

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Hannah Pallôt or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Rachel Heffer immediately with any concerns.

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Professional Curiosity



Every Moment Matters

Seven Minute Safeguarding

WB 27th February 2022

What is 'Professional Curiosity'?

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, asking follow up questions and reflecting on information received. It means not taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value. It means not just accepting something at face value but following up when you feel that something isn't right. It means seeing past the obvious. It's about being interested in that snippet of information a child tells you.

It isn't being nosy; it isn't asking leading questions; it isn't making assumptions about families and the care of children.

Professional Curiosity - also described [by Lord Laming \(2003\) in the Victoria Climbié inquiry](#) as "respectful uncertainty" - is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, applying critical evaluation to any information received and maintaining an open mind. By acquiring an open minded, inquiring and curious mind-set, professionals can avoid linear and absolute explanations by exploring alternative, multiple perspectives on a situation.

Why is it important?

Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking and perceptual bias. [Munro \(2011\)](#) 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. The [Daniel Pelka Review](#) and the more recent case involving the tragic death of [Arthur Labinjo-Hughes](#) emphasised the need for professionals to be able to "think the unthinkable" rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home.

It is natural for us to want to believe the best of a family, and thinking the unthinkable does not mean assuming the worst. It means keeping an open mind, and being able to think objectively about the evidence presented. Be prepared to accept information that does not fit with previous assumptions and assessments.

Want to know more?

The NSPCC have an interesting document '[Learning from Case Review Meetings: Disguised compliance](#)' and [this article](#) from the British Association of Social Workers explores this issue further

Remember the old adage, 'be curious, not furious'? that sums it up. We need to be curious about our children's lives beyond the school gates. We need to ask those follow up questions, show some professional curiosity and take an interest in the things children tell us.

Do they mention hanging around with older children at the park? Do they keep referencing an adult visiting the house that you have never heard mention of before? Be curious, not furious.

Barriers to curiosity include:

- Over optimism
- Over identifying with parents/carers
- Making assumptions
- Time constraints
- Unconscious bias

Professional curiosity is supported by:

- A child focused approach with an ability to create a suitably safe and trusting listening environment for children and young people;
- Identifying and exploring what is not discussed as much as what is;
- An openness to other perspectives/willingness to try different responses;
- An ability to build close partnership style relationships with families whilst being constantly aware of the child's needs and the degree to which they are met;
- Critical thinking skills, sensitivity and persistence;
- Familiarity with local Child Protection procedures and guidance;