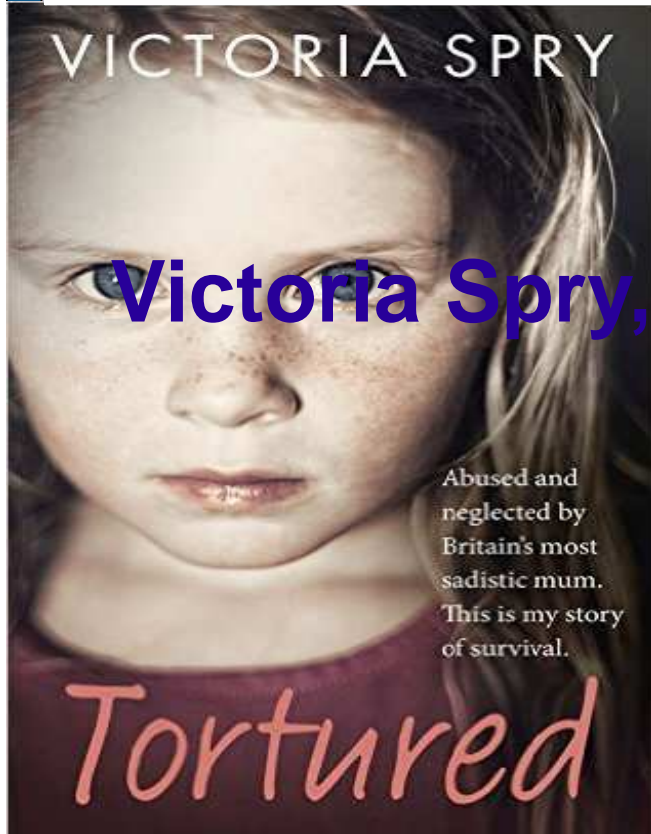


WORKING WITH DISGUISED COMPLIANCE



Victoria Spry, survivor &

**Joanna Nicolas, child
protection consultant
& trainer**



“Sadistic mum forced foster children to eat their own vomit and rammed sticks down their throats”



What is Disguised Compliance?

- Peter Reder, Sylvia Duncan and Moira Gray outlined this type of behaviour in their book *Beyond blame: child abuse tragedies revisited*
- Defined by the NSPCC as involving “a parent or carer giving the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and ultimately to diffuse professional intervention.”



Evidence from Serious Case Reviews

Disguised compliance is a common theme

- Khyra Ishaq
- Victoria Climbié



Victoria Climbié

Social worker described being “set up” during home visits.

Khyra Ishaq

The mother, Angela Gordon, was so aggressive that the teacher and social workers feared for their physical safety.

Angela Gordon made allegations of racism and complaints of harassment

“The approach reinforced that the power dynamics lay with the parents and not with the rights, welfare and protection of the children.”



SCRCE001 East Cheshire, February, 2011

3 siblings abused over 10 years. “The abuse was both predictable and preventable.”

“Too many professionals misread the signals and thought Child B was running away as part of normal teenage rebellion against the parents’ discipline. They were lulled by M and F’s disguised compliance. They presented as being concerned for Child B’s welfare - which to an extent they may have been. They usually reported him missing, and often made efforts themselves to locate him. In addition they were active in supporting the High School’s efforts to deal with his challenging behaviour and running away from school.”



SCRCE001 East Cheshire, February, 2011

“In this case, many professionals struggled to maintain a child focus when faced with M and F’s aggressive behaviour and their “disguised compliance”, and that their approach was affected by perceptions and assumptions made regarding the parents’ social class, professional status (scientists), and high academic qualifications, and the attitude of M and F towards them.”

