

### What is professional curiosity and why is it important?

Professional curiosity is the capacity and skills of communication to explore and understand what is happening for a person rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. It requires skills of looking, listening, asking direct questions and being able to hold difficult conversations.

Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are a fundamental aspect of working together to keep adults safe from harm. This approach is important in helping to identify abuse and neglect which is less obvious and can ensure that the right information is gathered to assess needs and risks. Being professionally curious is necessary to fully understand a situation and the risks an individual may face which are not always immediately obvious.

### Developing skills in professional curiosity

#### LOOK

- Is there anything about what you see when you meet with the adult / their family that makes you feel uneasy or prompts questions?
- Do you see behaviours which indicate abuse or neglect, including coercion and control?
- Does what you see contradict or support what you are being told?
- How are family members interacting with each other and with you?

#### LISTEN

- Are you being told anything that needs further clarification?
- Is someone trying to tell you something?
- Are you concerned about what you hear family members say to each other?
- Is someone in the family trying to tell you something, but finding it difficult to express themselves or speak openly?
- Make time and space to have a private conversation with an adult who may be at risk of abuse or neglect, or subject to coercion and control.

#### ASK

Research indicates those who experience abuse, including coercion and control want practitioners to ask direct questions and that it is easier to respond to a direct question than offer information independently.

- I've noticed you have this injury. Is there anything going on for you which may have caused this?
- Do you feel frightened of anyone?
- Do you feel safe living here?
- Who makes decisions about what you can and cannot do?
- Some of the things you have told me today concern me. Is somebody hurting you or are you afraid someone might hurt you in the future?

#### CLARIFY

- Are other professionals involved? What information do they have?
- Have other professional seen the same as you?
- Are professionals being told the same or different things?
- Are others concerned? If so, what action has been taken and is there anything else which should or could be done by you or someone else?

## Holding difficult conversations

Tackling disagreements or hostility, raising concerns and giving information that may not be well received are incredibly challenging and difficult things to do. The following tips can support practitioners in holding difficult conversations:

- Plan in advance to ensure there will be time to cover essential elements of the conversation.
- Keep the agenda focused on the topics you need to discuss.
- Be clear and unambiguous.
- Have courage and focus on the needs of the adult at risk.
- Be non-confrontational and non-blaming.
- Stick to the facts and have evidence to back up what you say.
- Ensure decision making is justifiable and transparent.
- Show empathy, consideration and compassion.
- Demonstrate congruence i.e. make sure tone, body language and content of speech are consistent.
- Consider the adult's needs for advocacy support.



## Additional Resources and Further Reading

[Sussex Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures](#)

[Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)

[Research in Practice for Adults - Coercive Control Tools and Resources](#)

[Safe Lives Hidden Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)

[Waltham Forest Professional Curiosity video](#)

The [Adult B SAR](#) published in East Sussex in February 2020 highlighted significant learning around the importance of professional curiosity in supporting an effective safeguarding response.

A range of safeguarding courses are available through the [East Sussex Learning Portal](#)

If you require further information about this briefing, please contact Delyth Shaw, SAB Development Manager at [Delyth.Shaw@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Delyth.Shaw@eastsussex.gov.uk) or on 07827 937 305, or Katharine Finnigan, Quality Assurance and Learning Development Officer at [Katharine.Finnigan@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Katharine.Finnigan@eastsussex.gov.uk) or on 07712 236 676

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