



Professional curiosity (series of 4 articles)	Bexley Safeguarding Children’s Board
I. What is professional curiosity?	June 2017

Professional curiosity is a practice mind-set and a communication skill. It is about keeping an open mind, considering alternative possibilities and working with families to better understand their circumstances.

A recurring theme in Serious Case Reviews nationally has been a need for practitioners and managers to be curious, sceptical, to think critically and systematically, but to act compassionately.

So what does this mean in practice?

We all have a duty to safeguard children but sometimes it can be difficult to know if a child is suffering from abuse or neglect.

[What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused](#) provides guidance for practitioners on understanding and identifying abuse and neglect, and how to take action.

There are four key steps in the guidance to help practitioners identify and respond to possible abuse or neglect.



How can professional curiosity support practitioners to safeguard children?

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| Be alert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know the indicators of abuse or neglect (insert hyperlink) Be alert to the way in which the child’s developmental needs, parenting capacity and family / environmental factors come together. Consider information from different sources; the child, case history, family members, friends, neighbours, other professionals. Ascertain the child’s views, what is their lived experience? |
| Question behaviours | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the narrative fit with information from other sources? Adopt a position of respectful uncertainty and ask questions. Are there any patterns or connections? Consider all alternative hypotheses. Hold the child in mind, is this good enough? |
| Ask for help | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the case in supervision and be open to helpful challenge to provide further analysis. Use a Signs of Safety approach to help you reflect: What is going well? What are you worried about? Identify gaps and recognise what you don’t know. Talk through your worries with the safeguarding lead in your agency or contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for advice: 020 3045 5440. |

Refer

- Keep accurate records and provide additional dates and details where possible.
- Make clear distinctions between fact and opinion, and clearly outline your worries or concerns.
- Be comprehensive and do not presume information is already known.
- Follow up your referral and report any new information.

Respectful uncertainty and multi-agency working

The respectful uncertainty needed in work with families is also required in multi-agency working where challenge of other professionals' opinions or judgments may be necessary. Recent analysis of Serious Case Reviews found that an organisational climate which supports and encourages sustained professional challenge is essential if the difficult tasks of recognising and responding to harm to the child are to be more effective.

What next?

This is the first of four pieces on professional curiosity to feature in the BSCB e-Bulletin. The information provided in these guides is intended to support practitioners with brief but key points to think about in their practice.