

# STRATEGIC COMPLIANCE -PLEASE READ

A Resource for Parents written by Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter Peer Parent Expert

## What is strategic compliance?

Some parents use a strategy often described as **strategic compliance**. BJ Newton (an amazing researcher focusing on lived realities of our child welfare system) has done invaluable extensive research into what this looks and feels like. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajs4.70027>

Strategic compliance is when you **choose to do what DCJ is asking**, or even **go beyond what they are asking**, not because you necessarily agree with their concerns, but because you understand the power they hold and the consequences of not complying.

It is a **survival strategy**, not blind agreement.

Parents using strategic compliance are making a calculated decision:

- to protect their child,
- to reduce "risk" in the case,
- and to avoid being labelled as "non-compliant", "uncooperative", or "not child-focused".

You can comply **strategically** while still holding your own truth about what is actually happening in your life.

## What does strategic compliance look like in practice?

Strategic compliance can look like:

- Doing the course DCJ asks for **and doing many extra ones (if you can!)**
- Engaging with services even when you feel judged or misunderstood (Just doing it knowing it benefits your babies and their journey home.)
- Making changes that go beyond what was required (understanding they change what they want as soon as you have done it, getting ahead of this!)

- Demonstrating initiative so decisions about your child are not made solely on assumptions (you evidence, evidence, evidence! Show the courts who you really are!)

One parent explained it this way:

“If they say to do that course, go do two, go do three courses. Do more than what they ask. If they ask you to slow down on the drugs, get off the drugs altogether. If you start showing initiative for yourself, then they will do more.”

This parent wasn't saying the system was fair – they were describing how to **work within it to protect their child**. They were fighting for their children in every way they could.

## Why do parents choose this strategy?

Parents often choose strategic compliance because they know:

- DCJ records everything
- Non-compliance is often written as lack of care or insight
- Silence, resistance, or hesitation can be interpreted negatively
- The consequences of being labelled “unwilling” can be permanent

For many parents, especially those already experiencing trauma, poverty, racism, or surveillance, **the cost of not complying feels too high**.

Strategic compliance is about **risk management**, not admission of guilt. It's about children coming home in the current state of the system. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajs4.70027>

## The emotional cost of strategic compliance

This strategy can be **emotionally heavy**.

It can feel like:

- You are admitting to things that don't fully reflect your reality
- You are agreeing with a story about yourself that feels unfair
- You are having to prove your worth as a parent in ways others never have to

Many parents describe feeling conflicted – doing what's required to protect their child, while quietly holding grief, anger, and exhaustion.

That conflict is real. And it makes sense. Get support to not lose yourself and your truth in it.

## Important things to remember

- Strategic compliance does **not** mean you agree with DCJ's version of events
- It does **not** mean you are a bad parent
- It does **not** erase your right to challenge decisions, seek legal advice, or advocate for yourself
- It is a **choice made under pressure**, not a failure of strength

If you are using this strategy, it's important to:

- keep records of everything you do
- get support where possible (legal, peer, cultural, advocacy)
- take care of your mental health alongside compliance demands
- never lose sight of your truth

## You are not alone

Many parents have used strategic compliance to survive a system that holds enormous power over their families.

Choosing to comply strategically is not weakness.

It is a **protective act of love** in an unsafe system.

Support, advocacy, and lived-experience guidance can help you decide **what to comply with, what to document, and how to protect yourself while doing it.**

## Parent voices on strategic compliance

**"I didn't agree with everything they said about me, but I knew if I didn't do what they asked, it would be written that I didn't care. So I did the courses, all of them, even ones they didn't ask for. Not because I thought I needed them, but because I needed proof that I was trying."**

**"It felt like playing a game I never wanted to be in. You learn quickly that if you push back too hard, you're labelled resistant. If you stay quiet and do what they ask, at least you stay in the room. Strategic compliance was about keeping my child safe while I figured out my next steps."**

**"Doing what they asked didn't mean I agreed with their story about me. It meant I understood the power they had. I knew every 'no' would be used against me, so I chose when to comply and when to document. It was survival, not submission."**

**"I went above and beyond because I knew the bar would keep moving. If they asked for one course, I did three. If they asked me to cut back, I stopped completely. Not because they were right, but because I couldn't risk them saying I hadn't shown insight."**

Please read this research and understand you are not alone

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajs4.70027>

[https://absec.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/KYR\\_Child-has-been-removed\\_Guide-3\\_Oct2025-DIGITAL.pdf](https://absec.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/KYR_Child-has-been-removed_Guide-3_Oct2025-DIGITAL.pdf)

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