

Background

Professional Curiosity is the capacity and communication skills to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting service users versions of events or disclosures/responses to disclosures, at face value

Why does Professional Curiosity Matter?

Children and Adults rarely disclose abuse & neglect directly to practitioners. If they do, it will often be through their behaviour or comments. This makes identifying abuse & neglect difficult for professionals across agencies. We know that it is better to help as early as possible. That means that all agencies and practitioners need to work together. Gain clearer insight. Use combinations of looking, listening, asking direct & open questions, checking out & reflecting on information received. Not taking a single source of information & accepting it at face value. Seeing past the obvious.

Professional Curiosity

Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking & perceptual bias. Inquiries have shown the extraordinary lengths some abusive parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners & therefore you need to consider **Disguised Compliance** (giving the appearance of co-operating with agencies to avoid raising suspicions & allay concerns). The **Daniel Pelka** review emphasised need for professionals to be able to “think the unthinkable”. This does not mean assuming the worse but more being able to think objectively about evidence presented.

Further research

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/case-reviews>

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/child-neglect-be-professionally-curious>

<https://adc.bmj.com/content/archdischild/106/2/108.full.pdf>

<https://letterfromsanta.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-disguised-compliance.pdf>

Questions to ask yourself & skills to develop

- Am I remaining Curious & inquisitive about what I am seeing/assessing? Am I open to new information?
- Would I be prepared to change my mind? How confident am I that I have sufficient information to base my judgements?
- Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable. Consider how you can articulate ‘intuition’ into an evidenced professional view.
- How can I use relationships to create change?
- Use of escalation process & the 7 minute briefing on Professional Challenge
- Is sufficient time being allowed for critical reflection/decisions?
- Do the family have the capacity to change? (eg LD, Substances)

Barriers to Professional Curiosity

- Losing focus on the child through over identifying with carers
- Over optimism
- Making assumptions
- Being afraid to raise concerns/question families
- Time constraints
- Lacking confidence or assertiveness to ask sensitive questions
- Unconscious bias

‘Respectful Uncertainty’ Described by Lord Laming

(2003) in the Victoria Climbié inquiry. The capacity to explore & understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, maintaining an open mind. Be more curious / inquisitive. Supported by a child focused approach, an openness to other perspectives, building on partnership style relationships with families whilst constantly aware of the child’s needs/ degree to which not met. Base judgements on evidence not optimism, seek clarity on decision basis made.

