

Professional Curiosity



A Safeguarding briefing for Safeguarding Week 2023

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What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional curiosity, also known as 'healthy scepticism' is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening in a child, young person, or adult at risk's circumstances rather than making assumptions or accepting accounts or observations at face value. It is also about being able to identify risk, and have the resolution to enquire deeper, and ask more questions to clarify the situation.

Some of the words associated with the term....



Why is it important?

Local and national Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) have identified :

practitioner reluctance to question observations or explanations provided by those receiving services, family members/carers or professionals.

a lack of professional curiosity can lead to missed opportunities

Some associated Learning from recent National Reviews and Local Reviews in Calderdale in relation to Professional Curiosity

Hidden men and

Significant Others in children's lives - Star Hobson / Arthur Labinjo Hughes

Doorstep visits/ No access / cancelled visits - Why ? Is there a reason ?

Who is this person who is answering the door and saying they are not in ?

Lack of eye contact/ Appearance – Is everything ok here ?

When we struggle to engage a family – Why ?

Genograms / Eco maps – who ? Where ?

Think Family – Who lives here , who has a role , what's that role ?

Curious Professionals help safeguard children and adults at risk

Interactions present crucial opportunities for protection. Responding to these opportunities requires the ability to recognise (or see the signs of) vulnerabilities and potential or actual risks of harm, maintaining an open stance of professional curiosity.

Children in particular, but also some adults, rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioners and, if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments.

Professional Curiosity helps to keep Children Safe

[OSCB Learning from Serious Case Reviews - YouTube](#)



Curious Professionals

Will spend time engaging with families on visits

Know that talk, play and touch can all be important to observe

Will ask questions to narrow the information gap and gain a full perspective on a situation

Will be alerted by tension, uncertainty or repeating patterns in people's situations

Will have the courage to hold difficult conversations and challenge

Have good communication skills and will use reflection, skilled use of questions and critical analysis



If things don't seem right – Maybe they're not

Who else might know something?

Gut feeling

Confirmational bias

Rule of optimism

Respectful uncertainty

Families with Children



Consider families' circumstances holistically

Show a real willingness to engage with children, adults and their families or carers.

Much has been written about the importance of curiosity during home visits and the need for authentic, close relationships of the kind where we see, hear and touch the truth of their experience of 'daily life' and are able to act on it and to achieve similar closeness with parents or carers.

The Importance of Professional Curiosity in safeguarding Adults at Risk

Adults involved in safeguarding enquiries may feel embarrassed, ashamed, hurt or traumatised.

Being curious by asking sensitive and respectful questions will allow information to be discovered and enable appropriate support to be provided

Strengths-based approaches rely on practitioners demonstrating curiosity by finding out more about the person in their environment and encouraging a narrative approach.

It is important to listen to individuals' stories and show interest and curiosity.

Professional curiosity was highlighted within a recent analysis of Safeguarding Adult Reviews as:

an important skill in gaining an understanding of the individual, recognising the significance of their history: childhood trauma, loss, bereavement.

Where an absence of professional curiosity was noted practitioners' failed to probe the circumstances with which they were faced.

Charles' Story- Finding the Person

Who am I ? What does my history tell you about me? What do I want for myself now?

[Charles' story | Age UK - YouTube](#)



More on Strength based approaches and their value when working with Adults at Risk

Can be a valuable long-term tool in supporting adults who have been abused or who self-neglect.

Help to move the adult from a position of some dependency to one of greater autonomy.

A curious professional will be willing and able to work proportionately with an individual.

Employ curiosity by assessing the totality of the person's life, covering individual strengths, community and resources.

Think more freely and work collaboratively with individuals by putting them at the heart of their own care and wellbeing

Professional Curiosity – A Domestic Homicide Example

[Professional Curiosity - YouTube](#)



What should practitioners do ?

Be interested

Avoid making assumptions.

Have an open mind

Triangulate information received.

Think holistically.

Focus on the need, **voice and “lived experience”** of the person or family.

Ask relevant questions

Be ‘brave’. Be prepared to have ‘difficult’ conversations. But also be respectful.

Focus on the **individual or family’s strengths** – this will **reduce the chances of resistance,** and **can**

help to develop a relationship.

What should practitioners do continued

Guard against over optimism

Recognise how your own feelings (for example tiredness, feeling rushed or illness) might impact on your views.

Demonstrate a willingness to have less than 'comfortable' interactions with families when this is necessary

Appreciate that respectful scepticism and challenge are healthy

Ensure you are able to recognise disguised compliance

Understand the impact of coercive control on the behaviour and responses of family members

Understand the cumulative impact on children of multiple or combined risk factors, e.g. domestic abuse, parental drug/alcohol misuse, parental mental health (previously referred to as 'toxic mix')

What are some of the difficulties / barriers?

Not always easy and straight forward

It can be difficult to question service users or colleagues, especially if they present as defensive, hostile or potentially disengaging.

Especially with those parents who demonstrate disguised compliance or coercive control.

Families can appear to be engaging with professionals, but are not able or willing to change as a result of an intervention.

Or certain family members are unable through fear to be open and honest about the family dynamics. It is with these families that professionals need to exercise most curiosity.

Difficult Conversations

- Plan in advance
- Be clear and unambiguous.
- Have courage
- Focusing on the needs of the service user.
- Be non-confrontational and non-blaming, and sticking to the facts.
- Having evidence to back up what you say.
- Showing empathy, consideration and compassion – be real and honest.
- Making sure tone, body language and content of speech are consistent.
- Holding a healthy scepticism.
- Understanding the complexities of disguised compliance

Supervision and Support

Ensure that your practice is reflective and that you are accessing good quality supervision.

Seek advice, guidance and second opinions.

Reflection and critical analysis are fundamental to a curious approach.

Reflective supervision incorporates opportunities to reflect and analyse.

Good supervision promotes emotional resilience, and helps practitioners to manage challenging or difficult conversations.

It helps relieve stress and pressure.

It is vital for developing and maintaining **professional curiosity**

Supporting professionally curious practice in Safeguarding Supervision

Play 'devils advocate' – asking 'what if?'

Present alternative hypotheses

Present cases from the child , young person, adult or another family members perspective

Provide opportunities for group supervision

Monitor workloads and encourage practitioners to talk about and support them to address issues of stress or pressure.

Support practitioners to recognise when they are tired and need a fresh pair of eyes on a case.

What Organisations can do to support their practitioners to exercise Professional Curiosity.

Evidence suggests that invoking curiosity is challenging when the working environment is pressured and stressful
(Burton & Revell, 2018).

- Involving people
- Time and capacity
- Structure and working practices
- Recording, processes and procedures
- Supervision and support
- Legal and safeguarding literacy
- Learning and development
- Open culture
- Partnership work



**Thankyou for
Listening**

**Get out there
and be a nosey
Parker !**

