

Professional Curiosity is good safeguarding practice

What is professional curiosity?

Professional curiosity is the skills used to explore and understand with what is happening with an individual or family. It is about managers and practitioners:

- maintaining **respectful uncertainty** rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.
- Listening and exploring uncertain thoughts and feelings generating when working with an individual or family through critical enquiry and the evaluation of information.

How does it safeguard people?

Abuse and neglect are rarely disclosed directly to practitioners. Working with people in a professionally curious way enables managers and practitioners to better identify and respond to the signs and indicators of abuse and neglect.

A lack of professional curiosity is an emerging and recurrent theme in both Safeguarding Adult Review and Serious Case/Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review findings.

How organisations and managers can support professional curiosity

- Be aware of systems, processes and practices that could contribute to 'organisational avoidance or ignorance' and so impede professional curiosity. Often services may be reluctant to get involved with an individual or family or may inadvertently create systems and processes which can discourage professional curiosity in practice. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as due to workloads, service boundaries or restrictive processes which have the intention of resolving one issue but may then have an impact on professional curiosity and good multi-agency practice. This minimises chances of really exploring and hearing the voice of the person and their family.
- Ensure professionally curious management and supervision (model and encourage reflective practice and support practitioner and organisational development)
- Avoid working in organisational silos and encourage creative multi-agency working.

How to practice professional curiosity

Work towards:

- Finding the person: relationship based practice [See Chapter 4(a) “The Importance of Relationships” in [Responding to Self-Neglect in Shropshire Practice Guidance](#)]
- Listening and observing: words and actions
- Looking at the whole picture; not just the reason you are there.
- Being mindful of and exploring any “gut” thoughts or feelings indicating that something about a situation does not seem “right” (for example words and actions not matching up, uncomfortable feelings or unusual responses from the individual or their family).
- Looking beyond the obvious
- Respectfully exploring and challenging: practice respectful uncertainty; embrace disagreement or challenge as an opportunity to resolve difficulties; work with resistance (don’t just walk away if risk is present), practice motivational interviewing approaches. [See [Disguised compliance, coercive control and families who are hostile or resistant to change](#)]
- Managing difficult conversations [See Manchester Safeguarding Partnership’s [Difficult Conversations with Parents Guide](#)]
- Effective Multi-agency working: agencies working effectively together prevents and identifies the risk of abuse and neglect earlier and helps to protect when it’s happening [See [Working with Risk Guidance - Adults](#)]
- Managing/resolving professional difficulties [Use the multi-agency [Resolution/Escalation Policy – Adult’s, Escalation Policy – Children’s](#)]
- Being professionally self-aware: what internal and external factors may be having an impact upon how you might be working with an individual or family (see barriers to the right)?
- Looking after yourself: your health and well-being; improving and maintaining your resilience and ensuring your professional safety (mental and physical).
- Reflecting on your practice - access peer and clinical supervision, maintain professional development.

Be aware of barriers to professional curiosity:

- Disguised compliance: the adult or family/carers appear co-operative to reduce professional involvement. Understand the difference between compliance and meaningful engagement: are the words and actions matching?
- The rule of optimism: Professionals rationalise away new or emerging risks despite contrary evidence.
- Accumulating risk: Not seeing risk in it’s history and context. Only looking at individual incidents in isolation.
- Normalisation: Ideas and actions can be seen as “normal” and so they cease to be questioned and so are not recognised as potential risks or assessed as such.
- Professional deference: Deferring to the opinion of a ‘higher status’ professional who has limited contact with the person but who views the risk as less significant.
- Confirmation bias: looking for or preferring evidence which supports or confirms a pre-held view and ignoring or filtering out contrary evidence.
- Knowing but not knowing: that something is not right but not knowing what
- Confidence in managing tension: disagreement, disruption and aggression from families/carers/others can divert or distract from what the practitioner wants to explore
- Dealing with uncertainty: in situation where practitioners are presented with concerns that are difficult to substantiate ‘there is a temptation to discount concerns that cannot be proved’
- Time Constraints: can impact on the time required to build on and explore aspects of the person’s life.
- Other organisational barriers; such as resources, systems and processes which may be contributing to organisational avoidance or ignorance and impeding professional curiosity (see [above](#))

Maintaining professional curiosity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are aware that the current pressure being placed on all of our partners whilst we work to fight the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

It is vitally important for people to stay at home in order to beat Coronavirus. But being at home can also increase the risk of abuse or neglect for children, young people, and/or adults with care and support needs.

Our statutory duties to work together to safeguard children and adults with care and support needs from abuse have not changed. The application of professional curiosity remains paramount; arguably more so; given that people's doors are closed and social distancing measures are in place. Many of you are using virtual and remote means of engaging and connecting with people at risk of or experiencing abuse. We hope that the below additional points, questions and resources will help you to continue to be professionally curious during these challenging times.

