Disguised Compliance / Disguised None Compliance

Bury Safeguarding Partnership

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1 What is it?

Disguised compliance is a term used to describe the behaviour of parents or carers who appear to co-operate with professionals to allay concerns and stop professional engagement.

Local Child Safeguarding Reviews frequently highlight concerns about parents' or carers' 'disguised compliance'. The term is often used to describe various caregiver behaviours, including minimising concerns, withholding information and inconsistent engagement with services

There has been debate about using the term 'disguised compliance' and in social work is referred to as 'disguised none compliance' however it is still widely known as disguised compliance.

2 Why does it occur

Many parents/caregivers involved in child protection interventions are involuntary participants and may view agencies as threatening, leading to fear, mistrust, and limited cooperation. Some families may keep professionals at a distance, and *disguised compliance* can occur when caregivers divert attention from concerns to reduce or avoid intervention.

Professionals should consider how a parent/ caregiver's trauma or past negative experiences with services may affect their ability to engage or build trust. Non-engagement is not always intentional deception; it can stem from fear. Practitioners should reflect on their own role, use supervision, and ensure all supportive efforts have been made before labelling behaviour as disguised compliance.

3 Think the Unthinkable

It is important, however, to be mindful that being understanding of the parent/caregivers' circumstances must be balanced.

Munro (2005b) comments that repeated inquiry reports show the extraordinary lengths to which some abusive parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through disguised compliance and the Daniel Pelka review emphasised the need for professionals to be able to 'think the unthinkable' rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home. Professionals should be mindful of the rule of optimism. This is when professionals assume that a child is safe and not in need of immediate intervention, despite signs of abuse or neglect.

4 Working with Disguised Compliance

Healthy scepticism – High caseloads can make it feel difficult to 'dig deeper', however, when there are suspicions of disguised compliance, it is important to always check for evidence in support of the parent / caregiver explanation for events.

Establish the Facts - Use in-depth assessments to gather evidence about the situation. Observe what is being said but also look for non-verbal cues, e.g. body language and parent / child interactions. Keep detailed records and build up a chronology - this will help with identification of patterns of non-compliance.

5 Working with Disguised Compliance

Look at previous records to identify patterns of behaviour / engagement. Talk to other professionals. What are their experiences of the family? Coordinate information across the family for a fuller picture of what life is like for the child. Be prepared to make critical judgements of parents and their behaviour.

Voice of the Child – what is the child telling you? What is it like to be a child living in that household? Ensure voice is considered for non-verbal children, those with additional needs or those who have not yet learned to speak. Remember when a child misses important appointments (e.g. with health providers) remember that this is not their choice.

6 Working with Disguised Compliance

Focus on Outcomes - Identify clear outcomes to measure progress and reduce drift. Reflect- have there been any real changes? Are there clear signs of sustained improvement?

Support and Supervision - Undertake joint visits with other professionals. Use supervision to bring in a 'fresh pair of eyes', reflect & share concerns.

Assess Capacity to Change - Disguised compliance involves resistance to change and an inability or unwillingness of parents/ carers to address risks to their child. Assessments of the parent's capacity and willingness to change should be carried out alongside assessments of the child's life.

7 Resources

Disguised compliance: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning

Understanding disguised non-compliance in social work | Iriss

Rethinking 'disguised compliance' in child protection practice

Why language matters: how using the term 'disguised compliance' can be problematic | NSPCC Learning