

20250619 All-age Professional Curiosity Rapid Read Practitioner Briefing

1. What is professional curiosity?

- Professional curiosity is having a healthy scepticism about what you are being told by the person you are speaking to, or a situation, and how this relates to safeguarding related issues across all ages.
- It is about using all your communication skills to explore and understand what is happening to an individual or within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting service users' versions of events or disclosures at face value.
- Another way of saying professional curiosity is saying that as a practitioner you are using 'respectful uncertainty'

2. Why is professional curiosity important?

- Developing and maintaining a sense of professional curiosity is vital if practitioners are to work together to keep children and adults safe.
- A lack of professional curiosity is identified regularly in adult and child safeguarding learning reviews
- Being professionally curious enables opportunities to identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or protective factors.
- It is a mindset that allows us to gather relevant information and understand the risks an individual may be facing from their perspective.
- It prevents assumptions being made when assessing an individual or families' needs and safeguarding risk thus reducing incorrect information being shared so the right level of support and intervention can be offered.
- It also allows us to understand the cumulative impact of multiple or combined risk factors, e.g. domestic abuse, drug and/or alcohol misuse, and mental health issues so we can identify if we need to refer onto other agencies including social care or specialist teams.

3. Professional curiosity and language

- Professional curiosity is often described as a key safeguarding skill, yet it is increasingly becoming a '*buzz word*' - used frequently but not always fully understood in practice. The language we use to define and discuss professional curiosity is therefore vital. We must ensure that it is accessible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive.
- In many organisations, a significant proportion of the workforce are internationally trained professionals for whom English is not a first language. As such, it is important that training, policies, and practice materials are delivered using clear, straightforward language, avoiding unnecessary jargon.

- Professional curiosity should not be reduced to abstract or academic terminology. Instead, it should be framed in a way that is grounded in practice, tied to the professional's roles, responsibilities, and ethical duties, and sensitive to cultural beliefs, values, and communication styles.
- Encouraging terms like *“respectful questioning”*, *“curious practice”*, or *“compassionate enquiry”* may help in translating the concept into more practical and culturally meaningful language, especially for staff who are new to safeguarding in a UK context.
- Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that every professional understands not only what professional curiosity means, but also how to apply it confidently, respectfully, and appropriately in their everyday interactions - regardless of their background or first language.

4. What works well in being professionally curious?

It is a combination of **looking**, **listening**, **asking questions**, and **checking** and reflecting on information received. It means:

- Testing out our professional hypothesis and not making assumptions
- Triangulating information from different sources to gain a better understanding of individuals and carers functioning
- Getting an understanding of individual's history, which in turn, may help us think about what may happen in the future
- Obtaining multiple sources of information and not accepting a single set of details we are given at face value
- Having an awareness of our own personal bias and how that affects how we see those we are working with
- Professional curiosity is not being intrusive or nosey
- Consider 'Think Family/Think Household' approach

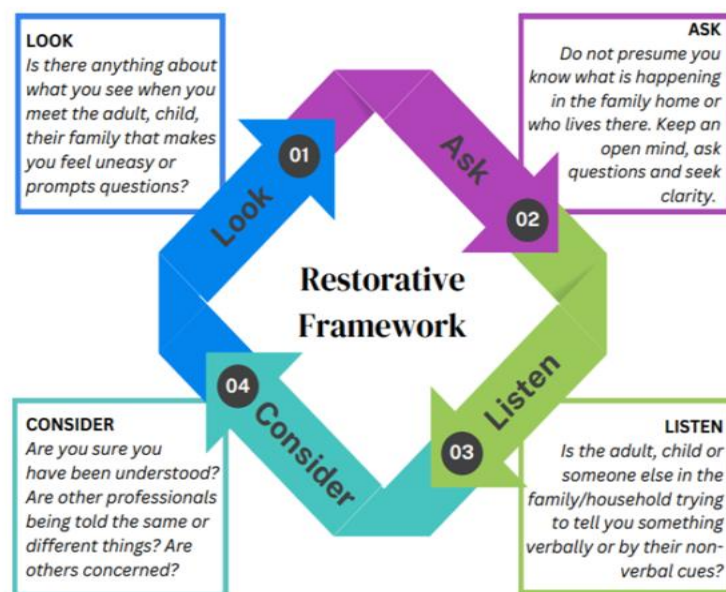


Figure1. [Multi-Agency Practice Guidance - Professional Curiosity - Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

5. What to do - prompts and questions that might help you to be more professionally curious?

Prompts	What might help
Self-care and your own support	Do you receive one to one's/supervision in your workplace? Does this supervision support a professional curiosity mindset? If not, perhaps you need to seek this within your organisation.
Lacking confidence in challenging others regarding being professionally curious	Do you feel confident to challenge? Do you need more support and guidance to communicate in this way? Consider having professional curiosity on meeting agendas and/or in meeting ground rules.
Deferring to the view of a senior colleague who may not be familiar with the case	Share information using situation, background, assessment, recommendations (SBAR), so informed decisions can be made and progressed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for support from others. • Remember that your view is as important as others and you may be holding a vital piece of information that needs to be shared
Time constraints	In the sometimes limited periods you have with people, it is an opportunity to use your observation and skills of verbal and non-verbal cues including body language to inform your assessment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain curiosity despite time pressures. • Offer to follow up and/or provide further information (website/leaflets etc).
Short term interventions	Ask yourself what you can do in a short time rather than what you cannot do? What information can you provide them with and/or what information can you pass to others to support a person? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If safeguarding concerns are identified, make a safeguarding referral. • If domestic abuse is identified complete a domestic abuse stalking honour (DASH) abuse-based assessment. (Dash risk assessment resources for professionals -

