

Plan B Cheat Sheet

EMPATHY STEP

Ingredient/Goal:

Gather information about and achieve a clear understanding of the kid's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem you're discussing.

Words:

Initial Inquiry (neutral observation): "I've noticed that (insert highly specific unsolved problem)... what's up?"

Drilling for Information: usually focuses on the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem, and why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others.

More Help:

- If you're not sure what to say next, want more info, or are confused by something the kid has said, say:
 - "How so?"
 - "I'm confused."
 - "I don't quite understand."
 - "Can you tell me more about that?"
 - "Let me think about that for a second."
- If the kid doesn't talk or says "I don't know", try to figure out why:
 - Maybe your observation wasn't very neutral
 - Maybe your unsolved problem was too vague
 - Maybe you're using Emergency Plan B instead of Proactive Plan B
 - Maybe you're using Plan A
 - Maybe he really doesn't know
 - he might need time to think
 - he might need problem broken down into its component parts

What You're Thinking:

"What don't I yet understand about the kid's concern or perspective? What doesn't make sense to me yet? What do I need to ask to understand it better?"

Don't...

- skip the EMPATHY step
- assume you already know what the kid's concern is and treat the Empathy step as if it is a formality
- rush through the Empathy step
- leave the Empathy step before you completely understand the kid's concern or perspective
- talk about solutions yet

DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP

Ingredient/Goal:

Enter the concern of the second party (often the adult) into consideration

Words:

"The thing is (insert adult concern)...." or "My concern is (insert adult concern)..."

More Help:

- Most adult concerns fall into one of two categories:
- How the problem is affecting the kid
 - How the problem is affecting others

What You're Thinking:

"Have I been clear about my concern? Does the child understand what I have said?"

Don't...

- start talking about solutions yet
- sermonize, judge, lecture, use sarcasm

INVITATION STEP

Ingredient/Goal:

Brainstorm solutions that are realistic (meaning both parties can do what they are agreeing to) and mutually satisfactory (meaning the solution truly addresses the concerns of both parties)

Words:

Restate the concerns that were identified in the first two steps, usually beginning with "I wonder if there is a way..."

More Help:

- Stick as closely to the concerns that were identified in the first two steps
- While it's a good idea to give the kid the first opportunity to propose a solution, generating solutions is a team effort
- It's a good idea to consider the odds of a given solution actually working ...if you think the odds are below 60-70 percent, consider what it is that's making you skeptical and talk about it.
- This step always ends with agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

What You're Thinking:

"Have I summarized both concerns accurately? Have we truly considered whether both parties can do what they've agreed to? Does the solution truly address the concerns of both parties? What's my estimate of the odds of this solution working?"

Don't...

- Rush through this step either
- Enter this step with preordained, "ingenious" solutions
- Sign off on solutions that both parties can't actually perform
- Sign off on solutions that don't truly address the concerns of both parties.