

Best Practice Guidance - Professional Curiosity

What is professional curiosity?

A combination of looking, listening, asking, direct questions, checking out and reflecting on information received. It means not taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value. It involves testing your assumptions and triangulating information from different sources.

‘Seeing past the obvious’

Why do we need it?

Children rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioner and if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments. This makes identifying abuse and neglect difficult for professionals across agencies.

The first step in keeping children safe is to be professionally curious and to engage with children and their families at the earliest opportunity before problems escalate into crisis.

Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking and perceptual bias. Munro (2005b) comments that repeated inquiry reports show the extraordinary lengths to which some abusive parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through disguised compliance and the Daniel Pelka review emphasised the need for professionals to be able to ‘think the unthinkable’ rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home.

Is it easy?

Some parents may be appearing to engage with you but are really hiding what is really going on – sometimes referred to as disguised compliance.

Some families may be adept at manipulating professionals or diverting the focus away from the topic you want to discuss, or they may be aggressive or hostile to services or had previous poor experience of services, so lack trust in your ability to help.

‘It is with these families professionals need to exercise most curiosity’

Curious Working

- Question your own assumptions, guard against over optimism;
- Recognise your own feelings might impact on your action – unconscious bias;
- Be willing to have uncomfortable discussions;
- Remain open minded and expect the unexpected;
- Ensure you can recognise disguised compliance;
- Understand the effect that coercive control and domestic abuse can have on family behaviours and engagement with services.

Key Issues

- **LOOK:**
 - Does anything make you feel uneasy?
 - Are there indications of abuse or neglect?
 - Does what I see match with what I am being told?
- **LISTEN:**
 - Do I need clarification on anything?
 - Is someone finding it hard to express themselves?
- **ASK:**
 - What direct questions can you ask the family member?
- **CHECK:**
 - Who else is involved with the family?
 - Is everyone being told the same thing?
 - Are other professionals concerned?
- **FEEL:**
 - Use your gut instinct if you still feel you need more information
 - Does this correlate with all the information I have been told?
 - Communicate your concerns with other professionals and your manager
 - Is there a piece of the puzzle missing?
 - Trust your professional judgement to explore further

Examples of Professional Curiosity questions

The list below is not designed to be prescriptive, your professional judgement is very important.

Health Professionals

- Is the child registered with universal services for example GP or Dentist? If not, enquire about the reason for this?
- Does the child have any health needs for which they attend appointments (including virtual appointments)?

- Are there children (who are dependent upon carers) that are being brought to appointments? Are there children (aged 16 and 17) who are not attending appointments?
- Are parents following the instruction/advice/intervention plan in relation to meeting that health need? How is this evidenced?
- What is the impact on the child of not attending their health appointment?
- If pregnant is the mother attending antenatal care?
- Have children been taken for their immunisations?
- Have children been taken to universal health and development checks?
- Ask about siblings if they are not present at a contact or home visit (particularly children under school age)
- Ask about Fathers and other people living in the same household?
- If the child is unwell at home, ask if they have not taken them to the doctors?
- Have they been given the safe sleep and ICON information?
- Is this a safeguarding issue? Refer to Threshold document.

Education

- Ask whether a school aged pupil turning up to medical appointments for siblings, particularly if they are not wearing their uniform, has a school place and why they are not in school?
- Visiting a home and a school aged child being in the house, ask why they are not in school? Do they have a school place?
- A professional makes a home visit and there is always a school age child present.
- A school age pupil always collects a younger or older sibling (may or may not be in school uniform)
- Parents repeatedly cancel school appointments.

More Question Examples

- How do members of your family deal with conflict?
- How do adults in the household respond to stress?
- What arrangements are in place for the child or young person to access education?
- Who are the professionals working with individual members of your family?
- What is it like to be (name) living in this family/household?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- Who is with you at this appointment?
- Who is living with you?
- What is the first thing you think of when you get up in the morning and/or the last thing you think of before you go to sleep?
- When were you last happy?
- Do you feel safe?
- Are there people who regularly visit your home apart from those who live there?
- Are you in fear of the consequence of doing something, or not doing something?

Professional Challenge

Professional Curiosity can be closely linked with Professional Challenge.

Professional Challenge is raising questions, challenging and escalating concerns where appropriate, quickly and clearly and is seen as a positive approach to practice and continuing improvement in how we protect and meet the needs of children in Telford and Wrekin.

Are you confident in your knowledge of procedures for challenging a professional decision that you disagree with? If not, please read the [TWSP Escalation Policy](#)