than they did

with rewarding and punishing hasn't been our primary focal point but they are things that we have not

completely neglected but here's what's interesting the literature on behavioral approaches to challenging behavior in kids is has established rewarding and punishing as evidence-based but there are some as the as many of the adherents and some of the key voices of that way of doing things have stated

it's not pure it's not like like a lot of parents drop out of that treatment before it's even completed the older a kid gets the more aggressive a kid gets the less likely that treatment is to work but reward and punishment programs especially have the achilles heel when it comes to durability of treatment effects you get a big bang for your buck early on with rewarding and punishing but i'm sure as many of the parents who are

listening to this will agree those effects either tend not to be durable or parents sticking with the program tends not to be durable or both i'm actually not interested in short-term gains i'm interested in durability of gains and when it comes to durability of gains there is at least some evidence to suggest that when you're solving problems collaboratively and proactively the improvements are more durable yeah okay awesome thank you for for digging into that a little bit for us

um okay so let's let's go to some of the questions that listeners submitted um and kind of starting at the younger end of the spectrum i i've read in your books that you can problem solve with an infant and i agree that that's possible to an extent uh it does to me seem easier when the infant's needs are probably related to being food to food or being hot or cold or missing a parent or being tired

you know there's a smaller spectrum of potential issues um and so one parent said that you know when when a child's about two they have a few words but not a lot and maybe we're asking them to help help tidy up we're not saying go tie to your room we're saying you know can we tidy this thing up together uh they just say i don't want to and they either won't or can't say anything at all about how they feel and

the parent just feels like well i'm at a dead end here i don't know where to go where do where can we go with that well it depends on the verbal skills of the two-year-old my now 23 year old daughter was very verbal at two and so i would have been able to extract some information from her but i'm not not looking so much for how she feels and i i'm not allergic to asking kids how they feel it's just not the

information that i'm looking for at that moment i'm looking for what's hard about meeting that expectation i just got stuck in the heat of the moment again i've asked her to clean up and she won't if she's chronically having difficulty cleaning up then we can have this conversation proactively outside the heat of the moment i cannot emphasize that point enough so let's put it outside the heat of the moment because that's preferable i've noticed that sometimes it's hard

for you to clean up your toys what's up now if it's a verbal two-year-old there's a good chance you'll get something if it's not a verbal two-year-old you can guess and see if the non-verbal two-year-old can verify for you and by the way that's not a real far cry from what you're doing with infants but i was making a face as you were saying that um the number of things that infants could be concerned about is

actually rather limited you know when it comes to difficulty cleaning up there's not going to be that many possibilities for a two-year-old okay so so maybe the the child finds it boring they're not willing to tell you they find it boring but they find it boring and well guess that and if they verified that um i suppose you could problem solve ways to make it more interesting we could put music on and march around the room

we could sing we there's things we can do to make it less boring we could go as fast as we can so it doesn't last as long as it frequently does this is the interesting thing um what i'm gonna bet on is that that two-year-old probably has some ideas i'm gonna bet that the parent has some ideas um i'm gonna bet that it's not just boring often often when kids are having difficulty

cleaning up it's because the task not always because i don't like to say anything's always is because the task at hand feels very overwhelming to them they have made quite the mess and they do not feel capable of tackling this all on their own and so they feel that they need some help so it all depends on what we hear but if it's a non-verbal two-year-old if it's a non-verbal 17 year old we do this

with nonverbal kids all the time right so that's why i actually don't see that much difference between problem solving with an infant who has no words but we're still trying to figure it out a two-year-old who has no words a 17 year old who has no words clearly it's preferable if the kid can tell us in words because words are our preferred modality for communicating but non-verbal kids like infants

do communicate and so even though it's not going to be in the way that we prefer boy can you get a lot of information out of a kid who's non-verbal even if it's not through the spoken word okay and so you're doing that by hypothesizing oh my goodness if there are a lot of toys on the floor does it just kind of seem like it's too much and and you're looking for a sign that yes this is it or

tell us more about what that looks like practically in the moment well here's what's interesting and i don't know if we want to spend too much time on this there's ways that we can give kids to communicate with us whether we're onto something and i frequently do it by teaching kids fingers people do this all the time right this is fingers right this is fingers right this is fingers um in non-verbal kids we often use the technology that they're using to

communicate and put yes and no on the home screen so that they can tap yes or no great example of how communication isn't quite as complicated as we think there's lots of ways to extract information from a kid non-verbal or otherwise besides just having what we would consider to be a regular old conversation with them but one thing i want to make really clear you are shooting yourself in the

foot if you're doing this in the heat of the moment [Laughter] you that this is not the first time this kid has had difficulty cleaning up why are we stuck in the heat of the moment again trying to do this yeah okay so so sticking with that idea that we we know we need to not do this in the heat of the moment um maybe there's an issue that has continually been challenging and the most common issue

most common issue i hear when this comes up is hitting a younger sibling um but but i i'm also thinking of an example where the child when they eat breakfast they have a great morning when they don't eat breakfast they i mean the whole morning just turns into a disaster for the entire family and we both know if a child would just eat and things would get better and and they would have a great morning together

