



Professional curiosity in safeguarding adults

Professional curiosity is a concept which has been recognised as important in the area of safeguarding children for many years. More recently, Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) have highlighted a similar need for professional curiosity in safeguarding adults with care and support needs (Braye et al., 2014; Preston-Shoot, 2017). Curiosity is required to support practitioners to question and challenge the information they receive, identify concerns and make connections to enable a greater understanding of a person's situation.

Adults involved in safeguarding enquiries may feel embarrassed, ashamed, hurt or traumatised. Being curious by asking sensitive and respectful questions will allow information to be discovered and enable appropriate support to be provided (Local Government Association, 2017). This Strategic Briefing draws from research and SARs to examine the nature of professional curiosity, some of the barriers that inhibit professionally curious practice, and the enablers that strategic leaders can put in place to create the conditions for a culture of curiosity in their organisations.

Research highlighted in this briefing indicates that there are enablers within organisations which support professional curiosity to flourish:

- > Involving people
- > Time and capacity
- > Structure and working practices
- > Recording, processes and procedures
- > Supervision and support
- > Legal and safeguarding literacy
- > Learning and development
- > Open culture
- > Partnership work

The appendices on page 21 includes a case study to illustrate the ways in which barriers to professional curiosity can manifest in practice situations, and poses questions for managers and senior leaders to consider.

The importance of professional curiosity

Research has identified that the literature on professional curiosity in safeguarding is limited (Braye et al., 2014, Morgan, 2017; Thacker et al., 2019; Preston-Shoot, 2020). However, much can be learned and applied about the conditions that prompt and support professionally curious practice from children's safeguarding (Brandon et al., 2012; Broadhurst et al., 2010; Burton & Revell, 2018; Mantell & Jennings, 2016; Naqvi, 2013; Nicolas, 2016; Revell & Burton, 2016). Nursing has also developed a rich seam of knowledge from which we can draw (Eason, 2010; Kedge & Appleby, 2009, 2010; Kirtley, 2013).

- > In an analysis of 37 SARs and SCRs, Preston-Shoot (2017) identified that 35 per cent contained recommendations that encouraged person-centred care and applied the principles of Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP).
- > 30 per cent of the sampled SARs contained recommendations relating to *Mental Capacity Act* 2005 (MCA) assessments and eight of the reviews (22 per cent) had recommendations relating to a need for better safeguarding literacy.
- > These studies do not quantify the number of SARs that specifically referenced professional curiosity. However, a review of the 113 SARs contained within the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) database at the end of 2019 identified that 16 make explicit reference to professional curiosity (Anka et al., in preparation).
- > Of the remaining SARs, 69 contained features which indicate where professional curiosity could have impacted on some aspect of the situation, such as taking account of case histories, applying relevant legislation appropriately or respectfully challenging or holding difficult conversations (Anka et al., in preparation).
- > In a review of SARs concerning the deaths of people who were homeless, Martineau et al. (2019) note that there were concerns about practitioners' professional curiosity and highlighted examples - including 'lack of interest in the homeless person's story' (p.5) or people not seeing patterns in a person's records that might have led to a safeguarding concern being raised.

Morgan (2017) argues that there is no substitute for professional curiosity in ensuring that assessments are holistic, support is appropriate and multi-agency working is effective. Findings from recent studies of SARs indicate that a greater degree of curiosity may have led to information or action that could have prevented harm (Braye et al., 2014; Preston-Shoot, 2017).

What is professional curiosity?

Burton and Revell (2018) argue that, whilst the concept of professional curiosity has begun to permeate social care practice across sectors, definitions lack clarity and transparency. They suggest constructing a definitional reference point by ‘assembling characteristics that may constitute professional curiosity’ (p.2).

The practice of professional curiosity could be viewed as a collection of personality traits, attitudes, behaviours and skills acquired by individuals:

Personality traits

The personality traits of professionally curious practitioners include, people who ‘want’ and ‘like’ acquiring knowledge (Litman, 2005); people who possess positive, adaptive behaviour traits such as tolerance of anxiety and uncertainty, positive emotional expressiveness, humour, unconventional thinking and a non-defensive, non-critical attitude (Kashdan et al., 2013).

