



Safer Seven

On: Professional Curiosity



1. Background

Professional curiosity is having the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening with a child, adult with care and support needs or their family. It is about enquiring deeper and using proactive questioning and challenge. It is about understanding one's own responsibility and knowing when to act, rather than making assumptions, or taking things at face value.

Professional curiosity is a regular theme in Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) completed in Dudley and reflected nationally. It has long been recognised as an important concept in Children's Services but is equally relevant to work with adults.

3. Respectful Uncertainty

Professional curiosity was described by Lord Laming in the **Victoria Climbié** inquiry as "respectful uncertainty" which is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value", applying critical evaluation to any information received and maintaining an open mind.

By acquiring an open minded, inquiring and curious mind-set, professionals can avoid linear and absolute explanations by exploring alternative, multiple perspectives on a situation.

5. Tips to embed Professional Curiosity

- Use Critical thinking skills, sensitivity and persistence.
- Ensure judgements are based on evidence not optimism
- Have a willingness to research, ask questions and seek specialist advice, for example, in relation to culture and race, disability race, drug/alcohol misuse.
- Access to high quality supervision where practitioners and their managers routinely play their own 'devil's advocate in advocate' in considering alternative actions, explanations, or hypotheses

2. Barriers to Professional Curiosity?

It is important to note that when a lack of professional curiosity is cited as a factor in a tragic incident, this does not automatically mean "blame". It is widely recognised that there are many barriers to being professionally curious. Some of these are set out below:

- Disguised Compliance
- The rule of optimism
- Accumulating Risk – seeing the whole picture
- Normalisation
- Professional Deference
- Conformation Bias
- Knowing but not knowing
- Dealing with uncertainty

4. Tips to embed Professional Curiosity

- Ensure you are working within a person-centred focused approach with an ability to create suitably safe and trusting listening environment
- Identify and explore what is not discussed as much as what is.
- Have an openness to other perspectives/ willingness to try different responses.
- Build close partnership style relationships with families whilst being constantly aware of the individual's needs/ degree to which they are met

6. Questions to ask yourself

- Am I remaining curious and inquisitive about what I am seeing and assessing?
- Am I open to new information?
- How confident am I that I have sufficient information upon which to base my judgements?
- Do I need to add a "health warning" about the strength of evidence contained in this assessment/ implications for decision making?
- Would I be prepared to change my mind?

7. Further information:

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