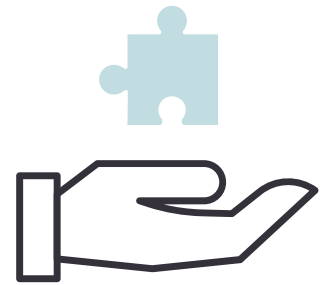


# COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING (CPS) FOR EDUCATION STAFF



A problem behaviour can put a strain on your relationship with a young person. Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) is an alternative to reward and punishment and can help you both understand each other better. Challenging behaviours are a form of communication and indicate the young person is struggling with something, it may be a way of avoiding something they don't think they can do, or makes them feel anxious. It may be they haven't learnt the necessary skill such as transitioning from one activity to another or something they don't understand. Shouting, using rewards and punishments or telling the child what they should be doing may not work if there is one of these underlying obstacles in the way.

CPS is a way of talking and listening that helps a child/young person build problem solving skills and aids cognitive and social-emotional development. The focus is working together rather than prescribing or imposing solutions. It can take a few conversations to solve the problem together but that will feel much better than shouting and pleading. It can be hard, these conversations are not easy, but with practice they start becoming more natural and more creative.

Try not to think you know what the solution is and you're trying to get the child/young person to just to do what you want.

**Have an open mind to finding a solution together. If you are genuinely committed to finding a solution together then they will be too.**

## THE THREE STAGES OF CPS

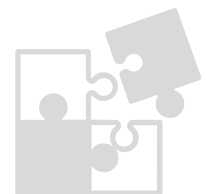
### THE EMPATHY STAGE



### THE PROBLEM STAGE



### THE INVITATION STAGE



## THE EMPATHY STAGE



When there has been a behaviour that has been challenging, don't deal with the situation there and then, especially if feelings are high. Do what has to be done to make the situation safe then wait until you are both calm before you bring the conversation up.

*'You haven't done the work I asked again. What's up?'* Then listen especially for feelings, ask questions to explore what was happening for the young person, why the problem may happen in some situations and not others. Don't assume you know what is going on - use PACE and take your time to ensure you understand the child/young person's reasons.

## THE PROBLEM STAGE



Here you introduce your perspective on the behaviour and why it is a problem either for the child/young person or for others, including yourself.

*'Thanks for letting me know what's been happening at home. I can see it's hard. It would be easy to say this work doesn't matter but it's important for you to get the best marks you can and that I feel I've helped you do your best.'* There is no need to lecture, judge or insist what the young person does - just to state clearly why the problem is the problem.

## THE INVITATION STAGE



Now you ask the young person if you can work together to find a solution to stop this happening next time. There is no need or benefit in arguing about the past, the focus is on the future.

*'I wonder if we could find a way that works for both of us. So that you could get to look after your family but also get your work in on time.'* Then both of you start to generate ideas together. Give space for the young person to give ideas and if they do, don't close them down, instead write them down along with your ideas until you have some possibilities to consider. It can be helpful to be playful, including ideas that both of you know won't work out but may help lighten the conversation. You'll need to judge whether the young person involved is able to be playful or if it would be difficult for them.

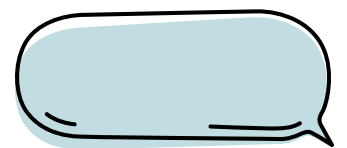
Go through ideas, thinking them through and both of you estimating the probability of each idea working. Ideally, you can agree a plan - it may be something neither of you would have thought of by yourselves. Give a reasonable idea a chance. You can keep repeating the process until you find a workable solution.

**It can take many conversations to find a solution that works for both of you but you will have saved both of you a lot of anger and frustration and possibly helped the young person learn some valuable skills as well.**

## **SOME USEFUL QUESTIONS AND SENTENCE STARTERS**

- I've noticed that ..... What's up? (Raise the issue when you are both calm)
- That sounds so hard/That must have been scary (acknowledge and validate feelings)
- That's not an easy thing to deal with
- I really want to hear what was happening for you...
- It would be so much easier if you didn't have to... ..(Give wishes in fantasy)
- I think you are saying.....is there anything else?
- I get that but how come you were able to then....? (explore why problem might occur under some conditions and not others)
- Can we think together about what we could do if it happens again? (invitation to problem-solve together)
- I'm not saying 'No' (but not saying 'yes' either)
- If you/I/they did that, what would happen? (thinking through consequences)

Remember it will be rare to resolve a complex problem the first time you talk about it. The child/young person may find it hard to give ideas and be unsure you genuinely want to work together. Complex problems are going to take a lot of thinking by both of you to find genuine solutions.



You can find out a lot more about this approach on these websites  
[www.thinkkids.org](http://www.thinkkids.org)      [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg