



Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board



Working with People displaying Disguised Compliance

Contents

Foreword from Independent LSCB Chair Sheila Lock	3
Introduction	3
Recognising and understanding uncooperative or hostile behaviour	4
Reasons for uncooperativeness or hostility	5
Impact on undertaking assessments	6
Responding to uncooperative or hostile families	7
Multi-agency meetings	8
Keeping professionals safe (the professional's responsibility)	8
Professionals should also:	9
If an incident occurs, professionals should:	9
Professionals should not:	9
Management responsibility	10
Managers should:	10

Version Control:

Review Date

Foreword from Independent LSCB Chair Sheila Lock

Working with children who may be at risk is challenging and complex, working with families where there is hostility and aggression provides additional challenges. We recognise this particularly from cases where things haven't gone well and from the review processes that support interagency working to help us improve practice.

The purpose of this guidance is to complement existing single agency procedures designed to support and protect staff working with aggressive people. It is intended to help professionals in the identification of parents and carers who are hostile, aggressive, or using disguised compliance techniques as a mechanism to keep professionals at a distance or attempting to persuade professionals that sufficient change has occurred or is occurring so as to reduce the need for further intervention.

This guidance is for professionals working with children and families across Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) partnerships.

We hope that this will complement existing guidance and support professionals in seeking additional advice if necessary.



Introduction

Health and Safety at work legislation puts a legal duty onto employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare of employees at work, this will include ensuring staff are protected around dealing with uncooperative and hostile families.

There can be a wide range of uncooperative behaviour by families towards professionals. From time to time agencies will come into contact with families whose compliance is apparent rather than genuine, or who are more obviously reluctant or sometimes angry or hostile to their approaches. Laming (2009) states signs of non-compliance by parents, or indeed threat or manipulation, must form part of the decision to protect a child.

Disguised compliance involves parents giving the appearance of co-operating or being pleasant with professionals to avoid raising suspicions and allay concerns. Published case reviews highlight that professionals sometimes delay or avoid interventions due to parental disguised compliance.

The NSPCC facilitates the Repository for National Serious Case Reviews and alongside this they have published guidance on disguised compliance.

Disguised compliance can take the form of:

- Parents deflecting attention
- Pre-arranged home visits
- Failure to engage with services
- Avoiding contact with professionals

Disguised compliance is a term used to describe the process of parents hiding dangerous or poor parenting practice by actively working to deceive and undermine professional involvement.

The risk factors associated with disguised compliance that have been highlighted in serious case reviews are also

- Missed opportunities to make interventions, this can lead to drift on cases
- Removes the focus from the child, this can lead to no focus on child outcomes
- Over optimism about progress, this can lead to a delay in interventions

Recognising and understanding uncooperative or hostile behaviour

The learning from serious case 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.

Ambivalence:

Ambivalence can be seen when people are regularly late for appointments, or make excuses for missing them repeatedly. Some people may change the conversation away from certain uncomfortable topics and can use dismissive body language. Ambivalence is a common reaction and may not amount to a lack of cooperation. Sometimes ambivalence may reflect cultural differences. Poor experiences of previous involvement with professionals may make people display an ambivalent attitude.

Avoidance:

Avoidance is very common and includes avoiding appointments, missing meetings, and cutting visits short due to other apparently important activity. People may have something to hide or resent outside interference from professionals. As time goes on people may face up to the contact as they realise the professional is resolute in their intention, and may become more able to engage as they perceive the professional's concern for them and their wish to help;

Disguised compliance:

Disguised compliance means giving the appearance of cooperating to avoid raising suspicions and to minimise professional intervention. Sabotage can be used by families to stop efforts to bring about change e.g. missed appointments. Professionals are urged to be a curious practitioner in these circumstances to subtly question the information they are being provided by families. This can involve checking the validity of information with other agencies, not being overly optimistic over changes that have yet to be sustained and retaining a clear focus on achieving outcomes for the child.

Confrontation:

Confrontation can involve parents challenging professionals, provoking arguments can involve extreme avoidance. This can be due to a lack of trust of professional due to past involvement and may lead to a 'fight' rather than 'flight' response to difficult situations. Fear is often a factor, parents may fear that their children may be taken away. Parents may be suspicious of a professional's motives, it is therefore important for the professional to be clear about their role and purpose and demonstrate a concern to help. Parent's uncooperativeness must be challenged so they become aware the professional/agency will not give up.

Children themselves do not 'DNA' appointments; rather, it is that they are not brought to appointments by their family or carer, which could be a flag for further safeguarding concerns.

Munro Journal of Research in Nurs-

Violence:

Violence threatened or actual happens in a very small number of cases and is the most uncooperative behaviours for a professional to engage with. It may reflect a deep and longstanding fear and hatred of authority figures. People may have experience of getting their way through intimidation and violent behaviour. The professional should be realistic about the child or parent's capacity for change in the context of an offer of help with the areas that need to be addressed.

Reasons for uncooperativeness or hostility

There are a variety of reasons why some families may be uncooperative or hostile with professionals including:

- Do not want their privacy invaded;
- Have something to hide;
- Refuse to believe they have a problem;
- Lack understanding about what is being expected of them;
- Have poor previous experience of professional involvement;
- Dislike or fear of authority figures;
- Resent outside interference;
- Recent staff changes;
- Have cultural differences;
- Fear their children will be taken away;
- mental health problems;
- Fear of being judged as poor parents because of substance misuse;
- Feel they have nothing to lose (e.g. where the children have already been removed).

A range of social, cultural and psychological factors influence the behaviour of parents and it is likely the more uncooperative the family, the more likely it is that



Impact on undertaking assessments

Obtaining accurate information and a clear understanding of what is happening to a child within their family is vital to any assessment. The usual and most effective way to achieve this is by engaging parents and children in the process of assessment, reaching a shared view of what needs to change, what support is needed and jointly planning the next steps.

Engaging with a parent who is resistant or even violent is obviously more difficult. The behaviour may be deliberately used to keep professionals from engaging with the parent or child and can have the effect of keeping professionals at bay.

Such behaviour may have practical restrictions to the ordinary tools of assessment (e.g. seeing the child on their own, observing the child in their own home etc.). In addition the usual sources of information from other professionals and other family members may not be available because no-one can get close enough to the family.

In undertaking assessments, professionals from all agencies should explicitly identify and record what areas of assessment are difficult to achieve and why.

The presence of violence or intimidation needs to be included in any assessment of risk to the child living in such an environment. The professional needs to be mindful of the impact the hostility to outsiders may be having on the day-to-day life of the child.

The child may:

- Be coping with their situation through 'hostage-like' behaviour;
- Have become de-sensitised to violence;
- Have learnt to appease and minimise (including always smiling in the presence of professionals);
- Be simply too frightened to tell;
- Identify with the aggressor.



After every home visit to families, professionals should consider: Have you seen the child? Have you seen them alone? Have you listened to them and understood their views? If any of these answers is no, ask yourself why?

In order to assess to what extent the hostility of the parent/s is impacting on the assessment of the child, professionals in all agencies should consider:

- Whether the child is keeping 'safe' by not telling professionals things;
- Whether the child has learned to appease and minimise;
- The child is blaming themselves;
- That message the family is getting if the professional/agency does not challenge the parent/s behaviour;
- How does this family or its individual member make me feel?
- If I feel like this how does the child feel in that environment?

Responding to uncooperative or hostile families

Avoiding people who are uncooperative or hostile can be very damaging to effective partnership working to protect children.

Practical considerations for professionals include:

- Keeping the relationship formal and giving clear indications that the aim of the work is to achieve the best for the children.
- Clearly stating their professional and/or legal authority.
- Confronting

Although it is important to maintain positive relationships as far as possible, this must not be at the expense of being able to share real concerns about intimidation and threat of violence if

uncooperativeness when it arises.

- Engaging in regular supervision with their manager to ensure that progress with the family is discussed.
- Seeking advice from other professionals to ensure progress with the family is appropriate.
- Ensure that parents understand what is required of them and the consequences of not fulfilling these requirements. At the end of each contact it may be helpful to provide a summary of what the purpose has been, what has been done, what is required by whom and when. Plans need clear outcomes broken down into achievable actions, with agreed timescales and a contingency plan if not achieved.
- Being willing to take appropriate action to protect the child/ren, despite the action giving rise to a feeling of personal failure by the professional in the task of engaging the parent/s.
- Consider the possibility of having contact with the family jointly with another person in whom the family has confidence.
- Written agreements with families need to be explicit with clear expectations (NB: written agreements are not always appropriate for all families). See guidance on the use of written agreements and undertakings by Social Care Staff).

In drawing up a written contract with the family this could include:

- ◇ Specifying exactly what behaviour is not acceptable (e.g. raising of voice, swearing, threatening behaviour)
- ◇ Spelling out that this will be taken into account in any risk assessment
- ◇ Explaining the consequences of continued poor behaviour on their part. This could include seeking a supervision order or taking steps to remove the children.
- Discussing with the Chair of any meeting the option of excluding the parents if the quality of information shared is likely to be impaired by the presence of threatening adults.
- All plans should be reviewed and assessed. It is useful to include a period of time where support is drawn back from the family, to enable an assessment of the sustainability and to then assess whether professionals' input is complete or successful.

Multi-agency meetings

Where there is evidence of a lack of cooperation, non-compliance or hostility this should be considered as an escalation of risk and may result in the need for action. A multi-agency meeting should be called in the following circumstances and the family should be invited.

