

01 Background

Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting service users versions of events, or disclosures, at face value. This has also been described by Lord Laming (2003) in the Victoria Climbié inquiry as the need for practitioners to practice **'respectful uncertainty'**.

Children rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioners, and if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviours or comments. This makes identifying abuse and neglect challenging for professionals across

agencies. The first step in keeping children safe is to be **professionally curious** and to engage with

children and their families at the earliest opportunity before problems escalate into crisis.

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What to do?

- Be familiar with Forth Valley Multiagency Guidance **"Working with Resistance: A Complex Challenge for Practice"** (2017).
- Share your concerns and assessment findings with partner agencies.
- Never disregard information because it does not fit with your understanding – be open to the unexpected and willing to change your opinion.
- Do not make presumptions about what is happening in a family home.
- Use supervision to support reflective practice and be prepared to challenge and be challenged.
- [Have you watched this video?](#)
- [After that try this other useful video](#)

Why it matters:

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Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking and perceptual bias. Repeated inquiry reports show the extraordinary lengths to which some parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through disguised compliance and the review for Daniel Pelka (2013) emphasised the need for professionals to be able to **"think the unthinkable"** rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home.

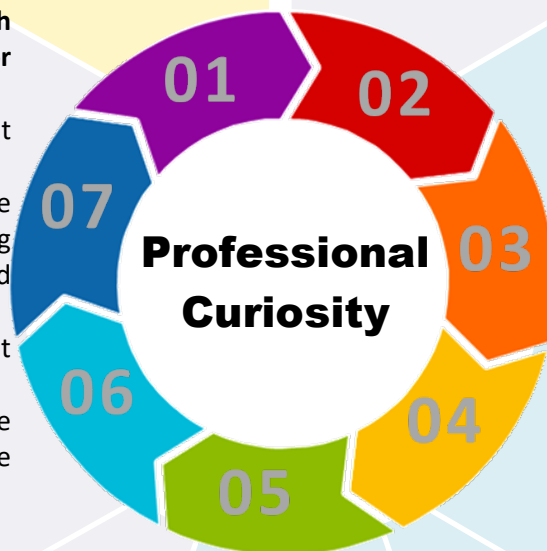
The Liam Fee review (2017) highlighted **"a lack of professional curiosity and parents' accounts and reports of events were rarely challenged"**.

Assessments are fallible, and contexts constantly change. Therefore, professionals need to remain curious and to keep their judgements under constant critical review.

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Barriers to Curiosity

1. Losing focus on the child through over-identifying with parents/carers.
2. Over-optimism.
3. Making assumptions.
4. Being afraid to raise concerns / question challenging families.
5. Time constraints (e.g. due to workload).
6. Lacking the confidence or assertiveness to ask sensitive questions.
7. Conformational bias/mind made up.



Questions

- Am I remaining **curious** and inquisitive about what I am seeing and assessing?
- Am I open to new information?
- How confident am I that I have sufficient information upon which to base my judgements?
- Do I need to review the strength of evidence contained in my assessment.
- Would I be prepared to change my mind?
- Is sufficient time being allowed for critical reflection on my decision making at supervision?

Information:

professional curiosity is supported by

- A child centred approach with an ability to create a suitably safe and trusting listening environment for children and young people.
- Identifying and exploring what is not discussed as much as what is.
- An openness to other perspectives/ willingness to try different responses.
- Judgements based on evidence not optimism.
- An ability to use relationship based practice with families whilst being constantly aware of the child's needs/ degree to which these needs are met.
- Critical thinking skills, sensitivity and persistence.
- Familiarity with **Forth Valley Interagency Child Protection Guidance (2016)**, a willingness to research, ask questions and seek specialist advice, for example, in relation to culture and race, disability, drug/alcohol use.
- Access to high quality supervision where practitioners and their supervisors routinely play their own 'devil's advocate' in considering alternative actions, explanations or hypotheses.

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