



TEA-BREAK GUIDE



Disguised non-compliance involves parents / carers giving the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions and allay concerns.

Families can develop skilful strategies to keep professionals at 'arm's length'. Disguised non-compliance occurs when parents want to draw professionals' attention away from allegations of harm and unsafe parenting with the aim of minimising or avoiding agency interventions in family life.

Some signs that may indicate disguised non-compliance:

Conflicting accounts of family life from differing family members;	Repeat incidents of harm/neglect to children;
Conflicting accounts / evidence from different professionals;	"It's all about me!" – Parents issues causing the child to become invisible;
Conflicting accounts from neighbours;	Clean the house the week before review;
Plausible reasons for children's injuries;	School attendance improves for two weeks;
Presentation and behaviours of children conflict with adults' account;	Welcoming, rather than usual hostility, at home visit;
Repeated missed appointments;	Plausible excuses for missed appointments and home visits and
Not following advice or only following friend's / neighbour's / mother's etc. advice;	Presenting for appointments before crucial home visit.
Consistently blaming others for any lack of progress	Talk about changing – but no change actually taking place over time

Practical advice when you need to help:

- **Keep focused on the child all the time:** do not let a parent's concerns cause the child to become invisible;
- **Evidence it;**
- **Get support and supervision:** Undertake joint visits with other professionals so you can share experiences. Use supervision to bring in a 'fresh pair of eyes'; talk through your concerns with your supervisor or manager and reflect on the case (Signs of Safety Mapping may be a tool to undertake this reflection) including any on-going concerns you have;
- **Re-assess – capacity to change?** - All disguised non-compliance involves resistance to change and inability or unwillingness of parents and carers to address risks to their child. Assessments of a parent's capacity and willingness to change should be carried out alongside assessments of the child's life;
- **Use appropriate assessment tools** – Graded Care Profile;
- **Chronologies** – When a child misses important appointments (e.g. with health providers) remember that this is not their choice and keep chronologies up-to-date and
- **Hear the child's voice** - Look to uncover the reality of the child's life in their family; talk to the child(ren). What is it like to be a child living in that household?
- **Awareness of our approach to engaging with families** - what motivates parents into not cooperating with safeguarding professionals? There is evidence to suggest that a lack of cooperation on the part of parents is sometimes generated by the way professionals work with parents.

Impact of disguised non-compliance

Babies and younger children can be particularly vulnerable, and the effects of missing out on timely safeguarding interventions can last throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

Disguised non-compliance also harms children in the following ways:

- Through missed opportunities to intervene – Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's);
- By removing professionals' focus from children to adults in the family, risking case-drift;
- By making professionals feel overly optimistic about progress;
- Older young people may display disguised non-compliance themselves;
- Hostile behaviour becomes normalised;
- A child may think that their parents have complete control over their world and this enhances a parent's power over the child;
- A child may collude with their parent's behaviour;
- They may fear reprisals (be mindful this may include threats that the child will be 'taken away' if they speak with professionals) if they speak to professionals and /or may be experiencing threats or aggression and
- They may have learned to appease and minimise.

Professional Curiosity

Professional curiosity is **the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family** rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. A 'Think Family' approach is essential to our safeguarding work with children and adults and their families.

In his report into the death of Victoria Climbiè, Lord Laming (2003) explained the importance of 'respectful uncertainty' when writing:

'While I accept that social workers are not detectives, I do not consider that they should simply serve as the passive recipients of information, unquestioningly accepting all that they are told by the carers of children about whom there are concerns.'

'The concept of respectful uncertainty should lie at the heart of the relationship between the social worker and the family. It does not require social workers constantly to interrogate their clients, but it does involve the critical evaluation of information that they are given. People who abuse their children are unlikely to inform social workers of the fact. For this reason, at least, social workers must keep an open mind.'

While this report is now over 18 years old, the message is still relevant to all professionals.

On balance it's also important to consider that there may be factors which can prevent workers from using their curiosity including what is going on in the workplace and in supervision.

To critically examine one's assumptions about a family so we don't miss important information is acknowledged as complex. Practitioners can benefit from being encouraged to think again by uncovering assumptions, sometimes quite dramatically.

Munro suggested that workers hang on tenaciously to their ideas about families despite evidence to the contrary. So, it's important for us to revisit our hypothesis and review plans at the same time as encouraging practitioners to adopt a think again approach.

Useful reading

[Parental resistance and social worker skills: towards a theory of motivational social work - Forrester - 2012 - Child & Family Social Work - Wiley Online Library Lancashire | Disguised Compliance or Undisguised Nonsense Community Care | We Need To Rethink Our Approach To Disguised Compliance NSPCC Learning | Disguised compliance: learning from case review Community Care | Disguised Compliance: Applying a Relationship-based Approach NSCP | Working with Resistant Families / Disguised Compliance](#)