

# Learning from Serious Case Reviews Involving Disguised Compliance

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**Based on SCR's published since 2011**



## Introduction

Disguised compliance involves parents giving the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and to delay or avoid professional intervention.

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 and signs

Disguised compliance poses a number of risks for children.

- A reduction or downgrading in concern on the part of professionals can allow cases to drift, so losing the opportunity to make timely interventions.
- Disguised compliance can lead to a focus on adults and their engagement with services rather than on achieving safer outcomes for children.

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

Disguised compliance can take a number of different forms.

- Parents focus on engaging well with one set of professionals (e.g. 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 present the home as clean and tidy with no evidence of any other adults living there.
- 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

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.

### 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.

### Recording

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.

### 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.

### Supervision

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.