Attitude or outlook

Professionally curious practitioners are tenacious and determined. They have a willingness to learn and apply learning (Eason, 2010) and an openness to new ideas, challenges and ways of doing things (Oshikanlu, 2014). They are interested to learn the person’s story and hear the voice of lived experience (Preston-Shoot, 2020), and want to use strengths-based approaches to both empower and protect (Pattoni, 2012).

Behaviours

The curious practitioner will ask questions to narrow the information gap and gain a full perspective on a situation from the person and others (Oshikanlu, 2014). They will be alerted by tension, uncertainty or repeating patterns in people’s situations, recognising this as a signal to push for further information (Burton & Revell, 2018) and will have the courage to hold difficult conversations and challenge.

Skills

Curious practitioners have good communication skills and will use reflection, skilled use of questions (Broadhurst et al., 2010) and critical analysis (Rutter & Brown, 2015) appropriately, making connections between events and providing full analysis underpinning why decisions are made. They possess legal literacy (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2016), use research and evidence-based practice (Kedge & Appleby, 2009), and will routinely refer to legal and practice guidance.

The characteristics outlined above could enable practitioners and leaders to:

- > identify and take action to explore more deeply what is happening for an individual using proactive questioning
- > make connections and have the confidence to respectfully challenge when appropriate
- > identify potential abuse or neglect, or potentially abusive and/or neglectful situations
- > intervene early and take preventative approaches before a situation deteriorates
- > make and record defensible decisions
- > work in a person-centred way.

During a reflective discussion about professional curiosity between the author of this briefing and a social worker, the pair talked about times of concern when actions that had been requested for the safety of an adult were not carried out. The discussion included the issue of how difficult it can be to tackle this, when practitioners are advised the action is in progress yet an outcome is not being achieved. The social worker provided the following example to illustrate the need to monitor and review, and to be assertive in following up to ensure actions are completed:

When I looked back at my recording, I'd asked the care provider three times to provide the equipment the person needed to keep them safe, but each time I was told it was in progress or it would come next week. I realised the provider was repeatedly telling me they would provide the equipment but failing to follow through, and that I would need to challenge and take firmer action with them – give them a deadline and set out the consequences if they didn't comply.

Professional curiosity is not something that can or should be turned on and off, or used at particular times. Rather, it could be seen as a way of life, a way of professional practice and a way of being – so that a curious approach permeates all aspects of practitioners' interactions. The concept of '**Haltung**', a German term which roughly translates as ethos, mindset or attitude has been used to describe this way of being. In relation to professional curiosity, Mantell and Jennings (2016), citing Buechler (2004), describe a method of practicing as:

A strengths-based and goal-focused approach to engaging with individuals. A partnership of exploration that can enable the client to learn as much about themselves as the practitioner does.

The attributes of curious practitioners can be enabled and encouraged by the organisational environment (Burton & Revell, 2018).

Organisational values that enable curiosity to thrive

The values of an organisation or partnership will have a deep impact on the likelihood that curiosity will thrive. This section examines what strategic leaders, elected members and managers can put in place to support a professionally curious approach.

Involving people in safeguarding adults

The statutory guidance accompanying the *Care Act 2014* (Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), 2020) sets out Safeguarding Adults Boards' (SABs) responsibilities for involving people, and the wider community, in safeguarding adult services.

The Local Government Association's (2020) MSP Toolkit and the Research in Practice Leaders' Briefing *Involving people in safeguarding adults* (Pike, 2016) support this.

The *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007* also requires 'health authorities' (now replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups) to involve people in health services. The *Health and Social Care Act 2012* also places duties on the NHS Commissioning Board, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Monitor and Health and Wellbeing Boards with regards to involvement of patient, carers and the public.

Gathering feedback and enabling people to participate in service reviews or evaluations could encourage curiosity by learning from the perspectives of people who use services. Droy and Lawson (2017) provide examples which strategic leaders could draw on to inform the involvement of people in safeguarding adults. For example, CLASP (Caring, Listening and Supporting Partnership), a self-advocacy group for people with a learning disability, helped the SAB to develop a leaflet on safeguarding which was easy to read. CLASP also developed and delivered training on safeguarding for their peers – see:

www.wokinghamclasp.org.uk/com.

> Key messages

Involving people with lived experience encourages curiosity by learning about what is important to them and how to adapt practice to meet their needs and outcomes (Local Government Association, 2020).



Actions to support curiosity:

- > Develop strategies to involve people and systems to capture feedback from people who have experienced MSP.
- > Decide on an approach to involvement that enables adults and carers to share their feedback with strategic leaders and adapt practice and service development accordingly (Droy & Lawson, 2017).
- > Review the extent to which MSP is implemented in the organisation or across the local system and make changes as necessary (Local Government Association, 2020).



Reflective questions

- > To what extent does your organisation involve people in safeguarding adults in service design and review?
- > How can you be assured that the voice of the person is heard and their views captured during safeguarding enquiries and assessments?

Time and capacity

Mantell and Jennings (2018) point out that time is important in order to build relationships, reflect and seek out specialist knowledge. There is evidence to suggest that, in particular, people who self-neglect require consistency and time to build a relationship and develop trust with their worker (Anka et al., 2017; Braye et al., 2014).

Safeguarding adult reviews have identified that a high turnover of staff has been shown to impact on the ability to develop relationships over time (Swindon SAB, undated). To support recruitment and retention, evidence suggests adequate learning and development, pay, study leave and development opportunities such as secondments, are key to promoting professional curiosity (Mantell and Jennings, 2018).

Sidebotham et al. (2016) point out that, if social care practitioners have too many referrals or too high a workload, there is a risk that things may be missed, or assessments delayed, because of the volume.

He rang up querying the exercises I'd given him and I just told him they were fine and to carry on. It was late in the day and I just needed to get home. I should have looked at the consultant's letter to double check her recommendations, but I didn't. I should have done that shouldn't I? I worried about it all night – what if he did the wrong exercises and made it worse. I checked the letter in the morning and rang him back with some specific advice.

The above example from a physiotherapist is taken from an 'ad hoc' conversation with the author which explored the various ways the capacity for professional curiosity can be reduced, including tiredness or fatigue.

Practitioners who are under great pressure can be more vulnerable to the impact of complex practice issues such as normalisation, accumulating risk (Thacker et al., 2019) or bias in all its forms (Taylor (2010, cited by Lishman et al., 2018).

An example illustrating 'normalisation' can be found in a SAR carried out for Norfolk SAB where Mrs BB, an older woman living with dementia, was found outside in the lanes at unusual times and returned to her home by the police without any other agencies being notified, as her behaviour had become 'normalised' (Brabbs, 2016).

It is important to note that, while a small amount of stress can stimulate curiosity, too much stress and pressure can initiate a 'back away' response (Kashdan et al., 2004). A SAR carried out for Gloucestershire SAB (Clifford, 2016) demonstrates the level of pressure some teams can experience, limiting opportunities for reflection and 'backing away' from curiosity.

The Reablement Team [a team providing short-term care, often after a hospital admission or to avoid admission to hospital, to support people to learn or relearn skills for more independent living] describe the throughput and pressures to balance many demands as being 'like air traffic control'.

Burton and Revell (2018) identify that invoking curiosity is challenging when the work environment is pressured and stressful. Practitioners who are stressed and overworked are much less likely to thoroughly research background information, show 'concerned curiosity', ask questions which may uncover situations that will require further action, dig deeper or offer respectful challenge (Braye et al., 2014).

Kirtley (2013) argues that practice shines a light to find what is hidden and curiosity directs our light.

In some circumstances, working smartly could support more efficient working practices and enable time for reflection. A SAR carried out for Hampshire SAB (2015) recognised the pressures on individual workloads but highlights that good planning and coordination may *save time* in reducing multiple individual communications, and in improving clarity. The Local Government Association (undated resource) offers advice to agencies on how to work more efficiently and effectively by asking the following questions:

- > Does the local digital offer support people to find out information independently?
- > Are the first point of contact services set up to resolve social care queries?
- > How smooth is the system for coordinating multi-agency meetings?
- > How well is information shared across agencies?

