

Professional Curiosity

Professional curiosity is a term that describes the capacity and the skill to communication that allows a practitioner to explore and understand what is happening to a person or within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. It requires practitioners to think 'outside the box', perhaps beyond their usual professional role, and to consider families' circumstances holistically.

The lack of professional curiosity perceived in the management of a case is often a feature in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDR's) formerly Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR's) Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Partnership Reviews (SAR's).

The reviewers in these cases identify in hindsight that professionals became fixed in their understanding and analysis of the issues, leading to 'pervasive belief systems' about cases, and an unwillingness to consider alternative hypotheses. Encouraging professional curiosity is a fundamental aspect of working together to keep children, young people and adults safe.

Curious professionals engage with individuals and families through visits, conversations, observations and asking relevant questions to gather historical and current information.

What skills do I need to develop



Be flexible and open-minded, not taking everything at face value.

- Check your own emotional state and attitudes. Leave time to prepare yourself for managing risk and uncertainty and processing the impact it has on you.
- Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable. Consider how you can articulate 'intuition' into an evidenced, professional view.
- Use your communication skills: review records, record accurately, check facts and feedback to the people you are working with and for. Never assume and be wary of assumptions already made.
- Use case history and explore information from the person themselves, the family, friends and neighbours, as well as other professionals (triangulation).
- Pay as much attention to how people look and behave as to what they say.
- Actively seek full engagement. If you need more support to engage the person or their family, think about who in the network can help you. Consider calling a multiagency meeting to bring in support from colleagues in other agencies.
- Take responsibility for the safeguarding role you play, however large or small, in the life of the person in front of you.

One Minute Guide

Responding

- **Look** - Does anything make you feel uneasy? Are there indications of abuse or neglect? Does what I see match with what I am being told?
- **Ask**- What direct questions can you ask the family member?
- **Listen** - Do I need clarification on anything? Is someone finding it hard to express themselves?
- **Clarify** -Are other professionals involved? What information do they have? Have other professional seen the same as you? Are professionals being told the same or different things? Are others concerned? If so, what action has been taken and is there anything else which should or could be done by you or someone else?

Barriers to Professional Curiosity

Disguised compliance - the appearance of cooperating to allay concerns and reduce professional involvement

The rule of optimism - the tendency to rationalise away new or escalating risks despite clear evidence to the contrary.

Accumulating risk –the tendency to respond to new risk discretely, rather than assessing the new information within the context of the whole person, or looking at the cumulative effect.

Normalisation - actions come to be seen as 'normal' and become taken-for-granted or 'natural' in everyday life.

Professional Deference - a tendency to defer to the opinion of a 'higher status' professional who has limited contact with the person but who views the risk as less significant.

Confirmation bias - we look for evidence that supports or confirms our pre-held view, and ignores contrary information that refutes them.

Confidence in managing tension



How do I have difficult conversations

- Plan in advance so there is time to cover essential elements of the conversation.
- Keep the agenda focused on the topics you need to discuss. Be clear and unambiguous.
- Have courage and focus on the needs of the child.
- Be non-confrontational and non-blaming.
- Stick to the facts and have evidence to back up what you say so that decision making is justifiable and transparent.
- Show empathy, consideration and compassion.
- Demonstrate congruence i.e. make sure tone, body language and content of speech are consistent.
- Acknowledge 'gut feelings', sharing these with other professionals, and seeking evidence.
- Hold a healthy scepticism.
- Apply professional judgement.

One Minute Guide



Where can I get information from

Safeguarding / Professional Curiosity

- [Professional curiosity in safeguarding adults - Strategic briefing](#) – this one key for your strategic leaders and the quality assurance team to focus on in terms of looking at how the organisation can support and develop professional curiosity in this context.
- [What is professional curiosity? - Podcast](#)
- [Critical reflection and analysis - Learning pathway](#) – in Module 2 has six sections and focuses on professional curiosity
- [Safety matters - Practitioner's handbook \(3rd Ed\)](#)
- [Radical safeguarding toolkit for homelessness: Practice tool](#)
- [Supporting good court craft - Practice tool](#)

Key Messages



- Consider alternative hypotheses.
- Have empathy and hear the voice of the person.
- Know the factors that are barriers to professional curiosity and take steps to reduce them.
- Be courageous and ask difficult questions.
- Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable
- Consider how you can articulate 'intuition' into an evidenced, professional view and discuss 'gut feelings' with other professionals.
- Share concerns with colleagues and managers. A 'fresh pair of eyes' looking at a case can help practitioners and organisations to maintain a clear focus on good practice and risk assessment and develop a critical mindset.

For more information on

Cheshire East Adults Safeguarding Board – www.stopadultabuse.org.uk

Safer Cheshire East Partnership - [Community Safety](#)

