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 focussing on outcomes rather than processes professionals can keep the focus of their work on the child.

Published: March 2014

Authors

This briefing summarises the learning from case review reports. It is an analysis by the NSPCC Information Service, highlighting risk factors and key learning for improved practice.
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 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

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.

Criticising professionals

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

Pre-arranged home visits

Pre-arranged home visits 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.
Parents promise to change their behaviour and then avoid contact with professionals.

Learning for improved practice

Establish facts and 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 about 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 and 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 time scales.

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 change has occurred. Supervision needs to challenge professionals’ beliefs about apparent changes and to seek evidence of actual progress.

Related topics

Disguised compliance

NSPCC factsheet explaining what ‘disguised compliance’ means, when it occurs and what professionals can do to identify and counteract it.

Domestic abuse: learning from case reviews

Lessons from case reviews published since 2011, where domestic abuse is a key factor.
Hidden men: learning from case reviews
Lessons from case reviews published since 2008, where agencies were unaware of men who posed a risk to the child or who could have protected the child.

Find out more

Parents who misuse substances: learning from case reviews
Lessons from case reviews published since 2010, where substance misuse is a key factor.

Find out more

Neglect
Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child’s basic needs. It’s dangerous and children can suffer serious and long-term harm.

Read more about neglect

Domestic abuse
Witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse, and teenagers can suffer domestic abuse in their relationships.

Read more about domestic abuse

Our web pages are liable to change. Please check back regularly to ensure the copy you are using is still current. For full terms of use see: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/terms-conditions
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/case-reviews/learning/disguised-compliance/ - 06/02/2018
Neglect and serious case reviews


Find out more

More information and resources

PDF / 278 KB

Research briefing: harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

This research briefing aims to help professionals update their knowledge of the most recent research on HSB.

National case review repository

Working together with the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs to make finding the learning from case reviews published in 2014 and 2013 easy to find.

Find out more

Our web pages are liable to change. Please check back regularly to ensure the copy you are using is still current. For full terms of use see: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/terms-conditions

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/case-reviews/learning/disguised-compliance/ - 06/02/2018
Child protection system

The services and process in place across the United Kingdom to protect children at risk of abuse, neglect or harm.

Find out more

Research and resources

Read our latest research, leaflets, guidance and evaluations that share what we've learned from our services for children and families.

Find out more
EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Helplines

Help for adults concerned about a child
Call us on 0808 800 5000

Help for children and young people
Call Childline on 0800 1111

For donation and fundraising queries
Call us on 020 7825 2505

Links

What we do
Preventing abuse
Donate
Services and resources
NSPCC Shop

Follow us

The NSPCC

Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
Leading children’s charity, incorporated by Royal Charter

Registered charity number 216401. NSPCC, charity registered in Scotland, charity number SC037717. Jersey registered charity number AJC179.