



North Wales Safeguarding

Children's Board

Practice Guide

Working with people displaying disguised compliance

Version 2 Oct 2020

1.0. **Introduction**

- 1.1. Disguised compliance involves parents and carers appearing to co-operate with professionals in order to allay concerns and stop professional engagement.
- 1.2. Published case reviews highlight the importance of practitioners being able to recognise disguised compliance, establishing the facts and gathering evidence about what is actually happening in a child's life.
- 1.3. This North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board practice guide is to support Multi Agency Practitioners in identifying and responding to cases where potentially the parents/ carers may be displaying disguised compliance.
- 1.4. Disguised Compliance is a common feature within North Wales Child Practice Reviews. (See appendix 1 -NSPCC Learning from Case Reviews 2019)

2.0. **Working with Parents who display Disguised Compliance**

- 2.1. Disguised compliance, resistance and denial are common features of families with early help needs. Apparent resistance may be the result of fear, stigma, shame, denial, ambivalence, or the parent's lack of confidence in their ability to change or lack of insight into their parenting capability and the impact on their children.
- 2.2. Indicators of disguised compliance can include:
 - A lack of measurable progress at reviews, despite apparent effort and co-operation from parents;
 - Parental agreement to change but not completing agreed actions to achieve it;
 - Change occurring due to the efforts of other agencies rather than the parents;
 - Inconsistency in the areas where change is achieved with parents opting to work with some professionals and not others or on some actions and not others; children's views differing significantly from that of the parents.
 - Look out for frequent missed appointments;
 - Exaggerated co-operation and compliance;
 - Attempts to minimise professionals' concerns or denial of the impact of the lived experience of the child;
 - Aggressive or threatening behaviour when challenged;

- Unjustified claims of progress being made or actions carried out and a refusal to discuss key issues whilst focussing on others that have less or no impact for the child.
- 2.3. Some parents may be resistant to the involvement of professionals, rather than resistant to change in itself, particularly where they feel professionals are exercising power over them instead of working with them in a supportive manner. Consider the professional relationship with parents and ensure parents feel respected and avoid judgmental language or assertions about their behaviours or motivation.
 - 2.4. Be alert to the risk of collusion with parents. Where parents appear co-operative, remain open to hearing the voice of the child throughout the process and always measure parents' assertions there has been progress against the child's lived experience. See and speak to the child regularly.
 - 2.5. Ensure there is **evidence** of improvement through the use of assessment tools and do not rely solely on the parents' views to measure success. Cross check against the evidence, maintain 'respectful uncertainty' and check what parents say with other professionals.
 - 2.6. Without good evidence, do not be over-optimistic about progress. Share information with other professionals regularly and check on their view of progress made to challenge your assumptions.
 - 2.7. Challenge your approach with the family through supervision. With your supervisor, hypothesise about possible underlying issues that parents may not want to face, consider evidence carefully and reflect on the quality of parental engagement and motivation to change when progress is not being achieved. The supervisor may want to escalate concerns to their managers or arrange a multi-agency meeting to discuss.
 - 2.8. Where parents are openly hostile or aggressive, consider risk to the worker and discuss in supervision the strategies needed to overcome this. Re-evaluate risk to the worker and the child regularly.

Appendix 1

NSPCC Learning from Case Reviews 2019

1. Key issues

Parents' behaviour towards professionals

Parents and carers may minimise concerns raised by practitioners or deny that there are any risks facing children.

Parents and carers can develop good relationships with some professionals whilst criticising or ignoring others. This can divert attention away from parents' own behaviour.

Parents and carers displaying disguised compliance may manipulate professionals and situations to avoid engagement or intervention.

Some parents and carers may say the right things or engage 'just enough' to satisfy practitioners.

Engagement with professionals

Some parents and carers regularly miss or cancel appointments, promising to reschedule but not attending.

Optimism

Sometimes practitioners are over optimistic about parents' and carers' progress and ability to care for the child or their promises to engage with services.

Practitioners may rationalise parent's behaviour, for example seeing a failure to engage with services as a matter of 'parental choice' rather than non-compliance.

Practitioners in these case reviews tended to accept information from parents and carers as fact without displaying appropriate professional curiosity and investigating further.

Lack of action

In some of these case reviews, disguised compliance was suspected or discussed but no actions were put in place to tackle this.

2. Learning for Improved Practice

Recognising disguised compliance

Local safeguarding agencies should ensure practitioners are trained in recognising and responding to disguised compliance.

Practitioners need to remain aware that disguised compliance could be occurring.

Establish facts and gather evidence

Practitioners should display professional curiosity when working with families and not accept information from parents and carers at face value without investigating further. Practitioners need to establish the facts and gather evidence about what is actually happening or has been achieved.

Practitioners should focus on the child's lived experience rather than the parents' and carers' actions.

Unannounced visits

To avoid seeing only what parents and carers want to present, social workers should make unannounced as well as pre-arranged statutory visits.