

Professional Curiosity



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Introduction

Professional curiosity is an emerging theme in the Safeguarding Adult Reviews nationally. It has long been recognised as an important concept in Children's Services, but is equally relevant to work with adults



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Aims of today's session

- To consider the value, purpose and importance of 'professional curiosity' in assessing risk and identifying safeguarding concerns
- To learn from Safeguarding Adult Reviews, both local and national,
- To identify what 'professional curiosity looks like in practice and identify some of the barriers to engaging 'professional curiosity'
- To share good practice and practical tips on how to apply proactive questioning and active listening to ensure the importance of 'Making Safeguarding Personal'



Why is Professional Curiosity Important?

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Skills needed

- A curious mindset
- Creative approaches
- TEDS – explained later
- Observing, using your senses
- Listening to your gut
- Recording subjective observations objectively



Barriers to Professional Curiosity

- Time pressure
- Professional deference
- Disguised compliance
- The 'rule of optimism'
- Accumulating risk
- Record keeping

Professional Curiosity in
Safeguarding Adults:
Strategic Briefing 2020

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Why is professional curiosity important?

'Professional curiosity is "the golden thread" that is required for safeguarding adults to work. It is a reoccurring theme picked up in Safeguarding Adult Reviews and audits. Promoting professional curiosity is a fundamental aspect of working together to keep children, young people and adults safe.

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

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Is exercising professional curiosity easy and straightforward?

- Not always....Especially if working with parents/ carers/ family members who demonstrate disguised compliance or coercive control.
- In these cases professionals will need to exercise most curiosity.
- No.... If you need to challenge other professionals viewpoints and lack of professional curiosity

Sam's case study

- Mrs Smith had a diagnosis of advanced dementia and Mr Smith was her carer
- Safeguarding received a referral from a community OT suggesting that Mr Smith was being coercive and controlling and not accepting professional advice
- The GP practice nurses were also worried that Mr Smith was not following medical advice
- Outcome – no safeguarding concerns (thankfully) but how did we get to this point!

TOP TIPS

- Look
- Listen
- Ask
- Check out



Learning From Safeguarding Adult Reviews



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What is a Safeguarding Adults Review?

Safeguarding Adult Boards (SABs) must arrange a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) SAR when an adult:

- **with needs for care and support** in its area
 - dies as a result of known or suspected abuse or neglect, **or**
 - the SAB knows or suspects that the adult has experienced serious abuse or neglect
 - **and** there is concern that partner agencies could have worked more effectively to protect the adult



Local Learning

- Concerns considered a 'Lifestyle Choice'
- Lack of exploration of behaviours
- A 'a no news is good news' approach
- Accepting statements on face value
- Lack of triangulation
- Mental Capacity



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National Learning

“What also emerges from a detailed reading of the reviews is the significance of the impact of a life event, such as loss of a parent. That impact may well be hidden from view, at least initially, and highlights both the importance of time to establish a trustworthy relationship and skill in sensitively exploring emotional distress.” [p60](#)



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National Learning – Living Situations

Findings in SARs in relation to people's living situations and location of abuse:

*“introduces an important question, namely whether reviews and oversight of care provision, in whatever setting it is offered, are sufficient robust, and whether health, housing and social care practitioners express **sufficient professional curiosity and authoritative doubt** when they have the opportunity to intervene to prevent abuse and neglect, or protect individuals from significant harm” [p71](#).*



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National Learning – Self Neglect

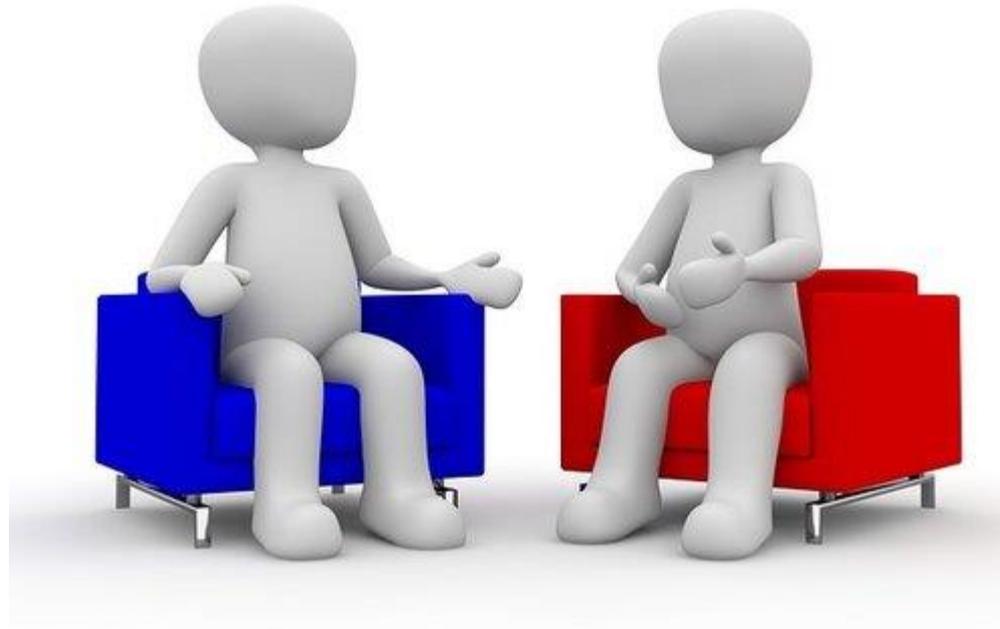
Cases of self-neglect feature strongly amongst SARs, but much less so in national data for enquiries under section 42 Care Act (2014) ([p27](#)).



