

OBEDIENCE

*Character First!® Elementary Teacher's Guide
Series 1, Booklet 2*



Definition

Quickly and cheerfully carrying out the direction of those who are responsible for me.



Illustration

Indian workers domesticated elephants as long as 5,500 years ago. The elephants' obedient nature and gentle power suits them perfectly for a life of service. Typically, a young boy of 10 begins training an elephant his same age, and the two work together for a lifetime. During these years together, the two become inseparable. The boy feeds his elephant, bathes him, tends his wounds, and trains him. In return, the elephant demonstrates remarkable obedience and loyalty. See these exceptional traits illustrated in the nature story on page 4.

I Will:

- obey my authorities immediately.
- have a cheerful attitude.
- complete all that I am expected to do.
- go the "extra mile."
- not obey a wrong command.



Application

Taking responsibility for one's actions is a preliminary step in character development. The five "I Wills" used throughout the *Character First!* Education curriculum represent decisions vital for children to make in order to establish a foundation of character in their lives. These statements are the basis for the stories, activities, lessons, and crafts found on pages 8 through 14.



Praise

So much attention is given to disobedience that many children accept condemnation, thinking they can do no better. Show that character is worthwhile by praising obedience in the lives of children. The praise they receive will motivate them to continue being obedient. Look on pages 14 and 15 for more ways to praise children.

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OBEDIENCE

vs. Rebellion

O•be•di•ence *n.* **1:** the quality or state of being submissive to the restraint or command of authority. **2:** an act or instance of following commands or guidance.

Obedience comes from the Latin words *ob* and *audio* and means literally "to hear." Obedience contrasts with willfulness in that a willful person doesn't listen. A willful person follows after his or her own will without regard for what authorities have to say.

Mistakes vs. Disobedience

It is important to understand the difference between *mistakes*, *errors*, and *failures*.

- A *mistake* is the result of a miscalculation, inability, or accidental oversight.
- An *error* is the result of wrong information, wrong processes, or a wrong understanding.
- A *failure* is the result of a lack of character.

If a student makes an occasional *mistake*, do not discipline for disobedience. If, however, the mistake is frequent, investigate for some *error* in his or her thought process or understanding of the task.

If a student demonstrates irresponsibility by staying up late at night and then working lethargically, thus making mistakes, do not deal with the mistakes primarily, but address the character flaw of *irresponsibility*.



The Concept of Authority

Authorities are those who are responsible for us. For instance, parents are responsible for their children, teachers for their students, employers for their employees, government officials for their citizens, and coaches for their teams. Obedience to an authority results in protection by being under that authority's jurisdiction.

When an authority gives instruction that conflicts with one's personal schedule, style, or enjoyment, it is all too common to rationalize disobedience. Symptoms of a disobedient attitude are thoughts such as, "that doesn't apply to me," "she doesn't know what she is doing," or "I don't understand why I should...." In contrast, true obedience involves a willingness to sacrifice personal comfort in response to the call of duty.

However, obedience is not the mere completion of a task. It is possible to comply with directions *outwardly* and still be disobedient *inwardly* by grumbling or complaining, even if the complaint is unspoken. Full obedience involves *cheerful* completion of the task.

The Role of Leadership

A person in leadership makes decisions that affect many people under him or her. Therefore, it is vital for authorities to do everything possible to meet their responsibility as a good leader. Authorities are to look after the best interests of those under them. That is a high calling, but doing so will promote obedience and cooperation among the group. The responsibility then rests on those under authority to choose obedience rather than willfulness.

Being a good leader requires maintaining a higher standard than what others are expected to follow. People naturally expect more of teachers than of themselves. By being submissive and obedient to your *own* authorities, those under you will more naturally obey.

The *attitudes* conveyed by a leader speak volumes as well. Inward feelings of discontent or frustration will set a negative tone for everyone. However, if those attitudes are replaced with genuine humility and obedience, that will be seen and followed as the standard. A student's character development begins with the example of his or her teachers.

Honor Your Word

As a teacher, your word carries authority. Students depend on you. When you make a commitment, or anything which students may interpret as a *possible* commitment, remember that you cannot expect others to obey your words if you do not keep your *own* word.

If you find it impossible to carry out a previous commitment, go back to those to whom you promised, explain your situation, and ask for their release. This assures them that you honor your word.

Demonstrate your own personal obedience by keeping your actions consistent with your words.

Obey First, Then You Will Be Obeyed

Obedience is perhaps the most critical character quality for anyone in leadership. The military has a saying:

*"A senior must never regard his rank.
The junior must never forget it."*

Before teachers can expect obedience from their students, they must maintain exemplary obedience to those over *them*.

If someone in your school hears you complaining about a principal or administrator, that person will immediately recognize your spirit of disobedience, even if you comply with the directives given. That example will come back to mind when they receive instructions from you. If this person does not like your instructions, he or she will justify half-hearted compliance or perhaps completely disregard your authority.

The way to effectively teach obedience is to be obedient to your own authorities. Rather than enforcing obedience with an attitude of superiority, obedience should be enforced as a matter of principle and as a measure of individual character, which starts in your own heart.