

Coercive Methods For Enforcing Compliance

Abuse can take different forms – physical, sexual, emotional, or financial. Many people who have suffered abuse blame themselves for what happened. They might have thoughts such as “Why did I let them do that?”, or dwell on things they did or didn’t do.

This type of rumination is very common after experiencing a trauma. Psychologists think that we might do this because it can give us a sense of control.

The problem with focusing on our own actions, though, is that it lets the perpetrator off the hook. It can be very helpful to ‘balance things up’ by paying attention to their actions and motivations.



How could this tool help me?

- People who have experienced abuse often focus on their own actions, but this means that they are often missing an important part of the story.
- Abusers use a variety of strategies to persuade other people to act or behave as they want them to. Some people who have experienced abuse find it helpful to talk about what the abuser was trying to achieve, because this helps them place the responsibility for these actions where it belongs.



How should I use it?

You can use this exercise in different ways. Suggestions include:

- Your therapist might introduce this handout to start a conversation about things you have experienced.
- You can use it to start thinking about the motivation of the perpetrator: what were they trying to achieve when they acted in these ways?



Helpful tips

- The examples on this handout might bring up difficult memories for you.
- Be kind to yourself and go at a pace that feels comfortable for you. Don’t be afraid to put it aside for a while if you find it too triggering.

Coercive Methods For Enforcing Compliance

Abusers use a variety of techniques in order to control others into behaving the way they want. In 1956 the psychologist Albert Bandura developed a framework for understanding the methods foreign armies used to extract false confessions from prisoners of war. Psychologists now think that abusers in many different situations use the same methods to achieve control over their victims. For example, victims of domestic violence or childhood abuse often report having experienced similar treatment.

Method	Effect / Purpose	Examples
Isolation	• Deprives the victim of social support for their ability to resist • Makes victim dependent upon the abuser	• Complete isolation • Cut off from family or friends (sometimes gradually) • Encouraged to stop work
Misrepresentation of perceptions	• Fixes attention upon immediate situation • Fosters introspection • Eliminates information not consistent with the abuser's message • Punishes non-compliance	• Physical isolation • Bizarre environment • Restricted freedom • Use of chem / sedation mixed with hostility to control behaviour
Induced debilitation / exhaustion	• Weakens physical and mental ability to resist • "You're tired, so I'll go along with it for now"	• Administer drugs and alcohol • Sleep deprivation • Semi-starvation • Over-exercising
Threats	• Cultivates anxiety and despair • Makes clear what the victim can expect for non-compliance	• Threats of death or injury • Threats to loved ones • Vague threats • Mysterious changes of treatment
Occasional indulgences	• Provides positive motivation for compliance • Encourages victim to work to 'earn' indulgences • "You're not all bad"	• Occasional favours • Fluctuation of behaviour • Promises • Rewards for partial compliance
Demonstrating incompetence and immaturity	• Suggests futility of resistance • "You will know" • "There's no point, he always gets what he wants"	• Confrontations • Taking compliance for granted (e.g. acting as if victim would never rebel) • Demonstrating complete control
	• Lowers self-esteem • Reduces victim to animal level concerns • Makes cost of resistance appear more "aging than capitulation" • "You're disgusting"	• Physical or sexual degradation • Preventing personal hygiene • Demanding poor hygiene • Insults and

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Abusers use a variety of techniques in order to coerce others into behaving the way they want. Use the checklist below to record whether you have been subjected to any of these methods of coercive control.

Method	Example
Isolation 	☐ Cut off from my family or friends ☐ Methods of communication controlled (e.g. phone, email, internet) ☐ Encouraged not to see people ☐ Encouraged not to work
Monopolization of perceptions 	☐ Physically isolated ☐ Freedoms restricted / not encouraged ☐ Behavior controlled by mixture of charm, seduction, and hostility ☐ Encouraged to focus on abuser's wants / needs instead of your own
Induced debilitation / exhaustion 	☐ Given drugs and alcohol ☐ Sleep deprived (e.g. not allowed to go to bed, woken in night) ☐ Diet controlled (e.g. starvation) ☐ Over-worked (e.g. kept busy, given many jobs, made physically tired)
Threats 	☐ Threats of death ☐ Threats of injury ☐ Threats of suicide if you don't comply ☐ Threats to loved ones ☐ Vague threats
Occasional indulgences 	☐ Occasional favors ☐ Fluctuation of behavior - sometimes pleasant, other times punishing ☐ Promises (e.g. "I will change") ☐ Rewards for partial compliance (e.g. "I like this ... but stop doing that")
Demonstrating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience' 	☐ Starting confrontations ☐ Taking compliance for granted (e.g. acting 'as if' you would never rebel) ☐ Demonstrating complete control
Degradation 	☐ Humiliating treatment (e.g. humiliated in front of others, punishments) ☐ Sexual degradation (e.g. encouraged to engage in humiliating sexual behavior) ☐ Controlling or preventing personal hygiene ☐ Insults and taunts ☐ Denial of privacy
Enforcing trivial demands 	☐ Demanding things be done a certain way ☐ Making little requests ☐ Habits that must be adhered to

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Induced debilitation / exhaustion 	• Weakens physical and mental ability to resist (<i>"I'm tired, so I'll go along with it for now"</i>)	• Administer drugs and alcohol • Sleep deprivation • Semi-starvation • Over-exertion
Threats 	• Cultivates anxiety and despair • Makes clear what the victim can expect for non-compliance	• Threats of death or injury • Threats to loved ones • Vague threats • Mysterious changes of treatment
Occasional indulgences 	• Provides positive motivation for compliance • Encourages victim to work to 'earn' indulgences (<i>"He's not all bad"</i>)	• Occasional favors • Fluctuation of behavior • Promises • Rewards for partial compliance
Demonstrating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience' 	• Suggests futility of resistance (<i>"He will know"</i>) (<i>"There's no point, he always gets what he wants"</i>)	• Confrontations • Taking compliance for granted (e.g. acting 'as if' victim would never rebel) • Demonstrating complete control
Degradation 	• Lowers self-esteem • Reduces victim to 'animal level' concerns • Makes cost of resistance appear more damaging than capitulation (<i>"I'm worthless", "I'm disgusting"</i>)	• Physical or sexual degradation • Preventing personal hygiene • Demeaning punishments • Insults and taunts • Denial of privacy
Enforcing trivial demands 	• Develops a habit of compliance • Reinforces who is in control	• Demanding things be done a certain way