and so we're having we wait for later in the day when we're fed we're arrested we're having this conversation with the child um you know what can we do here we could maybe uh if remember we're not jumping to what do we do here yet i don't know why the kids have here's the interesting thing i'm going to reduce this to a simple unsolved problem yeah we may have all kinds of good reasons for wanting the kid to eat breakfast

but the bottom line is the kid is having difficulty eating breakfast in the morning yep that's our expectation our expectation whatever reason we have that expectation is that the kid eat breakfast in the morning but i cannot jump to the invitation step until i've done the first two steps right i'm gonna come up with solutions that are just like that father who bought 12 different flavors of toothpaste unless i know what's getting in the kids way i'm taking

shots in the dark when the person who could actually tell me what's difficult about eating breakfast is sitting right in front of me not eating breakfast [Laughter] i wonder what's going on here so now i love that you said we're outside the heat of the moment that's perfect right i just don't want us jumping to solutions too quickly until we know what's making it hard for the kid to meet the expectation i already know why we think it's

important that the expectation be met i gotta know what's hard about meeting that expectation could be boy it could be i don't know six to eight things would be the texture of the food could be that this kid has a very limited range of things that the kid wants to eat and the parent is absolutely bound and determined that the kid eats spinach for breakfast you know so there's all kinds of things that it could be

we've got to come up with a solution together but we can't do that until we've heard the concerns of both parties yeah yeah and so what we're going to do is to again use the drilling approach to try to to understand what's going on here and even if the child is not saying anything is is refusing to say something and and i you know what another person wrote and said well uh that she'll try a problem-solving

conversation she'll try the empathy step and and the child will say well it doesn't matter or i don't know or that i don't care um and and so if the child is just trying to extract themselves from that conversation as fast as possible no matter what the issue is i don't know if the kid is trying to extract themselves from the conversation i don't mean can mean like i don't know can mean like 20 different things

i don't know kameen you sprung this on me i don't know can mean you're doing this in the heat of the moment and i want to get back to what i was doing i don't know can mean i think you're going to lower the boom the minute i say anything so why should i talk i don't care can mean many of the same things all the more reason to do this proactively but we can't get put off by these very

common things that kids say especially when they are new to the process i don't know is very common in fact i expect i don't know in every empathy step that i do every empathy step has i don't know or a shrug of the shoulders some empathy steps i would say this happens less often has i don't care um it is a less good sign when the kid says there's no point in talking about this that can be a sign that the kid has lost

faith that this problem will ever get solved and may even have lost faith that their concerns are actually going to be listened to so here's the interesting thing all of those things have meaning beyond just what the kids said yeah so if we get put off by those things and don't explore them further we miss additional information pity those things are not show stoppers those are very common things that we move past with good

drilling yeah okay so i just want to clarify dr ross green said on video and audio that he hears i don't know from a child on a regular basis in a problem-solving conversation and there are ways to move beyond it that we shouldn't accept i don't know as okay well that's the end of it then this problem is not solvable we that is so not the end of it words can't say yeah okay okay and so um i know we need

to finish on time and i just want to squeeze in one more question about issues related to impulsivity and the idea that a child might just you know they may be on board with the idea that we've all come up with in this we've gone through the steps we've come up with an idea that we both believe will work and then in the moment the child just cannot regulate regulate themselves well enough to be able to implement it what do we do in

those kinds of situations we say to ourselves given that this kid that this solution did not work for this kid did we come up with a solution that really wasn't very realistic given who this kid is i mean solutions that don't work are very informative they tell us that we missed something they tell us that we came up with a solution that there wasn't a snowball's chance this kid was going to be able to

do they tell us a lot right and so i don't freak out over solutions that didn't work in real life solutions that work usually come after the ones that didn't and come from what we learned from them so if we've agreed to a solution with an impulsive kid and the kid's impulsiveness makes it so that that solution is not going to work then we've agreed on a solution that

isn't realistic for that kid and we got to go back to the drawing board and figure out something that would be more realistic given that kid this is not pie in the sky this is not wishful thinking we're not agreeing on a solution saying you know if my kid wasn't impulsive this solution would work beautifully so let's go with it yeah your kid is your kid you're being responsive to the hand you've been dealt you are not agreeing

on solutions that you know in your mind's eye this is not gonna fly but if in your mind's eye you thought it was going to fly and then it didn't that's information back to plan b to get it sorted out yeah all right well i know we're out of time thank you so much i i hope one day we get to meet maybe at a conference or something and i will get to drill into all of my questions about the

research and all the rest of it but i'm so glad that we were able to help so many parents today um with all of this information so thank you so much for spending time with us thank you for inviting me to do this and i have to tell you you asked the highest level questions there's a bunch that you sent to me that we couldn't quite get to higher level questions than any interviewer so i hope we do cross paths

and we have an hour or two to go through all those questions because um it'd be fun to talk about them that would be lovely well thank you so much again and so listeners can find the links to all of dr green's books as well as references for the show at your parentingmojo.com forward slash cps you