



## One Minute Guide to Professional Curiosity, Professional Challenge and Escalation

Professional curiosity is an emerging theme in both local and national SARs. It has long been recognised as an important concept in children's services, but is equally relevant to work with adults.

### What is Professional Curiosity?

***Professional curiosity has been described as the need for practitioners to practice 'respectful uncertainty'... to enquire deeper using proactive questioning and challenge... to understand one's own responsibility... to know when to act... not to make assumptions or take things at face value.***

### Professional curiosity requires practitioners to:

- THINK 'OUTSIDE THE BOX', beyond the usual professional role
- CONSIDER INDIVIDUALS' circumstances HOLISTICALLY – who else is involved in care delivery
- Show a real willingness to ENGAGE with the individual AND UNDERSTAND their circumstances
- LISTEN to the voice of the service user / OBSERVE any changes in behaviour
- Agencies / practitioners need to work together and be PROFESSIONALLY CURIOUS
- Professionals need to be prepared to "THINK THE UNTHINKABLE" – think objectively about the information presented - be prepared to accept information that does not fit with previous assumptions and assessments
- A culture of THINKING OBJECTIVELY and keeping an open mind about what we see, hear and the evidence as it is presented to us
- To apply CRITICAL EVALUATION TO ANY INFORMATION THEY RECEIVE, from the individual or elsewhere.
- **Failure to act upon evidence or information can be serious for the individual concerned**

### Barriers to Professional Curiosity:

- Disguised compliance – a family member or carer gives the appearance of co-operating with services to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and ultimately to reduce professional involvement.
- Professional optimism - professionals can tend to rationalise away new or escalating risks despite clear evidence to the contrary.
- Normalisation – ideas and actions come to be seen as normal and so cease to be questioned and not recognised as potential risk

- Not seeing whole picture, or assessing each event separately
- Professional deference - defer to higher status professional, who has limited contact with person – have confidence to challenge others' opinions
- Confirmation bias – looking for evidence that supports a pre-held view
- Dealing with uncertainty – unsubstantiated concerns and retracted allegations still need to be investigated

Other barriers to professional curiosity:

Poor supervision, complexity and pressure of work, changes of case worker leading to repeatedly 'starting again', closing cases too quickly, fixed thinking/preconceived ideas and values, and a lack of openness to new knowledge.

### **What is Professional Challenge?**

Disagreements or concerns can arise for practitioners and it is important they are resolved as effectively and swiftly as possible. It is essential that where disagreements or concerns arise they do not adversely affect the outcomes for individuals.

Disagreements and concerns are most likely to arise in relation to:

- professional practice or decision making
- criteria for referrals
- outcomes of assessments
- service provision and timeliness of interventions
- lack of information sharing and poor communication

If you do have a disagreement or concern about another practitioner or agency, remember:

- remain respectful at all times including throughout the escalation process
- professional disagreements can help us improve outcomes
- expect to be challenged; working together effectively depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies
- disagreements should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible, in the first instance by individual practitioners and /or their line manager
- encourage a stance of professional curiosity and challenge from a supportive base

### **When To Escalate Professional Concerns or Disagreements**

Practitioners and agencies have a responsibility to challenge when it is believed that other agencies are failing to recognise potential harm, abuse or neglect and/or their response leaves individuals at risk.

If a professional is concerned about care being delivered to an individual with care and support needs and has not been able to resolve it through line management support and discussion with the other agency/service; they should escalate as appropriate through organisational processes and escalate to the Local Authority Safeguarding Team for further discussion whilst keeping the focus on the adult in need.

The 4LSAB Safeguarding Adults Board have an Escalation Policy which should only be used within safeguarding practice, not for other matters, such as assessment for more general care and support needs, eligibility for care and support and funding of

care and support needs are outside the scope of this process. Individual practitioner performance is also outside the scope of this document. Also, the adult subject to the safeguarding concern and/or their representative should, wherever possible, be aware of the dispute and have an opportunity to express their views and wishes, in particular, that in raising a dispute, the worker has full consideration of the adult's wellbeing <http://www.hampshiresab.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safeguarding-Adults-Escalation-Protocol.pdf>