



Professional Curiosity and Challenge

Professional curiosity and challenge are included in the WSB priorities and are an essential part of safeguarding.

Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are a fundamental aspect of working together to keep children, young people and adults safe.

In this resource we will raise awareness of the need for respectful uncertainty and advise where and how to access help and services.

What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional Curiosity is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening in all aspects of a child and family's personal life rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.

Professional Curiosity requires practitioners to think differently about ways that they can engage with children, adults and their families or carers.

Practitioners involvement with a family or a child is usually in response to a crisis and when children may be in need of protection. Children rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioners and, if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments. This makes identifying abuse and neglect difficult and this why we are required to be Professionally Curious.

Curious professionals will spend time engaging with families on visits. They will be creative about how they do this. Talk, play and touch can be useful ways to observe the child or adults lived experience.

- **Keep an open mind and do not presume you know what is happening in the family home or personal circumstances.**
- **Do not be afraid to ask questions and clarify information with families.**
- **Explain that you are asking because you want to keep the child or adult safe, and that you do not want to judge or criticise.**
- **Be open to the unexpected and incorporate information that does not support your initial assumptions into your assessment.**

Professional curiosity & culturally competent safeguarding practice

BME/BAME – Black and Minority Ethnic, or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic is the terminology normally used in the UK to describe people of non-white descent (according to the www.irr.org.uk)

- There is evidence that culturally competent safeguarding practice enhances children's and adults well being. Practitioners should have an understanding of how variations in child rearing and caring is understood by BAME families and how various categories of abuse are manifested in BAME communities. At the same time they must be clear that child or adult abuse cannot be ignored because of religious or cultural reasons.
- All practitioners must take personal responsibility for informing their work with sufficient knowledge about the culture or faith by which the child, young person, adult and their family or carers lives their daily life.
- In some instances reluctance to access support stems from a desire to keep family life private. In many communities there may be a fear of social work practitioners or other professionals arising from experiences from their country of origin- particularly those with insecure immigration status.
- Practitioners must take personal responsibility for having knowledge of any specialist services, so they can provide the relevant cultural and faith-related input.

This includes:

- Knowing which agencies are available to access.

- Having contact details to hand.
- Timing requests for expert support to ensure that assessments, care planning and review are sound and holistic.
- Often for BAME communities, not accessing appropriate services is a barrier to them fully participating in society. This can make them feel more isolated and increase the risk for potential for victimisation.

The Safeguarding Lead in your agency should be able to signpost you to appropriate support available within your organisation

Supervision, curiosity and understanding families

For many agencies, the use of effective supervision is a means of improving decision-making, accountability, and supporting professional development among practitioners. Supervision is also an opportunity to question and explore an understanding of a case.

Group Supervision and Reflective Practice Groups can be even more effective in promoting curiosity. Practitioners can use these spaces to think about their own judgments and observations. It also allows teams to learn from one another's experiences, and the issues considered in one case may have echoes in other workloads.

Tips for practice:

- Play 'devil's advocate'
- Present alternative hypotheses
- Present cases from the child, young person, adult or another family member's perspective.

Thinking the Unthinkable

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Every agency has a role to play in safeguarding and protecting children and adults.

The following factors highlight the need for all of us to strive to improve professional curiosity and professional courage:

- The views and feelings of children and some adults can be difficult to obtain.
- Practitioners should listen to the views of other adults who maybe trying to speak on behalf of a child or adult at risk. This information may be very important.

- Parents or carers can easily prevent practitioners from seeing and listening to a child or another adult
- Practitioners can be fooled with stories we want to believe are true.
- Effective multi-agency work needs to be coordinated so we have all available information regarding the lived experience of the child or adult.
- Challenging parents or carers (and colleagues) requires expertise, confidence, time and a considerable amount of emotional energy.