

PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

7-minute briefing

1. WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY?

Professional curiosity is the ability to explore and understand what is happening with an adult or family. It requires practitioners to act upon their safeguarding responsibilities rather than make assumptions or take matters at face value. A curious professional will enquire deeply by looking, listening and proactively questioning and challenging all those involved. Professional curiosity is an essential part of all Safeguarding Adult Reviews and audits, it is vital to safeguarding and the adult health and social care sector.

2. WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Developing and maintaining a sense of professional curiosity is vital if practitioners are to work together to keep adults safe. Being professionally curious can help identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or significant harm and can help to find out more about the rationale behind the adults' decisions, informing assessments and decision making.

3. WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

- Not recognising 'disguised compliance'
- Being too optimistic about a case despite evidence of escalating risks
- Responding to each situation in isolation rather than seeing the whole picture
- 'Normalising' actions rather than recognising them for the risks they present
- Deferring to the view of a senior colleague who may not be familiar with the case
- Not recognising your own confirmation bias and ignoring information that disproves your view
- Having a 'gut feeling' that something is not right, but no evidence to act
- Allowing individuals to disrupt meetings so that difficult topics do not get discussed

4. HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Professionals need to be brave and have what are often difficult or awkward conversations. These could be domestic abuse, inadequate housing, self neglect, social isolation, mental health, drugs and alcohol, or issues between a person and carer.

- Plan the conversation in advance, be respectfully nosy
- Focus on the needs of the service user
- Be non-confrontational, do not blame, stick to the facts
- Ensure decision-making is justifiable and transparent
- Show empathy and compassion whilst being real and honest
- Recognise disguised compliance
- Make a professional judgement



5. USEFUL SKILLS FOR BEING PROFESSIONALLY CURIOUS

- Acknowledge 'gut feelings' whilst seeking evidence to underpin those feelings
- Recognise disguised compliance
- Plan the conversation in advance to include past to inform your assessment of the future
- Incorporate information from other practitioners
- Acknowledge your own values and personal bias can affect judgement
- Use risk assessment tools alongside professional judgement
- Consider different theories and research to understand the whole picture
- Be open-minded, think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable
- Pay as much attention to how people look and behave as to what they say
- Hold a multiagency meeting if you need support
- Have empathy for the lived experience of the individual
- Be alert to those who prevent you from engaging with the individual

6. TOP TIPS

- Look, Listen, Ask, Check.
- Do not be afraid to ask the obvious question.
- A 'fresh pair of eyes' on a case can help.
- Focus on the need, voice and 'lived experience' of the individual.
- Be confident in your own judgement.
- Share your view with other practitioners, even if it differs from theirs.

7. MANAGERS CAN DEVELOP PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY BY:

- Playing 'devil's advocate' and encouraging staff to think again about cases
- Discussing alternative hypotheses about what could be happening
- Setting up group supervision to stimulate debate and learning
- Presenting cases from the perspective of others involved
- Asking practitioners to show the evidence
- reviewing efficiency and reducing stress and pressure on professionals to
- Recognising when a case could benefit from a fresh pair of eyes
- Not closing cases too quickly

