

Professional Curiosity Briefing

What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional Curiosity is about using your knowledge, skills and experience to explore what may be happening for a person rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.

It requires the ability to think about the situation or circumstances holistically, the willingness to engage with the person, and to ask potentially difficult and challenging questions.

It is important to be open to unexpected information, to incorporate this in challenging your own assumptions, and to be aware of your own responsibilities in recognising and reporting potential vulnerabilities such as abuse or neglect.

Look

- Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable or uneasy when you meet with the person, their family or others who are involved?
- Are there any behaviours or actions that indicate abuse or neglect may be occurring?
- Does anything you see contradict the information you already have and that needs to be explored further?
- Are there concerns in relation to the environment or how people, such as family, are interacting with each other?

Listen

- Are you being told anything that requires further clarification?
- Do you have any concerns about anything that is said to the person by others, or the tone that is used?
- Could the person, or others, be trying to tell you something but struggling to express themselves or to speak openly?
- Are you being told anything that contradicts the information you already have? Does anything you see contradict the information you already have and that needs to be explored further?

Ask

- Are there any other professionals involved and if so what information do they have?
- Do any of the other professionals have similar concerns and if so have they taken any action to explore these further?
- Is there any further information it would be helpful to consider in considering the overall impact on the person? This could include areas such as the person's medical history, whether they may have experienced any trauma, potential coercion or control or any exploitation that may be occurring.

Difficult Conversations

Whilst professional curiosity may lead to challenging conversations or disagreement this may be necessary in order to accurately assess need, identify risk and escalate as necessary. The tips below can help support a professionally curious approach.

- Plan in advance with an agenda focused on the topics you need to discuss and ensure there is sufficient time to cover all of these.
- Consider who will be present so that the person has the opportunity to communicate openly (such as using non-verbal communication methods, a translator or whether an advocate is necessary).
- Be non-confrontational and avoid blame; showing consideration, compassion, empathy and respect with a focus on the needs of the person who may be at risk.
- Demonstrate congruence (i.e. ensure your body language, tone and what you are saying are consistent).
- Use direct questions where appropriate (i.e. Are you frightened, do you feel safe, has anybody hurt you?)
- Be honest and ensure any views or actions taken are evidence-based and transparent.

Further Information

The importance of professional curiosity has been identified in Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs), Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) and Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). Here are some additional resources to further develop knowledge and understanding around professional curiosity.

[Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures](#)

[Research in Practice for Adults - Coercive Control](#)

[Safe Lives Hidden Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)

You can read SARs published by the Brighton and Hove SAB and find more information at the [Brighton and Hove Safeguarding Adults Board](#) website.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

Thinking the Unthinkable

Professionals may be prevented from seeing or speaking to the person, or encouraged to believe accounts or stories that aren't true. It is important not to necessarily accept things at face value and to check or challenge where concerns are identified.

Disguised Compliance

This is when people appear to be co-operating with professionals but in reality, may only be superficially co-operating or actively resisting. This could be to conceal abuse or neglect so the views of the person should always be given precedence together with a focus on facts and evidence.

Cultural Competence

It is important professionals are sensitive to different lifestyles or situations that may vary across racial, ethnic or cultural groups. Taking responsibility for increasing your knowledge of particular cultures or faiths will increase trust and understanding.

Confirmation Bias

Professionals may unconsciously look for evidence or information that supports their pre-held view and filter out or minimise facts and evidence which do not support these.