



## Disguised Compliance

**Professional Curiosity or Respectful Uncertainty is keenly needed when working with families who are displaying disguised compliance. Professional Curiosity and challenge are an essential part of safeguarding.**

**In this resource we will help practitioners spot the signs of when a parent or carer may be using disguised compliance; and advise where and how to access help and services.**

### What is Disguised Compliance?

Disguised Compliance involves parents or carers giving the appearance of co-operating with agencies to avoid raising suspicions and reduce concerns.

There is a continuum of behaviours from parents or carers on a sliding scale, with full co-operation at end of the scale, and planned and effective resistance at the other. Showing your best side or 'saving face' may be viewed as 'normal' behaviour and therefore we can expect a degree of Disguised Compliance in all families; but at its worst, superficial cooperation may be used to conceal deliberate abuse. Many case reviews highlight that professionals can sometimes delay or avoid interventions due to parental Disguised Compliance.

### Examples of Disguised Compliance...

- **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.**
- **Parents criticise other professionals to divert attention away from their own behaviour.**
- **Pre-arranged home visits and present the home as clean and tidy with no evidence of any other adults living there.**
- **Failure to engage with services- Parents promise to take up services offered but then fail to attend.**
- **Avoiding contact with professionals- Parents promise to change their behaviour and then avoid contact with professional.**

## What are the risks?

- Missing opportunities to make interventions- Professionals may perceive risk to be low level and fail to make timely interventions.
- Removes focus from children- This 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, leading to cases being stepped down and delaying timely interventions.

**The following principles will help front line practitioners deal with Disguised Compliance more effectively:**

- Focus on the needs, voice and 'lived experience' of the child/ young person. Does it reflect what parents/ carers are telling you.
- Effective multi-agency work needs to be coordinated so we have all available information regarding the lived experience of the child or adult.
- Parents or carers can easily prevent practitioners from seeing and listening to a child or another adult.
- Practitioners can be fooled with stories we want to believe are true.
- Avoid being encouraged to focus to extensively on the needs and presentation of the adults or carers – whether aggressive argumentative or apparently compliant.
- Think carefully about the 'engagement' of the adult or carers and the impact of this behaviour on the practitioners view of risk.
- Focus on change in the family dynamic and the impact this will have on the life and well-being of the child or adult – this is a more reliable measure than the agreement of adults or carers in the professionals plan.
- There is some evidence that an empathetic approach by professionals may result in an increased level of trust and a more open family response leading to greater disclosure by adults and children.
- Practitioners need to build close partnership style relationships with families whilst being constantly aware of the child or adult's needs and the degree to which they are met.

- Practitioners need to think differently about ways that they can engage with children, adults and their families or carers. There is no magic way of spotting disguised compliance other than the discrepancy between.
- An adult or carer's accounts and observations of the needs and accounts of the child or adult. The latter must always take precedent.

Challenging parents or carers (and colleagues) requires expertise, confidence, time and a considerable amount of emotional energy. Please also see the guidance on Difficult Conversations with Parents/ Carers.