Use a reflective journal, supervision or discussion with colleague(s) in formal or informal team discussions to consider:

- How might [barriers to professional curiosity](#) present themselves differently during this time?
- How the below questions, points and resources could be useful to enable you to continue professional curious practice during this time:

Finding the person:
relationship-based
practice

Questions to consider:

- How could engaging remotely enhance your relationship with people? Multiple ways of engaging: post/flyers, text, phone, email, skype, Whatsapp enables you to communicate in so many more different and creative ways.
- How can you still have contact with people without entering their homes and from a social distance? (e.g.
 - Do they need anything that you could get and deliver for them and have a conversation at a distance from the door? Helping people to get the things they need will increase their engagement with you.
 - Can you arrange virtual contact when the person or the source of risk have gone out for essential reasons (food, health, exercise or work)?
- How well are you engaging with **all** members of the household?
- Do you know who else is having contact with the person and their household? If there are other agencies or voluntary organisations engaging with them; have you made contact with them (taking account of good practice in relation to information sharing)?

Useful resources:

- Catch 22 have produced guidance on remotely completing return home interviews with missing children: <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/news/guidance-on-delivering-and-accessing-remote-support/>
- Safe Lives have a number of resources for professionals on their COVID-19 pages: <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19>. This includes links to specific COVID-19 resources including:
 - [Responding to domestic abuse during telephone and video conversations](#)
 - [Risk Management and Safety Planning](#)
 - [Guidance for practitioners on working with alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse](#)Think about how these resources might apply to other types of abuse.
- The Social Care Institute for Excellence have produced some [COVID-19 adult safeguarding "how to help" and "dos and don'ts"](#)

<p>Look at the whole picture; not just why you are there</p>	<p>You may be one of the key agencies who are still having regular contact with a person or their family.</p> <p>You may have a closer relationship or better engagement than other professionals who are trying to engage the person or someone in their household.</p> <p>Find out who else is working with the person or people in their household (taking account of good practice in relation to information sharing and multi-agency working).</p> <p>If you are providing personal care or medical treatment or other emergency intervention to a person or someone in their household, you are currently one of the few professionals who are going into the home. Take time to consider their home environment and engage with the person and other householders (see above).</p> <p>Make sure you pass on any important information to agencies involved in any care co-ordination/case management (taking account of good practice in relation to information sharing)</p>
<p>Manage difficult conversations</p>	<p>As well as using specific guidance on this area outlined above; think about how this article might apply to your work: https://www.wipfli.com/insights/articles/op-how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-remote-employees</p>
<p>Managing/resolving professional difficulties</p>	<p>We are in unprecedented and challenging times. We are all in this together. Try to turn differences of professional opinion into positive action and better outcomes for the people we have a duty to safeguard. Working in a constructive, positive and collaborative way saves you time and energy and it will result in better outcomes. Much of your work with other professionals is going to be done by virtual means, with many of you involved in multi-agency/multi-disciplinary virtual meetings.</p> <p>Think about how the following articles might help you to manage/resolve professional difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/working-from-home-heres-how-to-run-an-effective-virtual-meeting/ • https://www.wipfli.com/insights/articles/op-how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-remote-employees <p>Also make sure you continue to use the multi-agency Resolution/Escalation Policy – Adult’s, Escalation Policy – Children’s] to help you.</p>

Being professionally self-aware	Be mindful of how the current situation may be affecting how you are working with individuals and their families (see below for tips of how to help you).
Look after and make time for yourself	<p>In order that you can continue be as resilient as you can be in these tough times, it is really important that you look after yourself as much as you are others (whether your caring role is as a professional or outside of work).</p> <p>Have a look at Shropshire Council's: Looking after your mental health during COVID-19. It provides a summary of helpful national and local resources and links to practical tips, advice and support</p> <p>Use the collection of Public Health COVID-19 guidance available to you both as a professional and an individual, parent or carer; to help keep yourself, your household, your families, friends, communities and those you are working with as safe as you can.</p> <p>Get regular updates on guidance available from the Government's Coronavirus Webpage</p>
Reflect on and continue to develop your practice	<p>Make sure you continue to access peer and clinical supervision using virtual means when necessary.</p> <p>Make time to ensure you regularly refresh/update your professional knowledge by visiting the COVID-19 pages on: http://www.keepingadultssafeinshropshire.org.uk/; http://www.safeguardingshropshireschildren.org.uk/</p> <p>The Shropshire Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit are regularly reviewing the information detailed on these pages in light of information that we receive. We are always interested to hear about useful links and resources that can help all professionals working across the multi-agency partnership. If you would like to share any resources or information that is not covered on these pages please email: SSPbusinessunit@shropshire.gov.uk</p>

Further Professional Curiosity Resources are available from: [Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board](#); [Manchester Safeguarding Partnership](#); [Brighton & Hove](#).