Individual managers have a responsibility to their teams to ensure time is managed effectively, in order to allow practitioners to reflect on their work. Time management is closely linked to the experience of stress. Practitioners working in adult social care frequently experience a high volume and complexity of work, often in teams with limited funding or resources.

Kinman and Grant (2019) have developed a resource to help social care leaders and managers create a workplace climate that builds the capacity for resilience. A workbook is available which supports senior managers to understand the foundations for individual resilience and how organisations can foster resilience in their workforce by providing a secure base, showing appreciation and concern for practitioner wellbeing, managing change and time effectively, and fostering a culture of learning.

For more information see:

sword.researchinpractice.org.uk

> Key messages

Evidence suggests that invoking curiosity is challenging when the working environment is pressured and stressful (Burton & Revell, 2018).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Review recruitment and retention practices (such as pay, learning and development offer, policy on secondments/study leave) as adequate staffing levels are key to promoting professional curiosity (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).
- > Develop strategies to promote the efficient use of resources across the system to meet actual and projected need (Local Government Association, undated resource).
- > Build in time for teams to reflect and analyse (Broadhurst et al., 2010).
- > Monitor workloads and worker stress levels (Burton & Revell, 2018).



Reflective questions

- > How can you ensure workloads in your organisation are at safe levels?
- > Have you made arrangements for your practitioners to have enough time and space for reflection?

Structure and working practices

Evidence suggests that ‘hot-desking’ or remote working can present challenges to practising in a curious way (Stevenson, 2019). For practitioners who are not naturally curious, remote working presents fewer opportunities to ask questions or receive respectful challenge from colleagues or managers. Talking with colleagues, asking questions and discussing situations are very important for practitioners across all disciplines to support them to reflect on their work and modify practice accordingly. It is therefore important that formal and informal discussions with managers and colleagues using telephone, video conferencing or other virtual means are built into the working day when practitioners are working remotely.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and consequent need for social distancing has impacted on how adult social care is provided and how practitioners are supported. This has included a significant shift to remote working.

Research in Practice has developed a range of resources to support supervision in the time of COVID-19, including a section on virtual supervision practicalities:
adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk/supervision-and-covid-19

Prior to this, Cooper (2019) presented a number of actions that can be taken to reduce the problems associated with practices which involve less time in an office base. She argues that, with a degree of planning and support, productivity, wellbeing and curiosity can be developed and maintained by:

1. Developing a detailed understanding of people’s thoughts about remote working by consulting teams and listening to their suggestions.
2. Considering designated team areas (including virtual) so practitioners are still surrounded by their team who understand their area of work and can offer support.
3. Focusing on improving remote technology to reduce the frustrations from unreliable technology infrastructure.
4. Considering agile working by creating spaces for different types of work, such as small rooms for confidential work, online team networking spaces, quiet areas, times of the day where people can concentrate, opportunities for informal supportive discussions.

5. Reaching out to team members using telephone, video conferencing or other electronic means to keep in touch. Asking questions to prompt discussion about current workload.
6. Identifying team members who feel isolated and working with them to develop plans to improve their wellbeing and connect them with colleagues.
7. Providing cleaning equipment so the working space can be kept hygienic.
8. Improving or enlarging storage options so staff can easily access the resources they need.
9. Collecting data on desk utilisation to identify times when it’s most difficult to access a desk and give staff alternative options.
10. Asking IT departments about the possibility of introducing desk-booking apps.
11. Creating a more personalised and inspiring environment if staff are unable to personalise their desk, for example with pictures on walls or plants.
12. If staff need to work from a variety of offices and home, ensuring training is available on how to operate remote log-in technology such as accessing phone systems or connecting printers.
13. Considering ways to boost morale by demonstrating practitioners are valued.

