

# WHAT IF... PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

The What if ...series seeks to provide guidance to aid the identification of an adult safeguarding concern and the action to take.

## Professional Curiosity

### What is professional curiosity?

Professional curiosity is a practice approach and communication skill that involves exploring and understanding situations by asking questions and maintaining an open mind. It encourages practitioners to proactively seek to understand what is happening rather than making assumptions. Fostering this sense of curiosity is essential for critical thinking and professional growth. While the concept may lack clarity in some contexts, it is increasingly recognized as vital in various professional fields.

Being professionally curious is fundamental to how we work with children, young people, their families and adults with care and support needs, and other professionals. To work alongside people, we need to understand their perspectives and lived experiences so that we can support them to achieve their full potential.

Professional curiosity is something that can be applied in all relationships, including children, young people, parents/carers and adults with care and support needs, wider communities, and networks of support. It also applies to the relationships we have with other professionals and the relationship we have with ourselves. By understanding multiple perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of each other meaning that we are better able to work together.

Professional curiosity is a regular learning point that arises from both Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARS), Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) and Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews (DARDR's). Several recent Safeguarding Practice Reviews undertaken by the NYSCP have found that developing a deeper understanding of family dynamics by asking professionally curious questions may have led to improved outcomes for people and their families.

This guidance may be used to help anyone to gain an understanding of professional curiosity, what it means in practice, and how it can be used to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with people and develop professional practice.

### Professional curiosity requires professionals to:

- Think 'outside the box' to a holistic picture of the individual and/or family circumstances.
- Look beyond the surface to explore the lives of the people you are working with in more depth.
- Show a real willingness to talk to and listen to the people you are working with and those supportive net works around them, to understand their lived experiences.
- Actively seek to consider the views of all, including through discussion with other professionals and seek evidence to support your curiosity and the information that is being shared with you.
- Be able to appropriately challenge thinking and decision making, either that of the person you are working with, other professionals or organisations or your own thinking (see professional challenge document).
- Ask the 'second question', this means in addition to asking 'what' is happening, asking 'why' it is happening? Spend time talking and listening with the people you are working with, either in their home, in communities and public spaces, in professional discussions or through telephone or online interactions.

Professional curiosity considers many aspects of communication and involves professionals being aware of and considering talk, play, behaviour, relational interactions, nonverbal cues, vocal tone, and touch when developing an understanding of what life is like for the people we are working with

## Developing Skills in professional curiosity

**Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable. Consider how you can articulate 'intuition' into an evidenced, professional view.**

- Listen to what the person is saying and importantly what are they not saying? What is the person trying to tell you? How do they look? How are they acting? What behaviours are they demonstrating? What non-verbal cues are they demonstrating? How is the tone of their voice? How are they communicating with others around them? A trauma informed approach to practice acknowledges the need to see beyond individuals presenting behaviours and to ask, "what does this person need?"
- Seek to explore different methods for capturing and understanding the voice and experiences of person you are working with. Considering those who may have language or communication needs, consider personalised approaches.
- Ensure, as much as possible, that decisions are made with full understanding of the person who is being supported.
- Speak to other professionals regularly, ensure timely information sharing. Don't wait for meetings.
- Seek to test and triangulate information, build evidence to support your thinking.
- Have other people heard, seen, been told, or felt the same as you?
- Have other practitioners heard, seen, been told, or felt differently to you?
- When developing an understanding of what life is like for the person you are working with, input and conversation from multiple perspectives is better than only listening to one.
- Never assume and be wary of assumptions already made. Establish the facts and gather evidence about what is happening.
- Sometimes the most important relationship to trust, is the one with yourself. If you have a feeling or intuition that something is not right, acknowledge this and proactively seek to build evidence that may support or challenge your feeling. Be professionally curious about yourself and your own practice and why you may be feeling the way you are.
- Don't use professional jargon. Talk to people using language and communication tools they understand and can relate to.
- Actively seek to establish a positive relationship with the person you are supporting. Look at the network around them to explore creative ways to develop this.
- Look at tools that can promote honest discussions with the people you are supporting and explore their values e.g., Genograms.
- Consider different perspectives and hypothesis about what is happening. Use supervision and discussions with professionals to explore different ideas. Be mindful that a different hypothesis may be worth consideration i.e., both/and, rather than, and/or, and that hypothesis may change and develop over time.
- Focus on outcomes rather than process to remain person centred. If you feel something is not right or you don't understand something, ask "what else can I find out?"

## Resources

[Research in Practice - Professional Curiosity](#)

[Professional Curiosity Short Version](#)

[Professional Curiosity Animation - YouTube](#)

