

Professional Curiosity

1. The Background?

Safeguarding reviews across health and social care in England have repeatedly identified that the involved professionals have become fixed in their understanding and analysis of the issues, leading to “pervasive belief systems” about cases, a lack of professional curiosity and unwillingness to consider alternative hypotheses. This means that all agencies and practitioners need to work together – the first step is to be professionally curious.

2. What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening to children, young people and adults rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. This can be described as the need for practitioners to practice ‘respectful uncertainty’ and applying critical evaluation to information they receive and maintaining an open mind

7. How Can Managers Help?

Managers can maximise opportunities for professionally curious practice to flourish by:

- Playing the “devil’s advocate” and presenting an alternative hypothesis to explore
- Challenging other professionals to explore the range of possible explanations for a situation

6. How can I develop my skills?

- Use case history and explore information from the Adult, young person, child or the family, as well as other professionals (triangulation)
- Review records, record accurately, check facts and feedback
- Talk to other professionals, promote healthy challenge so you can all work together to understand the child

5. What can practitioners /clinicians do?

Be open-minded, don’t take everything at face value

- Think the unthinkable
- Never assume and, be wary of assumptions already made
- Pay as much attention to how people look and behave as to the attention paid to what they are saying



3. Thinking the unthinkable?

It is natural for a practitioner to want to believe the best of people and / or families, being overly optimistic, or just accepting another’s view. Thinking the unthinkable isn’t about assuming the worst, it is considering all possibilities. Keep an open mind and being able to think objectively about the evidence presented, and if it changes over time. Be prepared to accept information that does not fit with previous assumptions and assessments. Practitioners will need to think outside of the box beyond their usual professional role

4. What is disguised compliance?

This involves an adult, parent, family, or carer giving the appearance of co-operating with agencies to avoid raising suspicions in order to allay professional concerns and, ultimately to diffuse professional intervention. Examples can include a sudden increase in school attendance, not reporting domestic abuse to the police so it appears that it has stopped happening, attending a run of appointments and engaging with professionals for a short period of time.