

Learning from Serious Case Reviews

Disguised Compliance

Disguised Compliance involves parents giving the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions and allay concerns. Published case reviews highlight that professionals sometimes delay or avoid interventions due to parental disguised compliance. The learning from these reviews highlights that professionals need to establish the facts and gather evidence about what is actually happening, rather than accepting parent's presenting behaviour and assertions. By focusing on outcomes rather than processes, professionals can keep the focus of their work on the child.

Reasons case reviews were commissioned

This briefing is based on case reviews published since 2011, where disguised compliance is a key factor. It pulls together and highlights the learning contained in the published reports.

In these case reviews, children died, or were seriously injured in a number of different ways:

- physical abuse, including head injuries and shaking
- neglect, including dehydration and malnutrition
- co-sleeping with parents who had consumed alcohol and drugs
- the ingestion of drugs.

Babies and very young children are at particular risk from a lack of timely intervention due to disguised compliance.

RISK FACTORS for disguised compliance in case reviews

Missing opportunities to make interventions

A reduction or downgrading in concern on the part of the professionals can allow cases to drift, so losing the opportunity to make timely interventions.

Removes focus from children

Disguised compliance can lead to a focus on adults and their engagement with services, rather than on achieving safer outcomes for children.

Over optimism about progress

Professionals can become over optimistic about progress being achieved, again delaying timely interventions

RECOGNISING Disguised Compliance

Avoiding Contact with Professionals

Parents promise to change their behaviour and then avoid contact with professionals

Criticising Professionals

Parents criticise other professionals to divert attention away from their own behaviour.

Parents Deflecting Attention

Parents focus on engaging well with one set of professionals, for example, in education, to deflect attention from their lack of engagement with other services.

Pre-Arranged Visits

Pre-arranged home visits present the home as clean and tidy, with no evidence of other adults living there.

Failure to Engage with Services

Parents promise to take up services offered, but then fail to attend.

Learning for Improved Practice

Establish facts & gather evidence → Don't accept presenting behaviour, excuses or parental assertions and reassurances that they have changed or will change their behaviour. Establish the facts and gather evidence of what is actually occurring or has been achieved, in order to not lose objective sight of what is happening.

Build chronologies → Chronologies can be used to provide evidence of past parenting experience, including possible former instances of disguised compliance, and to analyse parenting history. The information can then be considered in relation to current parenting capacity and to gain a fully documented picture of the family environment. This can help in recognising and understanding further incidences of disguised compliance.

Record the children's perspective & situation → Recording can become focussed on the adult's participation and parenting capacity. Instead the focus should be on recording the children's perspective and situation. This will help to retain the focus on the child and can also help to ensure that important information does not become lost when shared between multiple agencies.

Identify Outcomes → Focus on outcomes rather than process, so that attention cannot be deflected by good intent or an appearance of participation. Identify and establish clear, understandable and measurable outcomes and take action when outcomes are not achieved within agreed timescales.

Use of staff supervision to challenge beliefs

Professionals can become overly optimistic about change that has occurred. This can involve rationalising parent's behaviour to their own viewpoint - for example: seeing a failure to engage with services as a matter of 'parental choice' rather than non-compliance - or an over optimistic desire to believe that change has occurred.

Supervision needs to challenge professionals' beliefs about apparent changes and to seek evidence of actual progress

Information source: [NSPCC SCR Learning: Disguised Compliance](#)
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Learning specific to Buckinghamshire from local Serious Case Reviews

Although not specifically referred to as disguised compliance in the Serious Case Reviews, the following issues were noted:

1.

Where there was a history of drug and / or alcohol abuse, the parent's word was taken at face value that they were no longer using substances (Babies K, L and M). In the SCR for Baby K, mum disclosed that she was taking anti-depressant medication, although there were no medical records to confirm this. Professionals should be more 'inquisitive' to ensure accurate information is gained.

2.

In the reviews for Babies L and M, professionals had difficulty seeing the family in their own home, often opting for visits to take place at the grandparents' home. This did not allow professionals to see how the parents were coping with the baby and the environment the baby was growing up in.

3.

Different accounts were given by parents in the SCR for Baby M of how they got to hospital after the first incident. Although parents may collude over their account of an 'accident', looking at the wider picture could alert professionals to an issue.