

1 minute guide: Professional Curiosity

What is professional curiosity and why is it important?

Professional curiosity is where a practitioner explores and proactively tries to understand what is happening within a family or for an individual, rather than making assumptions or taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value. Examples of where practitioners were seen to have taken information at face value can be seen in the cases of [Daniel Pelka](#), [Baby P](#) and [Victoria Climbié](#).

Professional Curiosity means:

- Testing out professional assumptions about different types of families
- Considering information from different sources to gain a better understanding of family functioning which, in turn, helps to make predictions about what is likely to happen in the future
- Seeing past the obvious
- Questioning what is observed

It is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on ALL of the information received.

Professional curiosity is a recurring theme within safeguarding reviews, highlighting the need to fully understand a family's situation. Therefore, professional curiosity is important, as it enables a practitioner to have a holistic view and understanding of what is happening within a family and what life is like for an individual and use this information to fully assess potential risks. Being professionally curious enables practitioners to challenge parents/ carers, in order to understand a child or young person's vulnerability or risk, while maintaining an objective, professional and supportive approach.

How can practitioners be professionally curious?

Here are some considerations when seeking to be professionally curious:

- As practitioners, you should not presume to know what is happening in the family home and should ask questions and seek clarity if you are not certain.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions of families, and do so in an open way, so they know that you are asking to ensure that children are safe, not to judge or criticise.
- Professionals need to be brave and have what are often difficult or awkward conversations about the issues affecting families
- Am I concerned about what I am hearing family members saying to each other?
- Be open to the unexpected and incorporate information that does not support your initial assumptions into your assessment of what life is like for an individual.
- Seek clarity, either from the family or other professionals.
- Try not to make assumptions, be mindful of your own and others unconscious bias. Be open to having your own assumptions, views and interpretations challenged, and be open to challenging others.
- Consider what you see as well as what you are told. Are there any visual clues as to what life is like, or which don't correlate with the information you already hold?
- Am I observing behaviour which is indicative of abuse or neglect?
- Does what I am seeing support or contradict what I am being told?
- Professionals need to enquire about the significant people in families' lives that influence them.

- Use supervision as an opportunity to explore cases and exercise professional curiosity, for example: playing 'devil's advocate' by considering the information from a different point of view or perspective

The relationship developed between Early Years practitioners and families provides a good foundation to explore issues with families without being too intrusive. The regularity and frequency of being in contact with a child and their parents enables staff to consider the child's 'lived experience'.

This NSPCC published a report in 2017 which reviewed early years sector involvement in child protection cases. Lack of professional curiosity was one of the key findings highlighting that 'in some situations, practitioners missed opportunities to find out more about a child's home environment because they were not curious about the child's lived experience outside the setting. For example, practitioners didn't always seek further information from children, parents or carers when children had bruises or injuries. This meant that possible child protection concerns weren't always recorded or responded to and practitioners weren't able to identify patterns of behaviour that might cause a concern'. The full published reports can be found [here](#)

The obstacles for practitioners when applying professional curiosity can involve:

- lack of practitioner confidence to challenge
- fear of getting it wrong
- consequences of offending the adult and damaging the relationship between the provider and parent
- fear of reprisal
- fear that their concern will not be taken seriously

If you feel that your concerns are not being taken seriously or another agency is failing to recognise child maltreatment and/or their response leaves children at risk of significant harm you have a responsibility to challenge poor practice in a constructive and respectful manner. This protocol provides partner agencies with a clear, transparent process to resolve professional differences. Further information can be found [here](#)