

1

Urgency of the Problem

The following comments by educators, regarding the behavior of some students, have been expressed in many different ways over the years:

She just won't mind. Once she gets set on something, that's it, and it is a real battle to get her to do anything else. (Kindergarten teacher)

He just refuses to follow directions when we start formal instruction, and he won't cooperate with any form of group instruction. (Elementary school teacher)

She treats rules like a challenge, then goes out of her way to break them. (Middle school teacher)

He gets very angry when he is asked to make corrections on his assignments and then shuts down and won't do a thing. (High school teacher)

She has an authority problem. Whether it is a school rule or a direction from a teacher, you can almost guarantee she will find a way to be defiant. (School psychologist)

I find students who are sent to me for noncompliance are a difficult group to address. They already have a chip on their shoulder by the time they get to me, and you can tell they are not going to cooperate with what I try to arrange. (School principal)

Each of these comments, from K–12 educators, describes a variety of instances of students not doing what is asked of them. This resistance to requests is typically called noncompliance and is the focus of this book. Educators have identified two major concerns regarding this

behavior: (1) the high prevalence of noncompliance in schools, and (2) the harmful outcomes of chronic noncompliant behavior.

PREVALENCE OF NONCOMPLIANCE IN SCHOOLS

Over the past several years, there has been considerable focus on taking steps to ensure that schools are positive, welcoming, and safe environments for learning (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Mayer, 1998; Sprick, Wise, Marcum, Haykim, & Howard, 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2005). Although the emphasis in this trend has been to implement evidence-based, positive, and proactive practices, there is still a need for constructive procedures in managing problem behavior when it arises. It is very evident in research on the kinds of problem behaviors schools face that noncompliance and its analogues (disobedience, defiance, insubordination, and oppositional behavior) are highly prevalent and are of serious concern to educators.

Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) conducted an extensive analysis of office referral data of 19 middle schools serving 11,000 students from a large Midwestern city. These office referrals, numbering 17,045 across the schools, were coded by behaviors warranting an office referral. Results indicated that the most common reason for referrals was noncompliance (27.6%), representing more than double other common reasons, including conduct interference (12.8%), disrespect (10.7%), and fighting (10.7%), respectively. In an earlier study, Colvin, Kame'enui, and Sugai (1993) found across three schools that noncompliance was either the most common or second most common reason for referrals.

More recently, a review of data from School-Wide Information System, SWIS (May et al., 2003) on reasons for office discipline referrals was conducted from data for an urban school district in Oregon, composed of approximately 5,700 students. Results showed that for the elementary schools, K–5, the highest ranking reasons for referrals were as follows: first, aggression/fighting 28.8%; second, noncompliance/disrespect 27.9%; and third, inappropriate language, 11.3%. In the case of the middle schools, Grades 6–8, by far the most common reason for referrals was noncompliance at 31.0%, with aggression/fighting ranked a distant second at 17.7%. At the high school level, the top three reasons for referral were defiance, 20.8%, cell phone misuse, 15.9%, and fighting, 7.3%, respectively.

Spaulding and colleagues (2008) reviewed an extensive database of office discipline referrals from SWIS encompassing 1,709 schools from 43 states, Grades 1–12, for the 2005–2006 school year. Their analyses on highest ranking reasons for referral showed the following: Grades 1–5, fighting at 32.4%, defiance at 29%, and inappropriate language at 10.7%. In the middle schools, Grades 6–8, defiance ranked first at 31.2%, with disruption a distant second at 18.2%. For the high schools, Grades 9–12, defiance ranked first at 24.2%, tardiness for class at 24.0%, and truancy at 21.3%.

These studies have indicated that noncompliant behavior in the classroom, for some time now, has been the overall *highest ranking reason for office discipline referrals for Grades 1–12*. It is safe to conclude that noncompliant behavior in the classroom is a highly prevalent ongoing behavior of great concern in schools.

■ HARMFUL OUTCOMES OF CHRONIC NONCOMPLIANT BEHAVIOR

Students who display chronic noncompliant behavior are at risk for a number of serious negative outcomes that can be summarized in terms of (1) damaging life outcomes in general and (2) detrimental effects on academic achievement.

