



*Reinforcement Unlimited*  
Clinical and Behavioral Services

P. O. Box 1572  
Woodstock, GA 30188  
(770) 591-9552

RWM@Behavior-Consultant.Com  
www.behavior-consultant.com  
Fax - (770) 516-4191

# Compliance Training Techniques

Robert W. Montgomery, Ph.D., BCBA

Compliance is the performance of an action, or the termination of an action, at the request of another person. Compliance is normal and people comply throughout their lives. It must be remembered that absolute and unswerving compliance is not normal and therefore setting goals of 100% for compliance by any person is both ill-advised and unlikely to be achieved.

I. Research has demonstrated that there are **three main classes** of Compliance Request:

- 1) "DO" requests: a request to engage or start a specific behavior,
- 2) "DON'T" requests: requests to cease engaging or to refrain from engaging in specific behavior(s),
- 3) "WAIT" requests: requests to both not do certain things and to do other things the combination of which result in passive waiting for either another signal or an amount of time to pass.

Training in complying with one type of request (e.g., Do) does not typically generalize to the other two types of requests (e.g., Don't and Wait). This means that training must occur across all three types of compliance request in order to maximize the chances that the student will appropriately comply with such requests in the natural environment.



II Compliance must be **reinforced** frequently in order for it to be maintained as a social behavior.

1. Initially, reinforcement should be delivered very frequently and should be varied.
2. After successful establishment of compliance with a specific person under specific conditions the reinforcement in that situation can be thinned.
3. With the introduction of new people making compliance requests and/or new environments in which compliance is requested the amount of reinforcement must be increased under these new conditions.

III **Generalization** of compliance occurs across three dimensions:

1. People
2. Places
3. Time

In order for compliance to generalize across these dimensions reinforcement opportunities must be programmed for by varying who asks for compliance, where compliance is requested, and by varying the time between requests as well as the frequency of the reinforcement delivered (intermittent reinforcement is more likely to ensure generalization over time - or maintenance - of the compliant behavior under training).

IV **Momentum** can be achieved by making a very likely to be complied with request (e.g., a small request to engage in a preferred activity) or several such requests in a sequence, thereby getting the student used to responding appropriately to verbal directions/requests by the teacher. There are several ways to increase momentum in compliance.

1. Have training sessions that are like “Simon Says” in which you make compliance a game for the student and success is rewarded.



2. Make certain to select VERY highly desired activities that your request the student engage in so as to maximize the chance that they will comply with your request thereby making each subsequent request more likely to be complied with by the student. Be CERTAIN to reinforce even the small requests when compliance is exhibited.
3. If you are working with an actively oppositional student you can “prime the pump” for compliance by using #2 above, or if that does not work you can label something the student is about to do (e.g., they are reaching for the door knob) with a compliance request (e.g., “Billy please touch the door knob”) thereby making compliance inescapable. When the student does touch the door knob reinforce them for complying and issue a second small request.
4. Remember that momentum is built both within a session (e.g., a small series of requests each of which is more likely to be complied with if the previous one was complied with and reinforced) and across time or sessions. This means that if you stop a session on a successful note the next session should go more smoothly and quickly (even if the difference is VERY small) and over time compliance will begin to approximate typical children’s level of compliance.

## V **Nature of the Requests**

1. You must be certain that the child is capable of performing the requested task.
2. You must be certain that they understood the request.
3. You must be certain that they heard the request.

## VI **Unusual Requests** can still lead to increases in Compliance

1. If a child is being stubborn and will not do anything you say but sit with their head down then using IV.3 above by saying “Fine, sit there for a moment.” Any amount of sitting past the end of that sentence can be reinforced as compliance.

2. If you have a student with a problem with aggression toward others you can practice, when they are not upset or aggressive, some safety compliance requests and reinforce them for faster and faster compliance thus making compliance in a potentially dangerous situation much more likely because of the practice. For example, if a student uses their hands to hit or push thus presenting a danger to others in the school you could practice faster and faster compliance with “Hands in Pockets” and then if they were going to hit another student you might have a verbal cue that could slow down or stop the assault. The same idea applies for kicking “Sit Down” can stop someone (even temporarily) from kicking another person.
3. Your best guide to what are and are not appropriate requests for such practice sessions are the behaviors of age-appropriate peers. If peers are complying with such requests around the student then training on such requests are more likely to be appropriate for that child as well (given similar cognitive and physical abilities).

