

## 1. Professional Curiosity

Professional curiosity is a central theme in serious case reviews and is an essential skill for practitioners to use in the protection of children, young people and adults. This briefing aims to raise awareness of the need for professional curiosity and advises how practitioners can access help and support.

## 7. Things to Remember

Professional curiosity is key to protecting children and adults at risk of harm – be interested in the individuals you are working with and fully explore any concerns rather than making assumptions. Be aware of your own values affecting judgements. Triangulate any information you receive. Seek independent confirmation of individuals' accounts and weigh up details from a range of sources and/or practitioners. Focus on the need, voice and “**lived experience**” of the individual or family. Ask relevant questions and be ‘**brave**’. Be prepared to have difficult conversations. Reflective practice and regular supervision are ways to support practitioners to adopt professional curiosity as a non-judgemental and holistic approach to protecting children and adults at risk of harm. More information about our public protection training and supervision guidance can be accessed by clicking **the link** below to the Public Protection Team BEACON webpage

## 6. Be Self Aware in Practice

Practitioners should exercise a degree of caution in their judgements and ensure good triangulation of information. This means seeking independent views from a range of sources or practitioners, particularly when there appear to be discrepancies. Practitioners need to be aware of their own values without letting them influence their decision making and practice in a way that is non-judgemental and anti-discriminatory. **Think the unthinkable; believe the unbelievable** and consider how to articulate ‘**intuition**’ into an evidenced, professional view.

## 5. Having Difficult Conversations

Having open discussions with individuals, parents or carers when there are concerns about a child or adult often provokes anxiety in practitioners. Practitioners need to be brave and have what are often difficult or awkward conversations about the issues affecting individuals or families. These could relate to domestic abuse, inadequate housing, self-neglect, social isolation, mental health, drugs and alcohol, or issues between a person and carer. Professional challenge is part of good child and adult protection practice.

## 2. What is it?

Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill used by practitioners to explore and understand what is happening for an individual or within a family, rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. This has been described as the need for practitioners to practice **respectful uncertainty** and to know when to act. The first step in keeping children, young people and adults safe is to be **professionally curious** and to engage with them at the earliest opportunity.

## 3. Barriers to Professional Curiosity

It is widely recognised that there are many barriers to being professionally curious. Some of these barriers are: **disguised compliance** – this is where a family member or carer gives the appearance of cooperating with practitioners to avoid raising suspicions; The ‘**rule of optimism**’ – this is a well known dynamic in which practitioners might rationalise any new or escalating risks despite clear evidence to the contrary; **knowing but not knowing** – this is about having a sense that something isn't right but not knowing exactly what, making it difficult to grasp the problem and take action.

## 4. Think Family

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 abusive carers can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through **disguised compliance** and the need for professionals to be able to **think the unthinkable** rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home. Think Family approach to our work with children and adults and their families is essential in protecting children.