



FACT SHEET: Fabricated or Induced illness

All parents / carers demonstrate a range of behaviours in response to their children being ill or being perceived as ill. Some may become more stressed or anxious than others. There are some parents / carers, who for differing reasons may either induce or fabricate illness in their child. Such incidents are not commonplace. But they can significantly impact on the child's physical and emotional development and well being.

The impact on the child

Where illness is fabricated or induced the child often:

- Experiences extensive and unnecessary medical tests and investigations
- Is given or prescribed unnecessary medication or operations
- Experiences anxiety about their health and survival
- Experiences anger, a sense of betrayal of trust and suicidal thoughts
- Develop a dependency on the carer and being "an ill person".

The alleged abuser is usually the person providing the majority of the day to day care for the child.

Parental behaviour and risks to the child

Parents may:

- Deliberately induce symptoms in the child by administering medication or other substances
- Deliberately interfere with the child's body to cause physical signs of illness
- Interfere with treatments by overdosing, not administering them or interfering with medical equipment
- Report symptoms which cannot be verified
- Exaggerate symptoms causing unnecessary investigations and tests
- Continually seek specialist treatments and equipment not needed, often from many different sources including the internet
- Claim psychological illness in the child

Parents are often intensely involved in the care of the child even in the hospital setting.

Identifying concerns

- Reported signs and symptoms cannot be explained
- Physical examinations and investigations do not explain reported signs and symptoms
- There is an inexplicably poor response to prescribed medication and treatment
- New symptoms are reported as soon as previous ones are resolved
- The signs and symptoms only occur in the presence of the carer
- Over time there is a pattern of the child being presented to Health agencies
- The child's daily life activities are curtailed beyond what might be expected

There may be other explanations so careful review and a full developmental history and assessment should be carried out.

Making a Referral

Where there are concerns about a child at risk of significant harm in relation to illness being induced or fabricated a referral must be made to Children's Social Care.

Health agencies, Children's Social Care and the Police must work in collaboration to determine if the child is at risk of harm or a Child in Need. Fabricating or inducing illness is a criminal offence and a police investigation may follow.

All decisions and actions within the child protection process must involve specialist health practitioners.

The decision to inform the carer of the concerns and the timing of doing so must be carefully balanced to ensure that the child remains safe.

For further details see **chapter 3.9** in the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures.