



# Safer Seven

On: Disguised Compliance



## 1. Background

Disguised compliance involves parents and carers appearing to co-operate with professionals to allay concerns and stop professional engagement (Reder et al, 1993).

This can mean that social workers and other practitioners may be unaware of what is happening in a child's or adult's life and the risks they face may be unknown to authorities.

## 2. Why does it happen?

Many parents and carers whose families are the focus of child / adult safeguarding interventions are involuntary participants and agency involvement can be perceived as a threat.

Parents and carers may be fearful and reluctant to cooperate with agencies. They may resent the intervention and develop skilful strategies to keep professionals at 'arm's length'.

## 3. Can it harm children?

Disguised compliance harms children and adults with care and support needs as it prevents professionals being able to properly assess the risks to them within the household.

Superficial cooperation from parents/carers often prevents or delays professionals understanding of the severity of harm to the individual and where parents/carers engineer the focus away from allegations of harm, the individual can be unseen and unheard.

## 4. Possible signs of Disguised Compliance

Where there is disguised compliance, parents and carers may:

- Avoid contact with professionals by missing appointments.
- Control meetings with professionals and divert focus from the child to their own problems.
- Agree that changes are required, put little or no effort into making agreed changes and no significant improvements are made.
- Offer differing accounts to that of the individual concerned.

## 5. What can I do?

- Keep interventions and plans person centred and remember to seek their views by creating opportunities to see the individual on their own, without their parents or carers.
- Be professionally curious when undertaking assessments to gather the facts.
- Exercise healthy scepticism and think the unthinkable.
- Use supervision to bring in a 'fresh pair of eyes' to the case from your manager.

## 6. Other things you can do

- Keep chronologies to establish any patterns of behaviour and engagement.
- Identify clear outcomes in plans which can be used to measure progress and reduce drift.
- Assess parents or carers capacity to change and avoid being over optimistic when initial improvements are made, especially where evidence suggests previous changes were not sustained.

## 7. Further information:

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