(Adapted from Cooper, 2019)

Small changes to structure and working practice can make a big difference to the degree that practitioners feel supported to manage complex work. Felstead and Henseke (2017) found that those working remotely ‘find it difficult to **redraw the line between home and work** as predicted by border theory’. Training opportunities on self-care and wellbeing, focusing on managing home and work life, can be provided to enable those working remotely to manage the use of space and time effectively without intruding into their private and family lives.

Strengths-based working

A strengths-based approach in social care spans a variety of interventions and supporting process. It is integral to the assessment process, the review, the support and/or care planning process, within safeguarding activities and should be used in all settings.

(DHSC, 2019, p. 42)

Strengths-based working requires practitioners to employ curiosity by assessing the totality of the person's life, covering individual strengths, community and resources. They support practitioners to think more freely and work collaboratively with individuals by putting them at the heart of their own care and wellbeing (Department of Health, 2017). This is supported by the *Making Safeguarding Personal Toolkit* (2020):

www.local.gov.uk/msp-toolkit

Morgan (2020) identifies that a strengths-based approach can be a valuable long-term tool in supporting adults who have been abused or who self-neglect. A strengths-based approach builds on individual and community strengths to move the adult from a position of some dependency to one of greater autonomy. Strengths-based approaches highlight the need for continuity. A curious professional will be willing and able to work proportionately with an individual even if the person is reluctant to engage, recognising that some people need more time to develop a trusting relationship (Anka et al., 2017; Braye et al., 2014).

> Key messages

Although evidence suggests that remote working can present challenges to practicing in a curious way (Stevenson, 2019), as we move forward to more remote working, regular contacts with managers and colleagues through informal discussions using telephone, video conferencing or other electronic systems built into the working day can assist practitioners to stay connected with their teams. This will encourage curiosity to develop, particularly for those who are not naturally curious.

Strengths-based approaches rely on practitioners demonstrating curiosity by finding out more about the person in their environment (SCIE, 2015a), and encouraging a narrative approach. Listening to individuals' stories and showing interest and curiosity can lead to new ways to uncover potential harm and risks as well as identification of strengths and assets. This can also lead to new ways to work with risk (Felton & Stickley, 2018) and promote risk enablement.



Actions to support curiosity

- > Develop remote working strategies to enable and encourage frequent discussion and support across teams (Cooper, 2019).
- > Carefully plan the introduction of working practices such as agile or remote working to build in opportunities for regular discussion and support for practitioners (Cooper, 2019).
- > Introduce a strengths-based practice framework, which requires that the person's story is heard and that there is continuity in support (SCIE, 2015a).
- > Work with practitioners to embed their understanding and consolidate their strengths-based and professionally curious practice (SCIE, 2015a).



Reflective questions

- > Are you confident that you have supported your managers to put remote working policies into practice in a way that ensures there will always be some support available?
- > How can you assure yourself that your practitioners have access to support when they need it?
- > Has your organisation introduced a strengths-based approach to practice?
- > Do your practitioners understand the strengths-based approach, and can they explain what this means and apply it in practice?

Recording, processes and procedures

Evidence from SARs suggests that a performance culture which prioritises performance data collection impedes reflection and critical analysis. These are key ingredients for the development of professional curiosity (Swindon SAB, undated). Revell and Burton (2016) identify that practitioners have less opportunity to be curious in overly bureaucratic and unsupportive environments, arguing that compliance with record-keeping has become too dominant in some cases. They argue that practitioners and managers can feel pressured to comply with performance indicators; recognising that, while these are designed to keep people safe, there can be a reduction in curious practice when gathering necessary pieces of information for performance purposes.

Performance management is arguably about establishing a formal, regular and rigorous system of data collection and usage, to indicate trends and understand the impact and outcomes of support for adults and carers. Performance indicators are commonly used across systems to examine and compare performance (NHS Improvement, 2018). However, the *Post Qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care* (DHSC, 2018) stress the responsibility of those in management and leadership roles to:

...ensure the processes they are able to influence are functional and efficient. They should be pro-active in protecting social workers from unnecessary bureaucratic or hierarchical pressures and be able to implement strategies to help manage them.