	SafeLives) and refer to IDVA or Domestic abuse services.
Disguised compliance (people may downplay or draw attention away from concern to reduce professional involvement)	<p>Once you have established <i>what</i> is happening, try to understand <i>why</i> it is happening.</p> <p>Ask a person scaling questions such as on 0-10 “how likely are you to (take your medication as it is prescribed)” follow up with “what makes it a 5” and “how do we get you to a 6” etc.</p>
Normalisation of behaviours rather than recognising risks present	<p>Are you an analytical thinker?</p> <p>This involves breaking down complex information into smaller parts to understand and interpret what you are being told.</p> <p>You might see a pattern or cause and effect to help you identify a risk and find a solution with the person).</p> <p>Can you discuss with colleagues for a different view?</p>
Professional confidence and optimism	<p>What is your communication style?</p> <p>Can you hold difficult conversations and challenge others appropriately?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This extends to the individual you are concerned about, along with the professionals and networks around them. • If not, what training can you access or have you a colleague you can safely role play difficult conversations with?
Being too optimistic about a case despite evidence of escalating risks	<p>Make sure the person concerned is kept central to the decision-making process. Professional curiosity works hand-in-hand with making safeguarding personal principles (Making Safeguarding Personal - Safeguarding Matters - Ann Craft Trust) and dynamic risk assessment.</p> <p>Be open and name the risk(s) to the person and clearly explain consequences to them of not taking any action on the risk(s) so they can make informed choices.</p> <p>Check their capacity to understand the risk and consequences and provide interpreter or advocacy to support best interests in decision making.</p>

Responding to each situation discretely	<p>Keep an open mind and try to look beyond the obvious. Actively show an interest in people and their experience while building positive relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a safe space to talk • Ask 'how safe do you feel?' - sensitively and respectfully. • Ask them "noticing" questions "I noticed that you said you are fine, but that you looked sad when you said it" • Ask them "wondering" questions "I wonder what you think would help you the most at the moment" • Discuss their options and provide some suggested ones, summarise 2-3 of these options and ask them which of these options they think they would like to try first.
Not recognising your own confirmation bias and ignoring information that refutes your view	<p>Ask:</p> <p>"What am I really seeing and hearing?"</p> <p>"Am I aware of my own biases?"</p> <p>"Are these based on fact?"</p> <p>"What do I need to ask to gain their view on what is actually happening for them".</p>
Having a 'gut feeling' that is based on knowledge and experience that something is not right, and wider social determinants of health e.g. housing and employment, protected characteristics and adverse childhood experiences.	<p>Listen to your 'gut feeling'. If you feel that something is not right, then it probably isn't.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself what else you can do to learn more about the situation. • Trusting professional intuition. • Consider how you can articulate 'intuition' in relation to professional curiosity into an evidenced, factual professional view.

6. What do you need to consider with professional curiosity work and protected characteristics?

The Equality Act 2010 ensures individuals have equal treatment access to public sector services. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic. Below are the nine protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality and Diversity Act (2010).



Figure 2: [New film highlights the importance of collecting protected characteristics data - Welcome](#)

Some people may experience barriers to disclosing abuse and/or harm due to their protected characteristics, including:

- Older people experiencing domestic abuse but seeing this as “normal” throughout a long relationship
- Disability - people in relationships their roles changing from being a mother/father/sibling or husband/wife to being a carer (informal or formal)
- Language barriers and/or cultural differences to seeking help, support and accessing services.
- A pregnant mother not wanting to disclose abuse due to social norms of being a “good” mother or fear of having a child taken away from her.
- Men reluctant to discuss abuse for fear of appearing “weak” or vulnerable due to society stereotypes of masculinity
- Adultification- this is a type of bias which skews the perception of certain children, leading to professionals viewing them as more grown up than their peers which can lead to lapses in safeguarding and unfair treatment.
- Individuals and or groups who are not specially included in the 9 protected characteristics may still face discrimination. For example, due to socioeconomic status, sex work or appearance.
- Be aware of these barriers and consider what you need to do to support people experiencing any barriers and help get the support they need.

7. Resources and QR code:

- <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/professional-curiosity-safeguarding-adults-an-essential-introduction/>
- [Re-envisioning professional curiosity and challenge: Messages for child protection practice from reviews of serious cases in England](#)
- [Multi-Agency Practice Guidance - Professional Curiosity - Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- [Resources for professionals - SafeLives](#)
- [It's OK to Ask – Maternity's ground-breaking equity films - NHS Suffolk and North East Essex ICB](#)
- [Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK](#)
- <https://nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/conscious-inclusion/understanding-different-types-of-bias/>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17488958221116323>
- [Adultification animation](#)
- <https://safeguarding-guide.nhs.uk/>

