

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead:
Hannah Pallôt or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead:
Rachel Heffer immediately with any concerns.

Fabricated and Induced Illnesses



Seven Minute Safeguarding

What is Fabricated and Induced Illness?

Fabricated or induced illness (FII) is a rare form of child abuse. It happens when a parent or carer (93% of cases, the mother (Schreier, 2004)) exaggerates or deliberately causes symptoms of illness in the child.

The parent or carer tries to convince doctors that the child is ill or that their condition is worse than it really is.

The parent or carer does not necessarily intend to deceive doctors, but their behaviour is likely to harm the child. For example, the child may have unnecessary treatment or tests, be made to believe they're ill, or have their education disrupted.

FII was previously known as "Munchausen's syndrome by proxy" (not to be confused with Munchausen's syndrome, where a person pretends to be ill or causes illness or injury to themselves).

Why does FII happen?

The reasons why FII happens are not fully understood.

The parent or carer will have a need for their child to be treated as if they're ill or as being more unwell than they really are. The fabricated illness may involve physical and/or psychological health, neurodevelopmental disorders and cognitive disabilities. Their behaviour is intended to convince doctors that the child is ill or has a medical condition.

This may be because the parent or carer gains something, such as attention, support or closeness to the child. It may be because they have anxiety or incorrect beliefs about their child's health and they need these beliefs to be confirmed and acted upon. The parent or carer may not always be fully aware of the reasons for their own behaviour.

A significant number of parents or carers involved in FII have their own mental health challenges and may also suffer from Munchausen's syndrome themselves.

There have also been several reported cases where illness was fabricated or induced for financial reasons. For example, to claim disability benefits.

Information gathered from the child's records & collated in the form of a chronology is key to confirming whether the situation is abusive. The documentation of facts & evidence in this format often reveals a startling picture. Getting the facts agreed and seeing the overall pattern is crucial

What are the signs that a child may be experienced FII?

The NHS has published advice for clinicians which [can be read here](#).

The list of signs includes some that schools should be aware of including prolonged, frequent or persistent absences. Keeping registers up to date and using correct codes is especially important in this instance. If you complete registers and are unsure of the correct code to use to indicate an absence, please check.

As a school there is therefore a need to be aware of patterns of absence and whether asking questions leads to increased absence. Schools should also be aware of cases where there are multiple moves of school or the suggestion of home schooling for an ill child and should question what the reason for this may be. Evidence suggest that this is part of the pattern when there are cases of Fabricated or Induced Illness.

We must also make sure that medication we administer to a child is prescribed to them or is an age appropriate over-the-counter medication and that medication forms have been properly completed.

Respectful uncertainty was a concept introduced by Lord Laming in his [enquiry into death of Victoria Climbié](#). The importance of professionals remaining curious and critically evaluating information presented to us is important in cases of FII.

Why is this an issue for Schools?

Although [this study](#) in 2011 - carried out by the University of Edinburgh in conjunctions with the NSPCC - found that cases were prevalent at a rate of 89 per 100,000 over a two-year period making it a very rare event, there are a number of caveats to the figure, and there is consensus that the true figure may be higher.

Although not specifically referenced in the body of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022, all staff should be aware of Fabricated or Induced Illness through its inclusion in the definition of physical abuse in Part one of the document: '27. Physical abuse: a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. ***Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child'***

Want to know more?

[This longer read](#) [15 mins] from Safeguarding Network looks at this issue in more detail.

The NHS have created [this guidance](#) to provide an overview of FII and the impact it can have on children's lives.

[This Safeguarding Review for Adults](#) took place after the death of a 23 year old as a direct result of FII which began in childhood.