

One minute guide

October 2016

Fabricated or induced illness

What is fabricated or induced illness?

Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII) is a condition whereby a child, young person (or an adult) suffers harm through the deliberate action of her/his main carer and which is attributed by the adult to another cause. It is a relatively rare but potentially lethal form of abuse.

The main ways in which the parent / carer might fabricate or induce illness are:

- Fabrication of signs and symptoms, including fabrication of past medical history;
- Fabrication of signs and symptoms and falsification of hospital charts, records, letters and documents and specimens of bodily fluids;
- Exaggeration of symptoms; and Induction of illness by a variety of means - this can be relatively harmless or immediately life threatening

The above methods are not mutually exclusive. The primary focus should be on the outcomes or impact on the child's health and development and not on the parent/carer.

How can practitioners spot Induced Illness?

FII can be very difficult to spot. Each of the following possible warning signs requires careful review to rule out other explanations:

Reported symptoms and signs found on examination are not explained by any medical condition from which the child may be suffering; or

Physical examination and results of medical investigations do not explain reported symptoms and signs; or

There is an inexplicably poor response to prescribed medication and other treatment; or

New symptoms are reported on resolution of previous ones; or

Reported symptoms and signs are not observed in the absence of the carer; or

Over time the child is repeatedly presented with a range of symptoms to different professionals in a variety of settings; or

Unusual presentations; or the child's normal, daily life activities are being curtailed beyond that which might be expected from any known medical disorder from which the child is known to suffer.

What should practitioners do?

Practitioners who have identified concerns about a child's health should discuss these with the child's GP or consultant paediatrician responsible for the child's care. The paediatric consultant is the lead health professional and therefore has lead responsibility for all decisions pertaining to the child's health care; if there is no Paediatrician involved in the child's care then the GP should refer to a Paediatrician.

If any practitioner has concerns about a situation being indicative of FII, they should discuss these with their own agency safeguarding lead. In health agencies, they should also consult the Designated Health Professional. If there is not a safeguarding lead available within their agency, practitioners should contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

Unlike in other circumstances when contacting the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, concerns about induced illness **should not** be discussed with the family and consent to share information should not be sought until a strategy discussion has taken place and it is decided that to do so will not place the child at increased risk of significant harm. Parents should be kept informed of further medical assessments, investigations or tests required and of the findings. However, at no time should concerns about the reasons for the child's signs and symptoms be shared with parents if this information would jeopardise the child's safety and compromise the child protection process and/or any criminal investigation.

A strategy discussion led by Children's Social Care including at a minimum the Police, Children's Social Care and the Consultant Paediatrician responsible for the child's care should take place to agree if a Section 47 Child Protection enquiry under the Children Act 1989 is required. If so, a plan of action will be developed and this will include when and how the parent/carer will be advised of the concerns in order that the child can be appropriately safeguarded.

If a practitioner believes that a child is at immediate risk of harm, they must contact the Police on 999.

With thanks to Leeds Social Care

One minute guides
Homepage