

7-Minute Briefing

Professional Curiosity

www.wolverhampton safeguarding.org.uk

1 Background

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in Wolverhampton, and regionally, have repeatedly identified that the involved professionals have become fixed in their understanding and analysis of the issues, leading to 'pervasive belief systems' about cases, a lack of professional curiosity and unwillingness to consider alternative hypotheses. Children will rarely disclose abuse and neglect themselves and, if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments. All agencies and practitioners need to work together – the first step is to be professionally curious.

2 What is professional curiosity?

Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening to children and within a family, rather than making assumptions or accepting initial explanations. This can be described as the need for practitioners to practice 'respectful uncertainty' and being open to exploring different understandings.

3 Think the unthinkable

It is natural for a practitioner to want to believe the best of a family, being overly optimistic, or just accepting another's view. Thinking the unthinkable isn't about assuming the worst, it is considering all possibilities. Keep an open mind and be able to think objectively about the evidence presented, and if it changes over time. Be prepared to accept information that does not fit with previous assumptions and assessments.



4 What is disguised compliance?

This involves a parent or carer giving the appearance of co-operating with agencies to avoid raising suspicions to allay professional concerns and, ultimately to diffuse professional intervention. Examples can include a sudden increase in school attendance, not reporting domestic abuse to the police so it appears that it has stopped happening, attending a run of appointments and engaging with professionals for a short period of time.

5 How can I develop my skills?

- Talk to other professionals, promote healthy challenge so you can all work together to understand the child
- Think the unthinkable
- Never assume and, be wary of assumptions already made
- Pay as much attention to how people look and behave as to the attention paid to what they are saying

6 How can I develop my skills?

- Use case history and explore information from the child, the family, as well as other professionals (triangulation)
- Review records, record accurately, check facts and feedback
- Be open-minded, don't take everything at face value

7 How can managers help?

- Managers can maximise opportunities for professionally curious practice to flourish by:
- Playing the 'devil's advocate' and presenting an alternative hypothesis to explore
 - Challenging other professionals to explore the range of possible explanations for a situation