

1 Introduction

Professional curiosity was an issue picked up in Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board's (SSAB) [Safeguarding Adult Review \(SAR\) concerning Alan](#). This theme is also reflected in other SARs nationally. It has long been recognised as an important concept in Children's Services but is equally relevant to working with adults at risk of abuse and/or neglect.

2 Professional curiosity

is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening with an individual and/or within a family. It is about:

- Enquiring deeper and using proactive questioning and appropriate challenge
- Understanding one's own responsibility and knowing when to act rather than taking things at 'face value'
- Thinking outside the box, considering all of the family's circumstances holistically - "Think Family"
- Being curious, engaging with individuals and families, gathering historical and current information

3 Key Points

- Have empathy and hear and value the voice of the individual/their representative
- Know the factors that are barriers to professional curiosity and take steps to reduce them
- Be courageous and ask the 'difficult' questions - challenge appropriately where required
- Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable
- Consider how you can articulate 'intuition' into an evidenced, professional view and discuss 'gut feelings' with other professionals
- Be prepared to appropriately challenge or query the existing processes and culture of your and other organisations

Further Information

- [SSAB Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)
- [Professional Curiosity and Challenge - resources for practitioners](#)
- [Bitesize Guide to Professional Curiosity](#)
- [Resolving Professional Differences](#)
- [SSAB Complex Adults Risk Management \(CARM\)](#)

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4 Barriers to Professional Curiosity

- **Disguised compliance** - a family member or carer gives the appearance of co-operating to avoid raising suspicions
- **The 'rule of optimism'** - workers may rationalise away new or escalating risk despite clear evidence to the contrary
- **Accumulating risk** - workers may respond to each situation or new risk discretely, rather than looking at the cumulative effect of a series of incidents
- **Normalisation** - Where an individual's ideas and actions are seen as 'normal' and cease to be questioned
- **Professional deference** - a tendency to defer to the opinion of 'higher status' professionals
- **Confirmation bias** - looking for evidence that confirms a pre-held view

Managers can support staff by:

- Asking questions to challenge and support workers to think more widely around cases
- Present alternative hypotheses about what could be happening
- Provide opportunities for group supervision which can stimulate debate and curious questioning
- Promote reflective practice and provide regular, effective supervision
- Monitor workloads and encourage workers to talk about and support them to address issues of stress and pressure

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5 Good Practice in

professional curiosity occurs when workers:

- Attend good quality training
- Have access to good management support and supervision
- Have empathy
- Remain diligent
- Always try to see the individual separately
- Listen to people who speak on behalf of the person
- Do not rely on the opinion of one person, wherever possible
- Have an analytical and reflective approach
- Develop skills and knowledge to hold 'difficult conversations'

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