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What is Professional Curiosity?

Children and young people affected by abuse or neglect rarely disclose their experiences directly. They may feel frightened, ashamed, or unaware that their situation is different from others. Professional curiosity means actively exploring and understanding what is happening in someone's life rather than making assumptions or accepting information at face value. This involves looking for signs that something is wrong, asking direct questions, and reflecting on all the evidence.

Practitioners have a responsibility to recognise when individuals cannot, or will not, speak up for themselves. By identifying the signs and uncovering the truth, we can provide the help needed to ensure their safety.

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Check out.

Treat what people say with 'respectful uncertainty'. This means take what people say seriously, but then look for other information that confirms or challenges what you have been told.

Be the first to check out your concerns, be proactive, don't wait for others to ask you. Can you build a picture of what is happening?

Are other professionals involved? Have other professionals seen or been told the same as you? Are there family members you could speak to?

Are others concerned? If so, what action has been taken so far?

Have you recorded your concerns? Have you discussed them with a manager?

Refer to your organisation's policy and procedures.

Consider the need to raise a safeguarding concern.

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Why is Professional Curiosity important?

It enables a practitioner to have a holistic view and understanding of what is happening within a family, what life is like for a child or an adult person and fully assess potential risks.

A lack of professional curiosity can lead to missed opportunities to identify less obvious indicators of vulnerability or significant harm.

We know that in the worst circumstances this has resulted in death or serious abuse as confirmed by the learning from case reviews, both nationally and locally where practitioners have responded to presenting issues in isolation.

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How to be professionally curious.

- Ask openly: Question families in a way that shows your goal is safety, not judgement.
- Challenge assumptions: Incorporate unexpected information into your understanding, even if it contradicts your initial views.
- Seek clarity: Verify details with families or other professionals.
- Triangulate information: Reflect on and compare what you see, hear, and know to form a clearer picture.
- Observe closely: Look for visual clues that may not align with what you've been told.

Follow the Look, Listen, Ask, Check Out approach to ensure a thorough and balanced perspective.

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Look

Is there anything about what you see that makes you feel uneasy?

Could what you see be a sign or symptom of abuse, neglect or self-neglect?

Consider why someone is behaving a certain way; think broadly about what this might mean?

Does what you see match with what you are being told? Could there be an alternative explanation?

Be aware of people's responses to questions and read body language; are they seeming reluctant to answer the question, is something being held back? If so, why might that be.

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Listen

Does something not sound right?

Are you being told anything which needs further explanation?

Have you spoken to the person that you are concerned about? Are they free to give their views? Can you talk to them on their own?

Does what you hear, match with what you have seen? Could there be an alternative explanation?



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Ask

Are there questions you can ask, to explore what you have seen or been told?

Maintain an open mind - Try to avoid making assumptions, taking information at face value and jumping to conclusions.

Is your use of language, clear, accessible, understandable to the person you are talking to?