

The **Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP)** is a discussion guide created to assist caregivers in identifying a child's lagging skills and unsolved problems. Lagging skills provide caregivers with new lenses. Rather than viewing a child's difficulties as attention-seeking, manipulative, coercive, unmotivated, lazy, or limit testing, lagging skills provide more accurate, productive, actionable lenses.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING LAGGING SKILLS:

How hard could it be to check off lagging skills? Not that hard, but here are a few important reminders:

- Go in order...you don't want to miss anything.
- Don't spend time hypothesizing or theorizing about causal factors (why the student is lacking these skills)...you can't establish cause with any level of precision, and your time will be better spent identifying lagging skills and unsolved problems
- Don't spend any time talking about the child's behavior either...the behavior is simply the way children communicate that there are expectations they are having difficulty meeting
- Checking off a lagging skill is not a democratic process and shouldn't take more than 3-5 seconds each. If any caregivers in the meeting think the lagging skill applies to the child, check it off.
- While lagging skills provide you with new lenses -- a worthy goal -- lagging skills are not the primary targets of intervention. The unsolved problems you'll be identifying are the primary targets of intervention. If you solve those problems collaboratively and proactively, the child's skills will be enhanced.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING UNSOLVED PROBLEMS:

An unsolved problem is **an expectation a child is having difficulty meeting**. Writing unsolved problems is harder, because the wording of the unsolved problem on the ALSUP is going to translate directly into the words that you're going to use to introduce the unsolved problem to the child when it comes time to solve the problem together. As such, there are four guidelines for writing unsolved problems:

They should contain no reference to the child's challenging behaviors. Since you won't be talking with children about their behavior, there's no need to include the behavior in the wording of the unsolved problem. Instead, almost all unsolved problems begin with the words *Difficulty*, followed by a verb (a variety of verbs are shown in the examples below as well). So you wouldn't write *Screams and swears when having difficulty completing the word problems on the math homework...* instead write *Difficulty completing the word problems on the math homework*.

They should contain no adult theories. So you wouldn't write *Difficulty writing the definitions to the spelling words in English... because his parents were recently divorced*.

They should be split, not clumped (so you wouldn't write *Difficulty getting along with others* but rather *Difficulty getting along with Trevor on the school bus in the morning*).

They should be specific. To make an unsolved problem as specific as possible, there are two strategies:

- Include details related to *who, what, where, and when*
- Ask *What expectation is the child/student having difficulty meeting?*

The above guidelines -- and a variety of sample verbs -- are embodied in the following examples (they're grouped based on setting, but the verbs apply across settings):

SCHOOL/FACILITY:

- Difficulty getting started on the double-digit division problems in math
- Difficulty completing the map of Europe in geography
- Difficulty participating in the discussions in morning meeting
- Difficulty moving from choice time to math
- Difficulty ending computer time to come to circle time
- Difficulty walking in the hallway between classes
- Difficulty raising hand during Social Studies discussions
- Difficulty keeping hands to self in the lunch line
- Difficulty lining up for the bus at the end of the school day
- Difficulty remaining quiet when a classmate is sharing his or her ideas in English
- Difficulty waiting for his turn during the four-square game at recess
- Difficulty retrieving Geography notebook from locker before Geography class

HOME/CLINIC:

- Difficulty getting out of bed at 7 am in the morning to get ready for school on weekdays
- Difficulty going to church on Sundays
- Difficulty taking turns when playing chess with brother
- Difficulty sitting next to sister at dinner
- Difficulty putting the dishes into the dishwasher after dinner
- Difficulty taking the trash out on Tuesdays
- Difficulty brushing teeth before going to bed at night
- Difficulty ending Xbox at 8 pm
- Difficulty making bed before school on weekday mornings

There are also a variety of verbs that should be avoided, including *accepting, appreciating, staying calm, asking for help, listening, paying attention, focusing, considering, understanding, persisting, controlling*.

CHILD'S NAME _____ DATE _____

The ALSUP is intended for use as a **discussion guide** rather than as a freestanding check-list or rating scale. It should be used to identify specific lagging skills and unsolved problems that pertain to a particular child or adolescent.

LAGGING SKILLS

This section will help you understand why the child is responding so maladaptively to problems and frustrations. Please note that these **lagging skills are not the primary focal point of intervention**. In other words, you won't be discussing the lagging skills with the student, nor will you be teaching most of the skills explicitly. The primary targets of intervention are the unsolved problems you'll be documenting in the next section.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty maintaining focus	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty seeing "grays"/concrete, literal, black & white, thinking
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty handling transitions, shifting from one mindset or task to another	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty taking into account situational factors that would suggest the need to adjust a plan of action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty considering the likely outcomes or consequences of actions (impulsive)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inflexible, inaccurate interpretations/cognitive distortions or biases (e.g., "Everyone's out to get me," "Nobody likes me")
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty persisting on challenging or tedious tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty attending to or accurately interpreting social cues/poor perception of social nuances
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty considering a range of solutions to a problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty shifting from original idea, plan, or solution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty expressing concerns, needs, or thoughts in words	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty appreciating how their behavior is affecting others
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty managing emotional response to frustration so as to think rationally	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people/lacking other basic social skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chronic irritability and/or anxiety significantly impede capacity for problem-solving or heighten frustration	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty empathizing with others, appreciating another person's perspective or point of view
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sensory/motor difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty handling unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, novelty

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

Unsolved problems are the specific expectations a child is having difficulty meeting. The wording of an unsolved problem will translate directly into the words that you'll be using when you introduce an unsolved problem to the child when it comes time to solve the problem together. Poorly worded unsolved problems often cause the problem-solving process to deteriorate before it even gets started. Please reference the ALSUP Guide for guidance on the four guidelines for writing unsolved problems.

