

'Disguised Compliance'

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YMAST Conference



Content

- ▶ Background
 - National Serious Case/Child Practice Reviews, Community Care Inform Disguised Compliance';
 - LSCB/Ps guidance
- ▶ 'Disguised Compliance' – and lying/deception/pretending!
- ▶ Gaining a fuller picture
- ▶ Challenge and decision making

Disguised Compliance – What do we Mean???????

- ▶ Reder, Duncan & Gray (1993)
 - Identified patterns of 'closure' or 'flight' when families attempted to reduce their contact with the external world in an attempt to 'regain control by shutting out professionals'
 - Often when professionals took a more controlling stance, this was diffused by apparent cooperation of the family, the effect of which was to 'neutralise the professionals' authority and return the relationship to closure and the previous status quo'

Nb –based on learning from SCRs (Part 8)

What do we Mean?

- ▶ Some parents may give the appearance of cooperating to avoid raising suspicions and to minimise agency engagement and intervention (Barnsley MBC)
- ▶ Families resistant to change but have short periods of co-operation to seek to draw attention away from concerns (Brandon, et al 2008)
- ▶ Partial/ambivalent/selective co-operation

What do we Mean?

- ▶ Non-effective compliance (Stoke LSCB)
- ▶ 'giving the appearance of cooperating to avoid raising suspicions and to minimise intervention' (Cwm Taf LSCP)

Warnings about the phrase

- ▶ A number of questions about the use of the phrase 'disguised compliance' – some about use of language some about impact on assessments
- ▶ Still useful for us as a warning to be cautious and exercise Professional Curiosity
- ▶ Not helpful to use the phrase in our reports etc – we need to be clear about what our expectations are from the parent to meet the needs of the child and what might be the reality
- ▶ **Nb** Hart (2017) 'It's called pretending!'

What is the Effect?

'Apparent or disguised cooperation from parents often prevented or delayed understanding of the severity of harm to children and cases drifted'

Biennial Review of SCRs Brandon et al 2008

'This can mean that social workers and other practitioners may be unaware of what is happening in a child's life and the risks they face may be unknown to authorities' (Bradford SCP 7 minute briefing)

What is the Effect?

Arthur Labinjo- Hughes - 'campaign of cruelty'; 130 areas of injury; referrals re bruising; 'manipulated the system' - allowed to play in garden for SWk visit to substantiate claim of injury 'strong reliance on self-reporting' (CSPRP, 2022)

Star Hobson- catastrophic injuries, string of many other injuries; 5 referrals; 1 complaint closed as dismissed as 'malicious' & workers 'fobbed off' 'FS &SB acted to prevent professionals & family members from coming into contact with Star' (CSPRP, 2022)

(CSPRP, 2022)

What we know about 'lying' or deceit

Ekman (2009)

- ▶ Lying and/or deceit?
- ▶ A liar can chose not to lie!
- ▶ Two primary ways to lie
 - Conceal - leaving out true information
 - Falsify - presenting false information as if it was true
 - Where there is a choice about *how* - liars usually prefer to conceal - passive not active
- ▶ *But the liar loses the choice when challenged*
- ▶ Best way to conceal emotion is mask - either physical or another emotion

▶ Smile is the most common mask - throughout life social smiles falsely present feelings not felt but useful/required

▶ Also - acknowledge the feeling but lie about the cause - *'I'm angry because you are accusing me of not looking after my kids!', 'I'm crying because I love my kids so much and you are accusing me of abusing them'*

▶ Tell the truth with a 'twist' *'oh, yeah, I'm drinking 3 bottles of vodka a day!'*

▶ Telling partial truth - *'he does come round sometimes but never stays over'*

Clues to Deceit

▶ Two kinds of clues to deceit

- 'Leakage' - liar mistakenly reveals the truth
- 'Deception clue' - liar's behaviour suggests they are lying without revealing the truth

Why lies fail

▶ Cannot anticipate all questions that may be asked

▶ Have trouble remembering the line they previously stated - new questions cannot consistently be answered quickly

▶ *Detection apprehension* - especially when

- Target has a reputation for being hard to fool
- Target starts out as being suspicious
- Liar has little practice & no record of success
- Punishment for lying greater than for content of lie

Why lies succeed

- ▶ Lack of detection apprehension
- ▶ ‘Natural Liars/Storytellers’ - been getting away with it since childhood - highly skilled
 - Actors, salesmen, spies, politicians!
- ▶ Can anticipate questions & prepare answers
- ▶ Detail not checked or repeated

We can never rely purely on parental self- report

- ▶ ‘The couple were open and honest about their relationship’
- ▶ ‘Mum didn’t attend because the children were ill’
- ▶ ‘The Health Visitor cancelled the appointment’

No!! - this is what the parent *said* not necessarily the true situation

We can never rely purely on what we are presented with

- ▶ Arthur Labinjo- Hughes seeming ‘happy and playful’ and it seemed ‘happy household’
- ▶ Daniel Pelka was well dressed and there were no concerns about his siblings (Coventry LSCB) - (and mother was well dressed - and her nails were done beautifully!!!)
- ▶ Daniel Pelka’s home was clean & tidy - with a bowl of fruit on the table
- ▶ ‘There was a pot of snowdrops on the windowsill’

Learning from this

Professionals working with families need to ensure they do not become over-reliant on parental self reporting.

