

## Seven Minute Briefing - Professional Curiosity



Stockport Safeguarding Partnership produces 7-minute briefings on various current safeguarding issues and learning from reviews. They are intended to be simple so that the reader can absorb the information easily and teams can use them within meetings as a team-based learning exercise.

**Safeguarding  
Adults  
in Stockport**

### What is professional curiosity and why is it important?

Professional curiosity is the capacity and skills of communication to explore and understand what is happening for a person rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. It requires skills of looking, listening, asking direct questions and being able to hold difficult conversations. Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are a fundamental aspect of working together to keep adults safe from harm. This approach is important in helping to identify abuse and neglect which is less obvious and can ensure that the right information is gathered to assess needs and risks. Being professionally curious is necessary to fully understand a situation and the risks an individual may face which are not always immediately obvious.

### Developing skills in professional curiosity

#### LOOK

- Is there anything about what you see when you meet with the adult / their family that makes you feel uneasy or prompts questions?
- Do you see behaviours which indicate abuse or neglect, including coercion and control?
- Does what you see contradict or support what you are being told?
- How are family members interacting with each other and with you?

#### LISTEN

- Are you being told anything that needs further clarification?
- Is someone trying to tell you something?
- Are you concerned about what you hear family members say to each other?
- Is someone in the family trying to tell you something, but finding it difficult to express themselves or speak openly?
- Make time and space to have a private conversation with an adult who may be at risk of abuse or neglect, or subject to coercion and control.

#### ASK

Research indicates those who experience abuse, including coercion and control want practitioners to ask direct questions and that it is easier to respond to a direct question than offer information independently.

- I've noticed you have this injury. Is there anything going on for you which may have caused this?
- Do you feel frightened of anyone?
- Do you feel safe living here?
- Who makes decisions about what you can and cannot do?
- Some of the things you have told me today concern me. Is somebody hurting you or are you afraid someone might hurt you in the future?

#### CLARIFY

- Are other professionals involved? What information do they have?
- Have other professional seen the same as you?
- Are professionals being told the same or different things?
- Are others concerned?
- If so, what action has been taken and is there anything else which should or could be done by you or someone else?

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### Holding difficult conversations

Tackling disagreements or hostility, raising concerns and giving information that may not be well received are incredibly challenging and difficult things to do. The following tips can support practitioners in holding difficult conversations:

- Plan in advance to ensure there will be time to cover essential elements of the conversation.
- Keep the agenda focused on the topics you need to discuss.
- Be clear and unambiguous.
- Have courage and focus on the needs of the adult at risk.
- Be non-confrontational and non-blaming.
- Stick to the facts and have evidence to back up what you say.
- Ensure decision making is justifiable and transparent.
- Show empathy, consideration and compassion.
- Demonstrate congruence i.e. make sure tone, body language and content of speech are consistent.
- Consider the adult's needs for advocacy support.

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### Additional Resources and Further Reading

[Stockport Safeguarding Adults Policy & Procedures](#)

[Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)

[Research in Practice - Professional curiosity in safeguarding adults](#)

[Research in Practice for adults – Coercive control Tools and Resources](#)

[Waltham Forest Professional Curiosity Video](#)

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From a number of reviews recently commissioned in Stockport we have highlighted significant learning around the importance of professional curiosity in supporting an effective safeguarding response.

The SAR with pseudo name [Ivy](#) was published in early 2021 and learning from this case can be found here.

And further learning around professional curiosity can be found from the Multi agency learning review on a 63 years old man with pseudo name [Tom](#).

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A range of safeguarding courses are available through the Stockport Learning Pool if you require further information about this briefing, please contact [lsb@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:lsb@stockport.gov.uk)

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With thanks to Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board and Waltham Forest Council for kindly sharing their resources on professional curiosity.