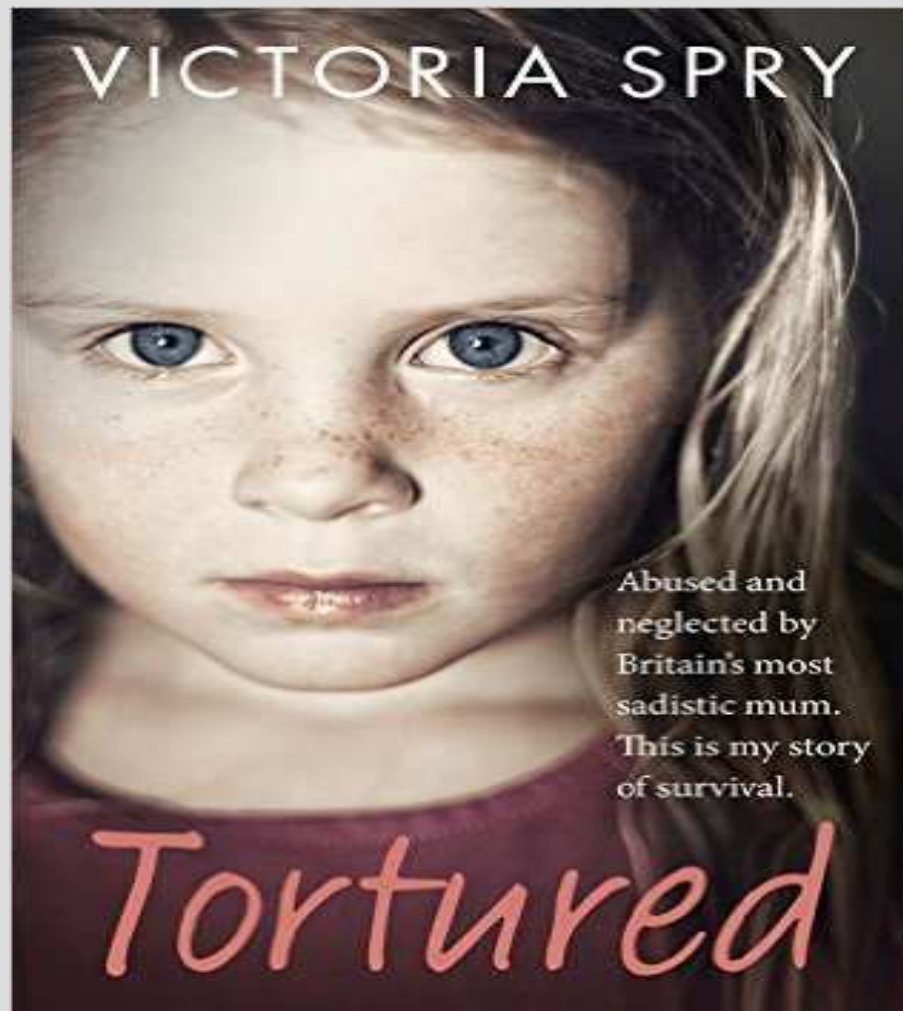


A Parent's Words

- I was made aware of a possible investigation and was easily able to manipulate my family and my victims to remain silent.
- I was particularly skilful in my approach towards “SS”, saying the right things, being proactive and diverting their attention to less serious problems. I also convincingly explained away “SS” concerns by placing possible blame elsewhere.
- There was too much emotion placed on the process leading to blind conclusions



Victoria's Story





In December 2005 at 19 years old I could no longer cope with what was going on at home so I found the courage from somewhere to run away because I was being horrifically abused by my adoptive mother Eunice Spry.

This is my Story

- I was put into care at eight months old and then adopted by Eunice at five
- To the outside world Eunice presented herself as a doting, religious, caring foster mother who took in needy children. Behind closed doors it was very different
- She was an expert in disguised compliance
- We were all “home schooled”

The Reality of my Life

- Horrific beatings, abuse and neglect
- Cooking, cleaning and obeying every command Eunice gave me
- I would of done anything to please her and make her proud but try as I might it wasn't to happen
- Severe and continuous injuries

There Were so Many Professionals in our Lives

Doctors, dentists, police, social services, speech therapist and teachers were the main ones

The more people questioned her and her treatment towards me, the more she pulled me out of eyesight

The Way Eunice Displayed Disguised Compliance

- She said I was autistic, which I'm not. She said I was clumsy and that was the excuse she gave to the dentist
- Avoided social services and manipulated them when they wanted to visit when neighbours regularly reported Eunice after hearing beatings, screams and children crying
- On one of the visits she said they could not see me because I was in bed with a terrible cold and she did not want to disturb me. In actual fact I was tied naked, blindfolded and locked in the bedroom. I could hear them


The Way Eunice Displayed Disguised Compliance

- “What do you say if social services ask you how I discipline you?”
- Her reaction when anyone knocked on the door. She was aggressive and intimidating. It was like a sick game to her
- She dazzled the home education inspectors
- She took me to different doctors
- She would just talk and talk

Warning signs of Disguised Compliance

Alarm bells should ring if parents/carers:-

- Deflect attention, or criticise professionals
- Only want pre-arranged home visits
- Consistently fail to engage with services
- Control discussions
- Move away, or between areas, or always go away
- Swap professionals involved in the child's care
- Say one thing but the evidence is the opposite
- Make it difficult for professionals to see the child alone, for fear of what they might say
- They use their religion or culture to justify the abuse



Some families/parents/carers are very good at providing professionals with what they want to hear. It can be very hard for a social worker who is very busy with a full caseload to dig deeper

Victoria's Tools and Tips for Dealing with Suspected Disguised Compliance

- First and foremost remain child focused at all times and remember you are not there to make friends with the child's guardian, you are there because of the child's and ultimately to protect them
- Don't be afraid to talk to other professionals to get a different perspective
- Don't be afraid to stand out and say you feel something is wrong, even if other people's opinions differ
- If you're worried, if you can't sleep at night, don't let go until you know that child is 100% safe

Victoria's Tools and Tips for Dealing with Suspected Disguised Compliance

- Don't ever take things on face value, look deeper. Think outside of the box
- Be observant and professionally curious
- Trust your gut feeling- it may not take you to court but you feel it for a reason so act on it

And finally.....

We will never stop all the Eunicés of this world but listening to experiences like mine, we can together learn lessons and close the net in on them. I don't have all the answers but I hope me sharing my experiences can help you all as frontline workers.

Indicators of Disguised Compliance

- No significant change despite significant input
- Parents/carers agreeing with professionals regarding required changes but putting little in effort
- Change occurring but as a result of professionals' efforts/resources, not the parents'/carers efforts
- Change in one area of functioning not matching change in other areas
- Parents/carers only engaging with certain aspects of the plan and aligning themselves with certain professionals
- A child's report of matters conflicting with that of the parents/carers. (Peterborough LSCB guidance)



Impact on Professionals

- “Apparent or disguised cooperation from parents often prevented or delayed understanding of the severity of harm to the child and cases drifted. Where parents ...engineered the focus away from allegations of harm, children went unseen and unheard.” (Brandon et al, 2008)
- Professionals duped
- Professionals over-optimistic, need to exercise “respectful uncertainty” (Lord Laming)



What Hinders Us

- **Quality of assessments. Overwhelmed professionals**
- **Chaotic families lead to chaotic professional response**
- **Agency context, capacity and organisational climate**



How Can We Improve Our Practice

- Stand back
- Are there any real changes
- Listen to the child
- Good quality supervision



Victoria's message



And Finally From Us Both

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Thank you

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