SCHOOL/FACILITY PROMPTS:

Are there specific tasks/expectations the student is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there classmates this student is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

Are there tasks and activities this student is having difficulty moving from or to?

Are there classes/activities the student is having difficulty attending/being on time to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the student has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the student about?

HOME/CLINIC PROMPTS:

Are there chores/tasks/activities the child is having difficulty completing or getting started on?

Are there siblings/other children the child is having difficulty getting along with in specific conditions?

Are there aspects of hygiene the child is having difficulty completing?

Are there activities the child is having difficulty ending or tasks the child is having difficulty moving on to?

As you think about the start of the day to the end, are there any other expectations the child has difficulty reliably meeting or that you find yourself frequently reminding the child about?

① 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 unsolved problem)... what's up?"

DRILLING FOR INFORMATION

Usually involves reflective listening and clarifying questions, gathering information related to the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem, and asking the kids what they're thinking in the midst of the unsolved problems and why the problem occurs under some conditions and not others.

MORE HELP

If the kid doesn't talk or says "I don't know", try to figure out why:

- Maybe the unsolved problem wasn't free of challenging behavior, wasn't specific, wasn't free of adult theories, or was "clumped" (instead of split)
- Maybe you're using Emergency Plan B (instead of Proactive Plan B)
- Maybe you're using Plan A
- Maybe he really doesn't know
- Maybe he needs the problem broken down into its component parts
- Maybe he needs time to think

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 perception
- Talk about solutions yet

② DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP | INGREDIENT/GOAL

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

WORDS | Initial Inquiry (neutral observation)

"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

③ INVITATION STEP | INGREDIENT/GOAL

Generate 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 | Initial Inquiry (neutral observation)

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 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

The goal of the Empathy Step is to gather information from the child about his/her concern or perspective on the unsolved problem you're discussing (preferably proactively). For many adults, this is the most difficult part of Plan B, as they often find that they are unsure of what to ask next. So here's a brief summary of different strategies for "drilling" for information:

REFLECTIVE LISTENING AND CLARIFYING STATEMENTS

Reflective listening basically involves **mirroring what a child has said** and then encouraging him/her to provide additional information by saying one of the following:

- "How so?"
- "I don't quite understand"
- "I'm confused"
- "Can you say more about that?"
- "What do you mean?"

Reflective listening is your "default" drilling strategy...if you aren't sure of which strategy to use or what to say next, use this strategy.

ASKING ABOUT THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE/WHEN OF THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

EXAMPLES:

- "Who was making fun of your clothes?"
- "What's getting the way of completing the science project?"
- "Where is Eddie bossing you around?"

ASKING ABOUT WHY THE PROBLEM OCCURS UNDER SOME CONDITIONS AND NOT OTHERS

EXAMPLE: "You seem to be doing really well in your work group in math...but not so well in your work group in social studies...what's getting in the way in social studies?"

ASKING THE CHILD WHAT S/HE'S THINKING IN THE MIDST OF THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

Notice, this is different than asking the child what s/he is feeling, which doesn't usually provide much information about the child's concern or perspective on an unsolved problem.

EXAMPLE: "What were you thinking when Mrs. Thompson told the class to get to work on the science quiz?"

BREAKING THE PROBLEM DOWN INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS

EXAMPLE: "So writing the answers to the questions on the science quiz is hard for you...but you're not sure why. Let's think about the different parts of answering questions on the science quiz. First, you have to understand what the question is asking. Is that part hard for you? Next, you need to think of the answer to the question. Is that part hard? Next, you have to remember the answer long enough to write it down. Are you having trouble with that part? Then you have to actually do the writing. Any trouble with that part?"

DISCREPANT OBSERVATION

This involves making an observation that differs from what the child is describing about a particular situation, and it's the riskiest (in terms of causing the child to stop talking) of all the drilling strategies.

EXAMPLE: "I know you're saying that you haven't been having any difficulty with Chad on the playground lately, but I recall a few times last week when you guys were having a big disagreement about the rules in the box-ball game. What do you think was going on with that?"

TABLING (AND ASKING FOR MORE CONCERNS)

This is where you're "shelving" some concerns the child has already expressed so as to permit consideration of other concerns.

EXAMPLE: "So if Timmy wasn't sitting too close to you, and Robbie wasn't making noises, and the floor wasn't dirty, and the buttons in your pants weren't bothering you...is there anything else that would make it difficult for you to participate in Morning Meeting?"

SUMMARIZING (AND ASKING FOR MORE CONCERNS)

This is where you're summarizing concerns you've already heard about and then asking if there are any other concerns that haven't yet been discussed. This is the recommended strategy to use before moving on to the Define Adult Concerns step.

EXAMPLE: "Let me make sure I understand all of this correctly. It's hard for you to do your social studies worksheet for homework because writing down the answers is still hard for you...and because sometimes you don't understand the question...and because Mrs. Langley hasn't yet covered the material on the worksheet. Is there anything else that's hard for you about completing the social studies worksheet for homework?"

Prepared with the assistance of Dr. Christopher Watson