

Healthy Compliance

One thing that interferes with setting boundaries is our views and history with authority and obedience. Think about your personal feelings with authority and how those feelings may or may not impact your relationship with your students. For example, if you had negative experiences with an overbearing parent as a child, you may shy away from holding kids accountable for poor behavior.

The bottom line is that school is about children learning. For this to occur, both the educator and the child needs to be compliant to their role. The educator's role is to provide an environment that is conducive to learning. The child's role is to listen, follow directions, and do their work.

The following definitions should be understood in order for the educator to know the difference and take appropriate actions:

- Authority:** The power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command, determine, or judge.
- Obedience:** In human behavior, a form of social influence in which a person yields to explicit instructions or orders from an authority figure.
- Compliance:** The act of complying with a wish, request, or demand.
- Coercion:** The practice of forcing another party to act in an involuntary manner (whether through action or inaction) by the use of intimidation or threats.

Healthy boundaries and structure are as much a basic need as relationships and therefore, compliance is an important part to healing the disrupted attachment cycle when working with children that have severe emotional and behavioral issues. It's not easy for these children to be compliant because they had adults who were not compliant to their roles. Therefore, they don't trust adults to take care of their needs since this did not happen when they were younger.

As educators, we have to reteach these children that we (as adults) will meet their needs in the educational setting. When we are compliant with our role as educators in meeting the child's needs, it is not unreasonable for us to expect the child to be compliant with adult directions and rules. This is an important part of the early cycle for human growth and development. Compliance will help children learn to trust and bond with healthy adults – essentially rewiring the brain. As they do this, children improve their behavior, mature, and grow through the developmental stages.

Sometimes when we hold others accountable, it feels uncomfortable for us. In addition, many of our students are triggered by discipline situations and feeling that the adults are controlling them. This often leads to emotional outbursts. Our feelings of discomfort and our fear about the child having an outburst can get in the way of us having expectations of our students and following through with consequences. With healing discipline, we are never coercive with our students or use shame when setting boundaries. We understand the child will not always be happy with our decisions or choices, and we recognize why the child acts the way they do. Most importantly, we have faith that through our relationship, having healthy boundaries, and providing consistent follow-through, we can give the child an opportunity to heal. Expecting compliance can actually help students have better lives.

Adults and children who don't learn healthy compliance can become sociopaths or "doormats." Each of us has a role and responsibilities we need to be compliant with in order for the world to work in healthy ways. This is why it's important to understand healthy compliance.