Damaging Life Outcomes

In the early 1980s, Walker and Rankin (1983), as part of an extensive eight-year research project, surveyed a national sample of more than 1,100 teachers, K–12, regarding the expectations general education teachers held for students in their classrooms. The results showed that more than 90% of teachers participating in the survey rated noncompliance and defiance toward teachers as one of the least acceptable maladaptive behaviors in their classrooms.

Similarly, 23 years later, Lane, Wehby, and Cooley (2006) found that (1) following teacher directions still remained a high-priority standard expectation of teachers for their students across grade levels and that (2) failure to meet these expectations resulted in several serious negative outcomes within and beyond school settings, especially regarding academic underachievement and social relationship issues.

Pediatricians and service providers have reported over many years that noncompliance of young children is a recurring serious problem for parents (Bernal, Klinnert, & Schultz, 1980; Kalb & Loeber, 2003). In a longitudinal study of children exhibiting noncompliance, Kochanska, Aksan, and Koenig (1995) found that noncompliance, especially severe noncompliance, is especially stable over time. This means that these students are likely to exhibit noncompliance throughout their school career, at home, and into later life (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

The prognosis for students who exhibit severe noncompliance at an early age is particularly grim. Researchers have reported for many years the prospects for children who display antisocial behavior, which includes noncompliance, are very serious with outcomes listed in Box 1.1.

BOX 1.1 NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS DISPLAYING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR AT AN EARLY AGE

- Peer rejection
- Increases in off-task behavior in lower grades
- Bonding with other antisocial students, including involvement with gangs
- Dropping out of school
- Involvement in juvenile crime and later on adult crime
- Ineffective relationships as adults
- Inability finding and keeping employment
- Serious mental health issues as adolescents and adults

Source: Compiled from Dishion, French, and Patterson, 1995; Eddy, 2001; Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey, 1995.

Detrimental Effects on Academic Achievement

It is logical to assume that most students who display noncompliant behavior on any regular basis will have problems in succeeding with their academic work. The reason is obvious; when teachers provide instruction, they typically require tasks of their students that involve following directions and expectations. Students who do not follow these directions will have difficulty completing the tasks set by the teacher, which will in turn affect their academic achievement. Kauffman (1997) so aptly noted that “low achievement and problem behaviors go hand in hand” (p. 247).

Sutherland, Wehby, and Yoder (2002) reported that academic deficits of students are further exacerbated by the modified instruction they receive, which is brought about by their disruptive classroom behavior. Van Acker, Grant, and Henry (1996) reported that for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the rates of correct oral responses were approximately 0.84 to 1.2 per hour. In addition, teachers praised these students’ correct responding at a rate of 0.68. This means that these students with behavioral issues in the classroom received teacher praise for correct responding at a rate of *only four to five times per day*. In addition, these researchers reported that teacher responses were five times higher for correct compliance responses to teacher directions than for correct responses to academic tasks. Several other studies reported that students who exhibit problem behavior in the classroom have low academic achievement scores compared with their peers, who by and large cooperate in the classroom (Carr & Punzo, 1993; Colvin, 2004; Cotton, 2000; Gunter & Conroy, 1998).

In effect, there is a clear correlation between academic underachievement and problem behavior. A cyclical relationship exists between the impact of problem behavior in the classroom and the kind of instruction that is delivered to students who display noncompliant and disruptive behavior.

CHAPTER SUMMARY ■

Ample documentation shows that noncompliant behavior in classrooms and schools has been a long-standing behavior of concern. For many years, it has been one of the most common reasons, if not the most common reason, for office referrals and is listed high on teacher reports as a demanding behavioral challenge. Noncompliant behavior not only causes classroom disruption but can also have many negative effects throughout the student’s life in school, at home, and in the community. It is imperative for educators and service providers to take urgent measures to more fully understand the nature of noncompliance and to take more effective steps to change this very challenging, pervasive, and disturbing behavior.