

Background

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All professionals who come into contact with children, parents and carers in the course of their work need to be aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and alert to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. This requires professionals to be curious and inquisitive about family circumstances and events so that they can effectively identify vulnerabilities and potential or actual risks of harm. Children rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioners and, if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments. This makes identifying abuse and neglect difficult 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.

Why It Matters - Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking and perceptual bias. Munro (2005b) comments that repeated inquiry reports show the extraordinary lengths to which some abusive parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through disguised compliance and the Daniel Pelka review emphasised the need for professionals to be able to **"think the unthinkable"** rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home

02

07

Useful Info - Consider disguised compliance

Verify and corroborate information with others. Consider: Disguised Compliance. (Disguised compliance involves parents or carers giving the appearance of co-operating with agencies to avoid raising suspicions and allay concerns).

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Key Points

What to do/consider

- Looking
- Listening
- Asking respectful direct open questions
- Respectful challenge
- Checking out / what are other professionals observing (GP; HV/SN/MW/Portal/Evolve/Social Care/Education)
- Reflecting and engaging in **safeguarding supervision**
- Recognising coercion and control and its impact.



03

Information.

Professional Curiosity - also described by Lord Laming (2003) in the Victoria Climbié inquiry as **"respectful uncertainty"** - is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, " , applying critical evaluation to any information received and maintaining an open mind. By acquiring an open minded, inquiring and curious mind-set, professionals can avoid linear and absolute explanations by exploring alternative, multiple perspectives on a situation

04 Consent - Professional Curiosity is supported by

- A child focused approach with an ability to create 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.
- An ability to build partnership style relationships with families whilst being constantly aware of the child's needs/ degree to which they are met
- Critical thinking skills, sensitivity and persistence.
- Judgements based on evidence **not optimism**.
- Familiarity with local Safeguarding procedures (<https://www.escb.co.uk/media/2086/set-procedures-oct-2019-updated-southend-logo.pdf> <https://suffolksp.org.uk/working-with-children-and-adults/children/policies-procedures-and-guidance-children-and-young-people/>)
- Attending **Safeguarding Supervision** where practitioners and their managers routinely play their own 'devil's advocate in advocate' in considering alternative actions,

The Law - Suggested Probing Questions

Who lives in your home?
 What other adults are involved in your children's lives?
 What other professionals do you have contact with eg HV; SW; Probation; Drug Advisory; Police; Housing
 Have you ever had a SW? When? Why?

05