

7 MINUTE BRIEFING Professional Curiosity



KNOWSLEY
SAFEGUARDING
ADULTS BOARD

PREVENTION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP



1. What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional curiosity is a golden thread through all Safeguarding Adult Reviews and audits and is an essential part of safeguarding and the adult health and social care sector.

Professional curiosity is making the time to respectfully explore and understand what is happening within an individual or family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. Be self-aware in your practice.

Professional curiosity can require practitioners to think 'outside the box', beyond their usual professional role, and consider the adult's and families' circumstances holistically. Curious professionals engage with individuals and families through visits, conversations, observations and asking relevant questions to gather historical and current information.

2. Why is it important?

A lack of professional curiosity can lead to missed opportunities to identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or significant harm; assumptions made in assessments of needs and risk which are incorrect and lead to wrong intervention for individuals and families.

Applying professional curiosity can help to find out more about the rationale behind the adults' decisions, inform assessments and decision making.

Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) have highlighted a similar need for professional curiosity in safeguarding adults with care and support needs ([Braye et al 2014](#); [Preston-Shoot 2017](#)).

3. Having Curious Conversations:

Professionals need to enquire about the significant people in families' lives that influence them. This may be someone who provides care, or supports the family or individual – for example, another family member, a friend, someone from the community or father of any children and so on.

Professionals need to be brave and have what are often difficult or awkward conversations about the issues affecting families. These could be domestic abuse, inadequate housing, self-neglect, social isolation, mental health, drugs and alcohol, or issues between a person and carer.

4. Using Senses – Look and listen:

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, respectfully asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on information received.

Look: Is there anything about what you see when you meet with this adult/ family which prompts questions/makes you feel uneasy? Are you observing any behaviour which is indicative of abuse or neglect? Does what you see support or contradict what you're being told?

Listen: Are you being told anything which needs further clarification? Are you concerned about what you hear family members say to each other? Is someone in this family trying to tell you something but is finding it difficult to express themselves?

5. Barriers to Professional Curiosity:

- **Disguised compliance** – when a family member or carer gives the appearance of co-operating with services to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and ultimately to reduce professional involvement.
- **Accumulating risks** – seeing the whole picture, don't treat new information in isolation.
- **Normalisation** - This refers to social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as 'normal' and become taken-for-granted or 'natural' in everyday life. Because they are seen as 'normal' they cease to be questioned and are therefore not recognised as potential risks or assessed as such.
- **Confirmation bias** - when we look for evidence that supports or confirms our pre-held view.

This list is not exhaustive.

6. What supports professional curiosity?

- **Involving people who use services** – learning about what is important to people so practice can be adapted to meet their needs and outcomes ([Local Government Association, 2020a](#)).
- **Time and capacity** – reviewing efficiency and reducing stress and pressure on professionals to create space for reflection ([Local Government Association, undated resource](#)).
- **Structure and working practices** – maximising opportunities for contacts with managers and colleagues through informal discussions particularly using telephone, video conferencing or other electronic systems to support curiosity when working remotely ([Cooper, 2019](#)). Using strengths-based practice frameworks which encourage a focus on the individual and their situation ([Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2015](#)).
- **Supervision and support** – providing good quality supervision which offers reflection, critical analysis and respectful challenge ([Broadhurst et al, 2010](#); Revell and Burton, 2016).
- **Legal and safeguarding literacy** – enabling practitioners to make appropriate connections between legal rules and their professional practice (Preston-Shoot and McKimm, 2013; [Preston-Shoot 2017](#)).
- **Partnership working** – bringing together different perspectives, sharing information, identifying an individual to coordinate activities, building a picture, managing difficulties between professionals (Thacker et al. 2019).

7. Why we need to be curious and further information:

We need to be curious to:

- Understand the full picture
- Ensure nothing is missed
- Improve practice outcomes
- To safeguard adults
- To identify coercive control

[Exploring 'professional curiosity' to support social care practice | Social Work Week 2022 - YouTube](#)

[The importance of professional curiosity in safeguarding adults | Research in Practice](#)