Both operational managers and strategic leaders have a responsibility to balance the needs of the organisation to collect data and evidence performance, alongside the needs of practitioners to reflect, critically analyse and focus on quality. The Royal College of Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics (2017) states that OTs should be able to access, understand and critically evaluate research and its outcomes, incorporating it into practice. It also states OTs should evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of a service provided, incorporating evidence based outcome measures into practice to demonstrate effectiveness.

Recording practices that allow freedom for practitioners to detail their analysis and rationale for decision-making support this to happen. Gough (2016) reviewed the extent to which desired and final outcomes were expressed in safeguarding enquiries in one authority. Findings indicated that recording was process and data driven, and inconsistent with the need for personalised recording practices brought in with the MSP approach. The Local Government Association (2020) has introduced tools, including the **MSP outcomes framework**, which support agencies across the safeguarding partnership to balance data collection with personalised, reflective approaches.

> Key messages

Evidence from SARs suggests that a performance culture which prioritises performance data collection hinders reflection and critical analysis – key ingredients for professional curiosity (Swindon SAB, undated).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Balance performance data gathering with quality, reflection and critical analysis when designing forms and recording practices, and when carrying out quality assurance checks (Revell & Burton, 2016).



Reflective questions

- > Is there a balance between the need to gather performance data and opportunities for reflection and critical analysis in your organisation?
- > Does your recording system encourage an analytical approach or is its primary focus recording pieces of information for reporting purposes?

Supervision and support

Reflective supervision is ideally placed to engender and model how effective professional curiosity can be achieved and developed across all organisational levels in adult social care (Revell & Burton, 2016). Ruch et al. (2018) illustrate how the reflective internal dialogue of supervisors can encourage curiosity in social workers. They describe the importance of agencies accepting that support is needed for curiosity to develop and become a meaningful part of organisational and professional practice.

Reflective supervision ‘helps social workers to provide the best support possible, particularly in the more complex and demanding cases’ (p. 25) and is considered an important factor in improving working conditions (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018).

In an analysis of SARs, Preston-Shoot (2017) notes that the quality, type and frequency of supervision are linked to whether practitioners possess appropriate knowledge and skills, relating to:

- > safeguarding procedures
- > the *Mental Capacity Act 2005*
- > best practice when working with adults who self-neglect (often presenting challenging human rights issues for practitioners because of the need to **balance respect for an individual’s autonomy with the practitioner’s duty of care** requiring them to protect the adult’s health and wellbeing)
- > strategies for working with people living with dementia
- > knowledge of the law or other technical areas, skills and values.

Reflection and critical analysis are fundamental to a curious approach. Evidence indicates that reflective supervision incorporating opportunities to reflect and analyse, promote emotional resilience, and manage challenging or difficult conversations, stress and pressure, is vital for developing and maintaining professional curiosity (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016).

The Local Government Association’s (2019) *Supervision Framework for Employers of Social Workers* sets an expectation that:

Supervision provides a safe environment for critical reflection, challenge and professional support that operates alongside an organisation’s appraisal process. It includes time for reflection on practice issues that arise in the course of everyday work and can help social workers and their managers to do their jobs more effectively. It enables social workers to develop their capacity to use their experiences to review practice, receive feedback on their performance, build emotional resilience and think reflectively about the relationships they have formed with children, adults and families.

Research in Practice (2018) has developed a suite of resources to promote the wellbeing of adults and carers through keeping them at the centre of supervision. There are also resources and tools to support the implementation of the post qualifying standards for practice supervisors in adult social care (Research in Practice, 2020a):

<https://adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk>

SCIE (undated) suggest that skilled use of reflection and critical thinking within supervision will enable a focus on the *quality* of practice and may at times alert the supervisor to situations where the work of the supervisee is unlikely to promote the best outcome for the person. A model of reflective supervision is presented, based on the adult learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). An experience is reflected on with the support of a manager, leading to critical analysis of actions taken and planning of subsequent actions.