(Sidebotham et al 2016)

So – How do we know?

- ▶ No significant change at reviews despite significant input
- ▶ Parents/carers agreeing with professionals regarding required changes but putting little effort into making changes work
- ▶ Change does occur but as a result of external agencies/resources, not the parent/carers' efforts
- ▶ Change in one area of functioning is not matched by change in other areas
- ▶ Parents/carers will engage with certain aspects of the plan only
- ▶ Parent/carers align themselves with certain professionals
- ▶ Child's report conflicting with parents'

(Peterborough, Stoke, Barnsley LSCBs)

What can we do?

- ▶ Change
 - Focus on change for the child brought about by change from the parent

Change

Failure to address neglect:

'non-compliance and disguised compliance by parents were common features of cases reviewed. Although some multi-agency groups developed clear strategies to manage such behaviour, this was not evident in all cases. *Where parents were not engaging in plans, and outcomes for children were not improving, professionals did not consistently challenge parents*'

'drift and delay have serious consequences for children resulting in them continuing to be exposed to neglect'

(Ofsted Neglect 2014, p 6)

What else can we do?

▶ Plans or expectation

- Plans based on child's developmental needs and how parents are going to prioritise the child's needs -use **Clear** language - not just 'attend'; 'improve'; 'adequate'; 'appropriate' - 'meaningful engagement'!!!
- This gives us better clarity on how to assess progress and change for the child
- Are they doing it or just 'ticking the boxes'?

What else can we do?

▶ Focus on the child

- Parental behaviours may be designed to prevent professionals gaining a true picture of the child
- When did we last see this child & how?
- Link parenting behaviour with parenting capacity i.e. domestic abuse; drug/alcohol misuse

▶ Experience of the child

- Do we have a true picture of the 'lived experience of the child' - if not what, or who, is preventing this
- What tools do we have to work with children

What else can we do?

- ▶ Working with all members of the family
 - Who else has contact this child/family/parent? Are we ignoring risks/ positives i.e. men; birth fathers – need to include them in assessment (cf SCR Cumbria, adoption)
 - Extended family, neighbours; don't ignore 'malicious' information
 - cf Arthur L-H & Star H – grandparents, partner, babysitter made referrals. In case of Star – one complaint closed as 'malicious' based on dislike of mum's partner

What else can we do?

- ▶ Observation
 - How easy is it for a relationship to be fabricated? What do we observe and for how long?
 - Nb – cctv of Daniel Pelka being collected from school
 - Announced & unannounced visits
 - Do we see the whole house or just the 'viewing area'?

What else can we do?

- ▶ Multi-Agency working
 - Key to identification of patterns
 - Each piece of the jigsaw
 - Parents should know account will be checked
- ▶ Chronologies
 - 'thinking chronologically' – patterns: what appointments have they kept; ability to challenge – are they doing it?
 - If there is some change, is this sustained or spasmodic?

What else can we do?

- ▶ Strengths-based working or 'over optimism'
- ▶ Evidence-based assessments
 - Remember what research tells us about i.e. vulnerable women & domestic abuse; dependent drug/alcohol misuse -
 - Given what we know - does this seem likely?
- ▶ Use of the child protection process
 - Consider thresholds; does lack of co-operation raise or lower my concerns?; Should lack of engagement mean that the case is closed??

Professional Curiosity

- ▶ Look
 - Does what you see contradict or support what you are being told?
 - How do family members interact?
- ▶ Ask
 - Do not presume you know what is happening in the home - ask
- ▶ Listen
 - Are you being told anything that needs further clarification
- ▶ Clarify
 - Are other professionals being told the same thing?
- ▶ Share information
 - - in a timely manner!

Professional Curiosity Guidance for Practitioners
Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board

Nb - lots more on each on this guidance!

'Lying' and deception (pretending!)

- ▶ Why do we believe parents?
- ▶ Many people are very good at it (most of us do - and get away with it!)
- ▶ Do we want to believe that all is well?
- ▶ How do we question?
- ▶ They know what questions we are going to ask and can prepare the answers - just like any good actor!
- ▶ People prefer to conceal than to actually lie
 - So what do we say?

