INCOMPATIBILITY:

- Bad behavior is just the means by which your child communicates that there is incompatibility. It’s the fever – the signal. The litmus test: if you’re frequently reminding your kid of an expectation, then the reminding isn’t working, and incompatibility is likely present.
- To have influence, you’ll need to see beyond the behavior and focus on identifying and solving the problems that are causing it. Behavior is the symptom. The incompatibilities are the root cause.
- Don’t view the child as a problem or focus on fixing the problem child. Rather, focus on improving compatibility.
- Your influence is exerted through your expectations. When your child is able to meet those expectations, there is compatibility; when he/she’s unable to, there’s incompatibility.
- The manner in which you go about responding to that incompatibility will have a significant impact on your relationship with your child, how well you communicate with one another, and whether your influence is truly influential.
- Incompatibility isn’t a bad thing; it’s what fuels most growth. It’s also unavoidable.
- Most parents use Plan A and fail at improving compatibility. Plan’s B and C will be much more successful (see below).

PLAN A: Parent solves a problem unilaterally and imposes the solution on the child. (DON’T DO THIS)

- Problems with Plan A:
  - It sends the message that the point of view of the parent is the only one that really matters and the point of view of the child won’t be heard or considered.
  - Child will listen to parents less as the child feels his/her point of view doesn’t matter.
  - It makes the child completely dependent on the parent to solve problems for the child.
  - It arrives at solutions without being informed by all the available information.
  - It makes parenting about us versus them.

PLAN B: Parent and child solve a problem collaboratively. (PICK 2-3 THINGS AND DO THIS INSTEAD OF A)

**Empathy Step:** Gathering information from your child to understand his/her concern, perspective, or point of view on a given unsolved problem. Do more listening than lessoning.

1. **Mission:** Demonstrate to your child that you’re really interested in and curious about his/her concerns. Your mission is not to teach a lesson or be judgmental.
2. **The Introduction:** Begins with the words “I’ve noticed that . . .” and ends with the words “What’s up?”. In between you insert an unsolved problem. Examples:
   - I’ve noticed that it’s been difficult for you to get along with your sister lately. What’s up?
   - I’ve noticed that you haven’t been too enthusiastic about riding the school bus lately. What’s up?
   - I’ve noticed that it’s been difficult for you to answer your cell phone when I call you. What’s up?
3. **Drilling (to be used with possible responses from the child below):** The goal of drilling is to clarify, not grill.
   1. Use reflective listening.
   2. Ask “W” questions (who, what, where, or when – avoid why).
   3. Ask about the situational variability of the unsolved problem.
   4. Ask the child what he/she is thinking amid the unsolved problem.
   5. Break the unsolved problem down into its component parts.
   6. Make a discrepant observation.
   7. Table (and ask for more concerns).
8. Summarize (and ask for more concerns).