Earle et al. (2016) identify **six principles of reflective supervision**, all of which promote the development of professional curiosity as a way of working to:

1. *Deepen and broaden workers’ knowledge and critical thinking skills.*
2. *Enable confident, creative and independent decision-making.*
3. *Help workers build clear, positive plans.*
4. *Develop a relationship that helps staff feel valued, supported and motivated.*
5. *Support the development of workers’ emotional resilience and self-awareness.*
6. *Promote the development of a learning culture within the organisation.*

Broadhurst et al. (2010) have also compiled a series of reflective questions that managers can ask to prompt their own reflection, and that of their supervisees, about whether they have done all they can to safeguard children.

Anka et al. (in preparation) suggest a number of questions for managers of practitioners working with adults to use to prompt reflection and curiosity:

- > To what extent am I encouraging my supervisees to reflect on their work?
- > Is the supervision I offer reflective, or is it mainly focused on workload management?
- > Do I model a reflective, analytical approach?
- > Am I giving my supervisees enough time to reflect on their work in supervision?
- > Do I offer opportunities for discussion about adults and carers and reflection in team meetings?
- > Am I offering challenge to support critical analysis in work?
- > Am I confident my team members' training and learning is up-to-date?
- > How do I support my supervisees to hold difficult conversations or challenge other practitioners or adults/families they are working with effectively?
- > Am I able to prioritise the needs of adults with care and support needs over and above performance data where necessary?
- > Am I sufficiently skilled in the use of the *Mental Capacity Act 2005* to be able to adequately advise and support my practitioners?
- > Do I carry out thorough quality checks to assure myself that my team members are practising to the required standard(s)?

Stevens et al.'s, (2017) study found that disagreement, disruption or aggression from families can undermine confidence and divert meetings from topics a practitioner might want to explore in more depth. Supervision is an opportunity for practitioners to debrief difficult situations and managers can offer support to give them the confidence to offer respectful challenge. Commenting on a reflective supervision session with her manager, a social worker observed:

When I talked to my manager in supervision, I admitted to myself that I'd knocked on the door deliberately quietly and left quickly, telling myself they weren't in. The client's husband can be quite aggressive and it's hard to have a constructive conversation with them. My manager asked me what was challenging about the situation and what was really going on. Those questions really helped me to see that I was trying to avoid a difficult situation.

> Key messages

Evidence indicates that reflective supervision is vital for developing and maintaining professional curiosity (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016).

Evidence also suggests that managers can be over-optimistic about the capability of their practitioners and the quality of their work (Revell & Burton, 2016).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Model a curious approach (Revell & Burton, 2016).
- > Provide systems and structures to support operational managers and enable them to access their own reflective supervision (Revell & Burton, 2016).
- > Establish an expectation that reflective supervision will be offered and prioritised by managers (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016).
- > Provide regular reflective supervision for all practitioners and managers, asking reflective questions and facilitating critical analysis, including a focus on wellbeing, emotional resilience and the ability to initiate and manage challenging or difficult conversations (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016).
- > Don't overestimate the abilities or resilience of practitioners, particularly long-serving or experienced people (Revell & Burton, 2016).



Reflective questions

- > Does supervision allow for reflection/ critical analysis or is it limited to workload monitoring and allocation issues?
- > Does the organisation provide systems and structures in which managers are supported to participate in reflective supervision? Who supports managers in their roles?
- > Are your managers realistic about their team members' abilities and resilience? How can you assure yourself of this?

Legal and safeguarding literacy

Researchers conclude that legal literacy is required to enable practitioners to make connections between legal rules and their professional practice (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot, 2017). Practitioners will be able to practice more effectively if they have the confidence to use the full range of legal options available - being able to collate, analyse and present the evidence and reasoning that underpin decisions (Braye et al., 2016).

Anxiety can reduce curiosity (Kashdan, 2007), and uncertainty about the law can lead to inaction (Mantell & Jennings, 2018).

Martineau et al. (2019) noted a particular concern about the quality of practitioner use of the *Mental Capacity Act 2005*, which is a recurring feature of SARs. The *Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services* (Department of Health, 2015) references the requirement for legal literacy in the organisational context, and a thorough knowledge of mental capacity legislation and guidance is identified as a statement in its own right, underlining its importance in work with adults.

