

Bitesize Briefing: Professional Curiosity

1 What is Professional Curiosity?

In safeguarding, being 'professionally curious' means that you **do not take things at face value** when you are worried about a child, family or adult. Instead, you are **respectfully uncertain**: you pay attention to things that don't seem quite right and ask questions that enable you to go beyond the surface, even if these questions are difficult or 'awkward'.



DID YOU KNOW?

Professional curiosity consistently emerges as a key theme in safeguarding reviews and audits. When practitioners do not question information, challenge inconsistencies or look beyond what they are initially told, this leads to missed opportunities to safeguard adults and children.

2 The Principles of Professional Curiosity

More on 'Professional Curiosity: A Whole-Body Response' (Siobhan Maclean).



Are you being nosy with good intentions? Are you missing something that is right under your nose?



Are you actively listening? What have or haven't you heard?



What have or haven't you seen? Are you looking for something specific? Is this affecting your judgement?



Are you asking direct questions, even if they are difficult or 'awkward'? Are you sharing information?



3 Overcoming Barriers

Competing priorities and pressures can make it difficult to pause, look beyond the surface and challenge what we have been told. Below are some questions that practitioners may wish to ask themselves and others to promote professional curiosity in their practice:



Assumptions & Fixed Mindset

Practitioners may feel that they already understand a situation, and approach with a predetermined plan. Unconscious biases and assumptions - which are often unintentional - can influence how we interpret and respond to information.



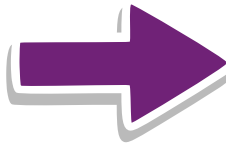
"What do I know?"
"What do I *think* I know?"
"What do I need to clarify?"
"How does my previous experience help me to navigate this situation, whilst remaining flexible and focused on this particular issue?"



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Lack of Confidence

Practitioners may feel uncertain about challenging families and more experienced/senior professionals, especially if they are worried about damaging relationships or 'getting it wrong'.

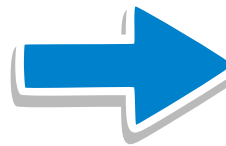


"What exactly am I worried about getting wrong?"
 "Can you help me to understand more about this?"
 "How does my evidence align with or contradict what others are reporting?"
 "Could there be another explanation?"
 "What is the risk of *not* asking?"



Normalisation of Risk

When safeguarding concerns become routine, practitioners can become desensitised to risk. Small changes or emerging patterns may go unnoticed because they happen slowly or seem insignificant in isolation.

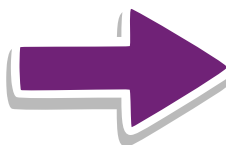


"What is the child or adult telling us?"
 "What does the chronology tell us when we read it as a story, rather than events?"
 "If the situation continues, what might life look like for this adult or child in a year?"



Lack of Information Sharing

Practitioners may hesitate to share information because they don't feel that they have enough evidence, and they're worried about 'overreacting'. Practitioners may also assume that another agency already knows and is dealing with the concern.



"Am I worried about sharing this information because I am unsure, or because it seems unimportant?"
 "Would another agency find this information useful?"
 "Do I have reasonable cause to override consent to share this information?"
 "What is the risk of *not* sharing?"



4 The Power of Probing

Professional curiosity isn't about catching people out. Being respectful, open and clear about why you are asking questions can help individuals to engage positively in safeguarding discussions.



Professional curiosity enables you to see the difference between genuine, sustained change and behaviour that simply gives this impression.

Children and adults may not openly disclose abuse, or may not recognise their experiences as harmful. Gentle, exploratory questioning can help uncover what is really happening.

Professional curiosity ensures that your decision-making is defensible. When curiosity is evident in both discussion and recording, it tells the story of how you assessed risk and why you acted.



5 Further Learning & Resources

Our Difficult Conversation Cards are designed to support practitioners to develop the confidence and curiosity needed to ask the right questions, explore concerns sensitively, and build trust with children, families and adults. This resource can be used to help you to prepare for challenging interactions that are common in safeguarding practice.

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