Authority

Professional authority involves both confidence and competence;

- ▶ Effective working with parents requires professional curiosity and challenge, without which analysis may lack rigour and depth.

Triennial Review of SCRs 2016

How do we challenge?

- ▶ Authoritative, negotiated child protection practice
- ▶ Assertiveness & persistence – not passive or aggressive/confrontational style
- ▶ ‘Rehearse’ phrases for a difficult conversation

How do we challenge?

- ▶ ‘Respectful uncertainty’
 - ‘eyes wide open’; ‘safe uncertainty & authoritative doubt needs to be a state of mind not a weakness
 - This is the way we always work – made clear in multi-agency group and to family

'Respectful Uncertainty'

- ▶ Consider:
 - Listen and take some time to think
 - Ask to repeat back statement not sure about, and to give more detail
 - Repeat back statement or paraphrase
 - 'I need to think about what you have said..'
 - 'I have a problem, in that.....'
 - 'I need to tell you that that does not fit with ...'
 - 'That is one possible answer to the problem, but I have to consider all the other ways of looking at it..'
 - Can you tell me how that fits with what we also know?

Detours! – and counter responses

- ▶ **Put Off** – insist/suggest concern is discussed now but keep it brief; arrange another specific time
- ▶ **Distracting** – take brief note, say what you might be able to do, return to the point
- ▶ **Denying** – briefly disagree with denial and/or restate your concern, do not engage with argument
- ▶ **Joking** – ignore or briefly disagree and return to point
- ▶ **Poor Me** – don't feel guilty, wait until person composed, acknowledge difficulty, return to point, arrange another time

Remember lessons from 'lying/deception/pretending'

- ▶ How to phrase the question
- ▶ Ask other questions
- ▶ Make sure you have a full picture of concerns
- ▶ Make sure they know you will check/talk to each other
- ▶ Ask to repeat
- ▶ Remember the detail
- ▶ When we first engage with parents, make clear that we will be more concerned if it later appears that they have not been truthful

Asking questions

- ▶ Nature of the question –
 - Not 'closed' – i.e. yes/no answer/no description 'How much are you drinking????'
 - 'Open' general/needing description: 'tell me about ...'; 'help me understand what,,'; 'when you say that things are fine, how would you describe that?'
 - Gain more specific information – 'when you say that you help with his homework, what does that mean? What does that look like?'
- ▶ 'Follow-up' questions?
- ▶ Is there something you think I should know that you have not told me? (*remember people prefer to conceal than to actually tell a lie*)
- ▶ Tell me what's gone well & not so well.
- ▶ How likely was the answer?
- ▶ How convincing were they?

Now what should I do???

Decision Making – taking this forward

- ▶ Importance of feelings & hypothesis
 - Consider our 'gut feeling/ reaction' – but be careful that we are not being deceived by very good actors!
 - Why are we worried/not worried? What information are we basing this on?
 - Think about our 'unconscious bias' – a smile, home conditions, presentation (don't fit our picture of abusive/neglectful parent)
 - Remember – sometimes 'gut decides – then the brain justifies'– Confirmation Bias

System 1 / System 2 Thinking

- ▶ System 1 Thinking –
 - quick thinking in stressful situations
 - consider information that is directly at hand – WYSIATI – 'What You See Is All There Is' – the prism through which we see a case
 - susceptible to first impressions – 'halo' effect
 - resorts to short cuts and 'educated guesses'
 - more intuitive and emotional – 'gut feeling'
- ▶ System 2 Thinking –
 - slower and more reflective thinking
 - allocates attention to the mental activities that demand effort, such as complex computations and conscious, reasoned choices about what to think and what to do

Kahneman (2012)

Gut reaction & feelings

- ▶ Our view of any family is a hypothesis – this needs to be tested – continually!
 - ▶ We need reflective space to consider:
 - What are we being told?
 - What sense do we make of this?
 - What else am I basing my view on?
 - Who else might have information?
 - Do we still think the same thing?
 - Does this change?
- Nb – it is not a weakness to change your mind!!!!

Decision Making

- ▶ Supervision/ case discussion
 - ‘reflective space and critical challenge’ to discuss meaning of **all** information – chronology, observation, what the child is saying, ‘gut reaction’
 - Am I being influence by emotion, fear or individual bias?
- ▶ Multi-agency setting
 - Use your assertiveness skills to challenge others’ opinions – you might be the one who has got it right!

Key points

- ▶ Change
- ▶ Patterns
- ▶ Lived experience of the child
- ▶ ‘eyes wide open’
- ▶ Confidence to challenge
- ▶ Will impact on assessment
- ▶ Multi-agency working



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