- There is evidence of non-compliance and practitioners are refused access to the children and the family home.
- Planned visits and appointments with the family have been missed on more than 3 occasions despite being rigorously followed up by practitioners.
- Where families have intimidated workers and a risk assessment is required in relation to the children in the household and the practitioner.
- The meeting should be chaired by the relevant team manager. The purpose of the meeting is to consider how the situation can best be managed to ensure the protection of both children and practitioners.
- A meeting should be convened within 7 working days following the identification of any of the above criteria. Those in attendance will share information, consider concerns and identify a clear plan to address those concerns.

Keeping professionals safe (the professional's responsibility)

When dealing with hostile families, professionals should consult with their line manager to draw up plans and strategies to protect their own safety and that of other colleagues. Practical considerations for the safety of staff start prior to contact with a family. Professionals should consider the following questions:

- Why am I doing this visit at this time of day and everyone else has gone home? (Risky visits should be undertaken in daylight whenever possible);
- Should this visit be made jointly with a colleague or manager?
- Do I have a mobile phone with me or some other means of summoning help?
- Could this visit be arranged at a neutral venue?
- Are my colleagues / line managers aware of where I am going and when I should be back? Do they know I may be particularly vulnerable / at risk during this visit?
- Are there clear procedures for what should be done if a professional does not return or report back within the agreed time from a home visit?

Professionals have a responsibility to plan for their own safety, just as the agency has the responsibility for trying to ensure their safety. Professional should adhere to their own agency

- Does my manager know my mobile phone number and network, my car registration number and my home address and phone

number?

- Do my family members know how to contact someone from work if I don't come home when expected?
- Have I accessed personal safety training?
- Is it possible for me to continue to work effectively with this family?

Professionals should also:

- Acquaint themselves with relevant agency procedures (e.g. there may be a requirement to ensure the police are informed of certain situations);
- Not go unprepared, be aware of the situation and the likely response;
- Not make assumptions that previously non-hostile situations will always be so;
- Not put themselves in a potentially violent situation - they should monitor and anticipate situations to feel safe and in control at all times;
- Get out if a situation is getting too threatening.

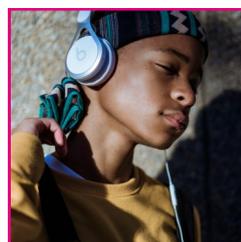
Professionals should always consider options for leaving a property if there are known issues and always make sure your colleagues know where you are.

If an incident occurs, professionals should:

- Try to stay calm and in control of their feelings;
- Make a judgement of whether to stay or leave without delay;
- Contact their manager immediately;
- Follow agreed post-incident procedures, including any recording required.
- Share as soon as possible with colleagues from other agencies who may be visiting even if they have previously had a good relationship with the family and document whom contacted.

Professionals should not:

- Take the occurrence of an incident personally;
- Get angry themselves;
- Be too accommodating and understanding;
- Assume they have to deal with the situation and then fail to get out;
- Think they don't need strategies or support;
- Automatically assume the situation is their fault and that if they had said or done something differently the incident would not have happened.



Management responsibility

Managers have a statutory duty to provide a safe working environment for their employees under Health and Safety at Work legislation. This includes:

- Undertaking assessments to identify and manage the risks inherent in all aspects of the work;
- Providing adequate equipment and resources to enable staff to work safely;
- Providing specific training to equip professionals with the necessary information and skills to undertake the job;
- Ensuring a culture that allows professionals to express fears and concerns and in which support is forthcoming without perceived implications of weakness.

Managers should:

All agencies should be mindful of the health and safety of staff and ensure it is included within all new employee inductions;

- Ensure that staff have confidence to speak about any concerns relating to families;
- Prioritise case supervisions regularly and do not cancel;
- Ensure they have a monitoring system for home visits and for informing the office when a visit is completed;
- Analyse team training needs and ensure everyone knows how to respond in an emergency;
- Ensure staff training is regularly updated;
- Empower staff to take charge of situations and have confidence in their actions;
- Recognise individual dynamics;
- Pay attention to safe working when allocating workloads and strategic planning;
- Keep an 'ear to the ground' - be aware of what is happening in communities and within their own staff teams;
- Professionals are aware of any home visiting policies employed in their service area and that these policies are implemented;
- Ensure adequate strategies and support is in place to deal with any situations that may arise;

Managers should always ensure staff are aware of lone working policies and how to contact colleagues in an emergency. It is a manager's responsibility to know where staff are out of hours and if they are safe.

- In allocating work, be mindful of the skills and expertise of their team and any factors that may impact on this. They need to seek effective and supportive ways to enable new professionals, who may be inexperienced, to identify and develop the necessary skills and expertise to respond to uncooperative families;
- Be aware of the impact of incidents on other members of the team;
- Be aware that threats of violence constitute a criminal offence and the agency must take action on behalf of staff (i.e. make a complaint to the police);
- Pro-actively ask about feelings of intimidation or anxiety so professionals feel this is an acceptable feeling.