

## A Christian guide to Compliant Surrenderer Mode

The Compliant Surrender Mode (CS) is a "submit" way of dealing with distress. When there is a threat that I don't have the resources to handle, I might try to make myself small or "befriend" the threat. This mode can develop as way of meeting emotional needs at some point. Perhaps you had an angry or harsh parent who was not happy with anything except compliance. Perhaps you were in a culture where "first time obedience" was highly prized, so you might have been rewarded and praised for bending to other's wills automatically. Perhaps, if you weren't compliant, love would be withdrawn, or you would have been shamed, or abandoned. These environments are fertile soil for a Compliant Surrenderer mode to grow. So what is a Compliant Surrenderer mode?

"In Compliant Surrenderer mode people tend to passively allow others to take control or even openly give control to others in an attempt to gain approval, acceptance or nurturance or reduce conflict, criticism, rejection and humiliation."  
(Simpson, 2020)

### Origins of a Compliant Surrenderer mode

Often there is a Self-Sacrifice or a Subjugation schema that drives the CS mode.

Self Sacrifice in Schema therapy an excessive focus on voluntarily meeting the needs of others in daily situations, at the expense of yourself. The most common reasons are: to prevent causing pain to others; to avoid guilt from feeling selfish; or to maintain the connection with others perceived as needy. Often results from an acute sensitivity to the pain of others. Sometimes leads to a sense that your own needs are not being adequately met and to resentment of those who are taken care of. It results in feeling like you don't matter.

Subjugation is an excessive surrendering of control to others because one feels coerced – usually to avoid anger, retaliation, or abandonment. The two major forms of subjugation are: 1. Subjugation of Needs: Suppression of your preferences, decisions, and desires.

2. Subjugation of Emotions: Suppression of emotional expression, especially anger

Usually involves the perception that your own desires, opinions, and feelings are not valid or important to others. Frequently presents as excessive compliance, combined with hypersensitivity to feeling trapped. Generally leads to a build up of anger.

There are many origins of coping modes and an important aspect of Schema Therapy is understanding where you learnt your coping modes. Here are some questions to ask yourself to explore your Compliant Surrenderer mode:

- What does it feel like in my body when I am in my Compliant Surrenderer mode?
- What am I thinking in that mode?
- What am I feeling?

- Where did I learn to comply?
- How did it help me get my needs met (for safety, love, autonomy, freedom or achievement)?
- Are there benefits to this mode in my life now?
- Are there people in my life who would like me to stay in this mode?
- What does this mode cost me?

Christians can be confused by this being called an unhelpful coping mode. It seems like it's what the bible says Christians should be. Shouldn't we be "other-person centred", didn't Jesus model sacrificing himself? How can this be an unhelpful mode?

Sacrifice is a key concept in the bible, but we need to understand what it is and what it is not. Philippians 2: 5-8 says we should have the same "mind" as Jesus;

**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Phil 2 ESV**

Jesus did not serve out of a desire to be OK, out of a need to be safe or to earn favour. Jesus willingly chose to serve, from fullness. He chose to serve, from a place of safety and security. He was already God. He was already "enough", so he did not need to "grasp" at power, or status, but could freely give it up. To sacrifice like Jesus sacrificed is to sacrifice from a Healthy Adult sense of self. Choosing to sacrifice, knowing that you matter and have freedom.

## **How do I change a Compliant Surrenderer mode?**

Becoming aware of the mode and what is driving the mode is an important first step. Once you are aware of the origin and the ongoing way this mode plays out in your life, you can start to make choices about whether you use this mode or not. You might also do some Imagery work or Chair work with your therapist to help you with the emotional power of this pattern. One challenge is that a Compliant Surrenderer mode may be a way that we have learnt to cope with core schemas like emotional deprivation, abandonment, or defectiveness. These very powerful schemas are painful and distressing and will need some healing before the Compliant Surrenderer is willing to let go.

Let's look at an example of how a Christian might work on this mode:

**Maggie has worked out in therapy that she has often been serving at church from her Compliant Surrenderer mode. She was brought up in a family of Christians who were**

very giving and always helping at church. As she reflects on this, she starts to see that she gets her identity out of being the helper and the caretaker, but then is angry and hurt because no one looks after her. Maggie is giving (Self Sacrifice schema) out of her emptiness, her need to be seen and acknowledged (Emotional Deprivation schema), not from her Healthy Adult mode. She starts to explore what Healthy Adult service looks like instead. She learns to pause a reflect and pray about where she serves and feels freedom to say yes or no, without feeling guilty.

### Reflection questions:

What do you think drives your Compliant surrender mode? Do you have a Self-Sacrifice Schema or Subjugation schema, or both?

If you say “no” to a request, how do you feel? Have you ever said “no”?

What deeper needs might your serving be meeting? Feeling worthy? Being seen or mattering? Keeping people close? Feeling safe?

Is there a sense of choice in your serving? Does your church community encourage people to take a step back if needed?

Do you feel joyful in your service?

Below is a table identifying the difference between a compliant Surrenderer Mode and Healthy Adult service:

Compliant Surrenderer Mode	Healthy Adult
Says yes before thinking, often on “auto-pilot”	Can pause and pray first
Serving out of emptiness	Serving out of fullness
I “have to” serve, regardless of capacity	I choose to serve, as God enables
Serving from needing to be liked	Serving from already being loved
Learned from family/churches that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promoted legalism or works-based salvation</li> <li>• prized doing more than being</li> <li>• valued strength, not weakness</li> <li>• were unsafe or conditionally accepting</li> </ul>	Chosen from an understanding of Grace - we are free to serve, which means we are also free to not serve
Reinforces core schemas like Defectiveness, Abandonment, Emotional Deprivation - I say yes to protect myself from the pain of these schemas but then am often fueling the schemas by not being authentic about my needs. People don't get to know the real me under the coping mode, so there's no healing	Heals core schemas - finding out how God has gifted me and saying no to things I am not equipped or gifted to do allows others to see me as a “real” person who has strengths and weaknesses. If they are safe people they will accept that I have limitations and show me love
Feels anxious	Feels joyful