4. Possible Responses:
   - He/she says something. Drill for more information (The goal of drilling is to clarify, not grill). Drilling techniques:
     1. Use reflective listening. Simply mirror or repeat back whatever your child said to you, followed by a clarifying statement.
        - In response to your inquiry about not getting along well with his sister he responds:
          - Child: Because I don’t like her.
          - Parent: Ah, you don’t like her. How so? or I don’t quite understand, or I’m confused, or Can you say more about that? or What do you mean?
     2. Ask “W” questions (who, what, where, or when – avoid why). Examples:
        - Who’s been giving you a hard time on the school bus?
        - What’s making it hard for you to answer your cell phone?
        - Where/when is your sister annoying you?
     3. Ask about the situational variability of the unsolved problem. Avoid the assumption that the child can meet expectations when he/she feels like it. Rather, ask something like:
        - So, help me understand how you were able to do the math homework yesterday and you’re not able to do the math homework today?
        - So, sometimes you get up for school pretty easily, and other times it’s a lot harder. Help me understand that.
     4. Ask the child what he/she is thinking amid the unsolved problem. Example:
        - So, when you’re sitting at your desk trying to do your math homework, what are you thinking?
     5. Break the unsolved problem down into its component parts. Most unsolved problems have multiple components. For example, getting ready for bed at night has different components (taking a shower, brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, reading a book, etc.). Kids sometimes need help identifying those components, so they can pinpoint which component is causing them to struggle.
     6. Make a discrepant observation. Be careful with this one. It’s the riskiest in terms of causing the child to stop talking. An example of a discrepant observation:
        - I know you’re saying that you and Charlotte are getting along fine these days, but, yesterday at breakfast you two weren’t getting along very well at all. What do you think was going on with that?
     7. Table (and ask for more concerns). Example:
        - So if I made pancakes every morning for breakfast, and if the pancakes were ready ten minutes before you had to leave for school, and if your brother and sister weren’t annoying you, would there by anything else that would make it difficult for you to eat your breakfast before leaving for school in the morning?
     8. Summarize (and ask for more concerns). Use this before moving on to the Define-Adult-Concerns step. Example:
        - Let me make sure I understand everything you’ve said. It’s hard for you to do your social studies work sheet for homework because you’re tired after a long day at school and soccer practice, it’s too noisy in the dining room because your brother is watching TV in the living room, and you need my help and sometimes I’m busy putting your sister to bed. Is there anything else that’s hard for you about completing the social studies work sheet for homework?
   - He/she says nothing or “I don’t know”. There are many reasons for this such as:
     o Your wording is off.
• Your timing is off.
• He/she really doesn’t know.
• He/she has had a lot of Plan A in his/her life, and he/she is still betting on the Plan A horse.
• He/she may be reluctant to say what’s on his/her mind.
• He/she is buying time.
• He/she says, “I don’t have a problem with that”.
  • Use drilling strategy 1 (reflective listening)
• He says, “I don’t want to talk about it right now”.
  • Sometimes insisting harder will make things worse. Instead, use drilling strategy 7 (table).
• He/she becomes defensive and says something like, “I don’t have to talk to you” (or worse).
  • A good response to I don’t have to talk to you would be You don’t have to talk to me.
  • A good response to You’re not my boss would be I’m not trying to boss you.
  • A good response to You can’t make me talk would be I can’t make you talk.
  • Some reassurances that you are not using Plan A might be necessary such as:
    • I’m not telling you what to do.
    • You’re not in trouble.
    • I’m not mad at you.
    • I’m just trying to understand.

Once you have used drilling strategy #8 (summarize) and no additional concerns are expressed, move on to the next step.

Define-Adult-Concerns Step: Communicating your concern, perspective, or point of view on the same problem.
1. Avoid the tendency to jump to proposing or imposing solutions before giving thought to your own concerns.
2. The concerns of both parties are exactly equal in legitimacy. This doesn’t mean the child is your equal, but, it means you must see their concerns as equally valid as yours if you want to solve problems collaboratively with them.
3. Your concerns should fall into one of two categories:
   • How the unsolved problem is affecting your child.
   • How the unsolved problem is affecting others.
4. Begin with the words:
   • The thing is . . . or My concern is . . .

Invitation Step: You and your child discuss and agree on a solution that is realistic and addresses the concerns of both parties. You invite your child to collaborate on solutions together with you.
• Start by asking something like: I wonder if there’s a way . . .
• Then give your child the first opportunity to propose a solution: Do you have any ideas?
• The solution must be:
  1. Realistic: Meaning both parties can actually do what they’re agreeing to do.
  2. Mutually Satisfactory: Meaning the solution truly and logically addresses the concerns of both parties.

PLAN C: Parent modifies, adapts, or sets aside an unsolved problem completely, or at least temporarily. (DO THIS FOR ALL NON-PLAN-B-ISSUES)
• Use plan C for reasons such as these:
  • You don’t really care that much about the expectation
  • In lieu of your experience, wisdom, and values, you’ve made the conscious decision to defer to your child’s skills, beliefs, values, preferences, personality traits, and goals.
  • You’ve decided to give your child the opportunity to solve the problem independently.
  • The expectation is unrealistic for your child at this point in his/her development.
  • You have other higher-priority expectations to pursue at this time.