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National Learning - Supervision



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How to 'do it'

How to have a professionally curious conversation



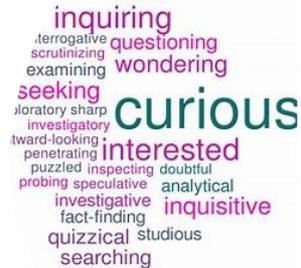
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What makes you curious here?

- 2 people live at a property.
- An ambulance crew have attended a property and are worried about self-neglect.
- This is based on the house being very cold even though there is a new heater in the room, the person looking unkempt, thin, a metal bucket in the corner of the room with urine and cigarette butts in it and the fridge having little food in it.
- One of the people is taken to the local emergency department due to concerns about dehydration. They have now been discharged back home and you are due to visit.



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What next?

- Trust, respect, relationship. Acknowledge suspicion and privacy. Be honest and explain the reasons for your presence.
- Adopt a position of the novice in the person's life. You want to learn about their situation.
- Self-neglect and someone to safeguard – [Elsie's story](#) - Community Care
- Asking questions can feel inquisitorial for both parties. You might wish to try prefacing questions with "May I ask you a question/some questions?" or, "I might need to ask you some personal questions to really understand what has been happening for you"
- There is no value in asking questions if the person doesn't believe you are listening to the answers. Show you are interested (Active listening)

TEDS

"Tell me"

"Explain to me"

"Describe to me"

"Show me"



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Some examples you might want to try in the earlier scenario

- The ambulance crew were worried that your house felt very cold. Could you tell me a bit more about that...
- Could you tell me about what you eat each day...
- Would you explain to me who else lives at home...
- Could you tell me a little more about that...
- I'm really interested in what a normal day is like for you. Would you describe that for me...
- The ambulance crew said that they saw a bucket in your room with urine and cigarettes in it. I'm a bit curious about that. Could you tell me more...
- Describe to me what its like living here...
- Explain to me what you would do if you didn't feel safe or needed help...



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Talking the talk or walking the walk?

- Mental capacity, executive dysfunction and show me...
- Can you show me how you do that?
- Can you show me where that is?
- Can you show me how that works?
- Can you show [person] how to do that?



Example Questions

- Explain to me how you or members of your family deal with conflict?
- How do adults in the household respond to stress?
- What arrangements are in place for the child or young person to access education?
- Who are the professionals working with you or individual members of your family?
- What is it like to be (name) living in this family/household?
- Describe to me a typical day for you?
- Who is this with you at this appointment?
- Who is living with you?



Example Questions (cont.)

- Why are you not at school?
- What is the first thing you think of when you get up in the morning and/or the last thing you think of before you go to sleep?
- When were you last happy?
- Do you feel safe?
- What do you look forward to?
- Are there people who regularly visit your home apart from those who live there? Or do you regularly visit others homes?
- Are you in fear of the consequences of doing something, or not doing something?

To Conclude



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Top Tips

Professional Curiosity



Our new One Page Briefing

Seven Minute Briefing: Professional Curiosity



7. Think Family

- A Think Family approach to safeguarding work with adults and their families is essential.
- When meeting with adults, including when completing assessments, professionals need to take opportunities to recognise risk and enquire deeper, **including where that risk relates to another family member or child.**

About Professional Curiosity

- Professional curiosity is an essential part of safeguarding.
- Using professional curiosity is a fundamental aspect of working together to keep adults and children safe.
- Professionals also need to have an awareness of their own personal bias, and how it affects how they see those they are working with

1. What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on information received. It includes:

- Testing out your professional hypothesis
- Not making assumptions
- Not accepting explanations on face value when you have doubts

6. Top Tips: Check Out

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



2. Why is it important

A lack of professional curiosity can lead to:

- Missed opportunities to identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or significant harm
- Assumptions made in assessments of needs and risk which are incorrect and lead to wrong, or no, intervention
- Dismissal of concerns as a person's 'Lifestyle Choice'

5. Top Tips: Ask

Are there direct questions you could ask when you meet the adult or their family which will provide more information about the vulnerability of them or another person?

- Can you show me how to do...? (e.g., something you have a concern about)
- How did you get that injury?
- When do you feel safe?

4. Top Tips: Listen

- Are you being told anything which needs further clarification?
- Are you concerned about what you hear people are saying to each other?
- Is someone trying to tell you something but is finding it difficult to express themselves? If so, how can you help them to do so?

3. Top Tips: Look

- Is there anything about what you see when you meet with the person that prompts questions or makes you feel uneasy?
- Are you observing any behaviour which is indicative of abuse or neglect, including self-neglect?
- Does what you see support or contradict what you're being told?

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Resources: Local

- [SSAB: Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)
- [SSAB: One Page Briefing on Professional Curiosity](#)
- [SSAB: Learning from Serious Cases](#)
- [SSAB: Self Neglect Practice Guidance](#)
- [SSAB: Guidance for Safeguarding Adults in Somerset](#)

Resources: National

- [LGA: Analysis of Safeguarding Adult Reviews: April 2017 - March 2019](#)
- [Ann Craft Trust: What should I say...? Advice for Starting Difficult Conversations](#)

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Resources: National (cont.)

- [Professional Curiosity: The What? Why? and How? Student Connect Webinar 72 \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Rochdale SAB: Safeguarding Adults Week 2021 - Professional Curiosity](#)
- [Safeguarding Nottingham Rethinking 'Did Not Attend'](#)
(Primarily regarding children but similar concepts would apply to an adult with care and support needs who is reliant in others to bring them to appointments)
- [NSPCC Talking about difficult topics](#)
(This is a Children's based resource pack but similar concepts apply when working with adults) .

Questions



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