Curiosity is required in order for practitioners to demonstrate 'safeguarding literacy', as described by Preston-Shoot (2017). Having knowledge and confidence and organisational support to recognise safeguarding concerns and cumulative patterns means issues and concerns can be picked up in a timely way.

Practitioners can only argue their case with confidence if they are sufficiently equipped with the legal knowledge and support they require to apply the law to practice. Research in Practice (2020b) has developed resources to support [legal literacy](#).

> Key messages

Evidence suggests that legal literacy is required to enable practitioners to make appropriate connections between legal rules and their professional practice (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot, 2017).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Offer training in legal and safeguarding literacy, noting the importance of up-to-date knowledge about the application of the *Mental Capacity Act 2005* and changes to legislation as appropriate (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot, 2017).
- > Develop practitioners' legal and safeguarding literacy in supervision using reflective questions and approaches that include curiosity (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot, 2017).



Reflective questions

- > Are you confident that the legal and safeguarding training provided by your organisation is comprehensive and of good quality?
- > How can you ensure practitioners in your agency are able to apply relevant legislation appropriately and with confidence?

Learning and development

In his analysis of 37 SARs and SCRs on self-neglect, Preston-Shoot (2017) identified gaps in learning and development programmes as a recurrent theme. Eason (2010) maintains that curiosity and a desire to enhance knowledge are essential elements of skill in practice. She argues that a culture in which educational growth is supported is vital in the workforce to both develop professions and stimulate curiosity.

Curiosity is a key component of the ability and willingness of practitioners to access and apply best evidence in their work (Kedge & Appleby, 2009). Naturally curious people tend to be more engaged with programmes of learning and development.

Organisations have a responsibility to provide learning opportunities that span different ways of learning. Programmes of learning and development that are meaningful to the student tend to be more successful (Kashdan & Fincham, 2004), creating conditions for curiosity to be optimised (Mantell & Jennings, 2016). Case studies or reviews, role-play and discussions are examples of learning opportunities that can capture the imagination and stimulate curiosity. These learning opportunities give practitioners an opportunity to practice newly acquired skills in respectful challenge, holding difficult conversations, applying legal knowledge or working in partnership (Shennar-Golan & Gutman, 2013).

Managers and leaders have a responsibility to ensure that learning and development opportunities are available, and practitioners have a responsibility to take up, understand and apply their learning. In Norfolk County Council (NCC), Kirkpatrick's (1967) learning outcomes model is used to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development activity. **This model defines four levels of outcome:**

1. Learners' reactions to the educational experience.
2. The acquisition of knowledge and skills.
3. Behaviour change, including the application of learning to the work setting.
4. Results assessed in relation to intended outcomes.

Within the NCC context, levels one and two are evaluated at the end of the training day by asking course delegates to identify what they have learnt and to think about how they can transfer the learning to practice. Follow-up questions are also sent a year after the training. Operational managers ensure practitioners get opportunities to practice their new skills/behaviours, including strengths-based approaches, in the workplace. They discuss individual support and review records alongside practitioners during supervision to establish how the learning has been put into practice at levels 3 and 4.

Training on MSP has been evaluated at levels three and four by requesting feedback from people who have been involved in a safeguarding enquiry about their experiences. The impact of the safeguarding training programme is analysed during thematic safeguarding quality audits. Practitioners interviewed for the audits are asked to comment on the quality of the training and the impact of the training on their practice. Research in Practice has developed (Leverson & Elwood, 2018) guidance for SABs which includes ideas as to how they can better assure themselves that adult safeguarding training commissioned or delivered on their behalf is of good quality and promotes the transfer of learning into practice.

While it is important that practitioners take responsibility for developing their sense of curiosity, there is much that leaders can do to develop a culture of curiosity within their organisation. Provision of a learning and development offer designed to pique the curiosity of those less inclined to engage in learning activities, as well as naturally curious members of staff, is something strategic leaders could consider to enhance professional curiosity in their organisations. Carrying out training needs analysis and audits by individual staff and managers of their levels of knowledge and skills are examples of how this could be addressed.

> Key messages

The evidence suggests that programmes of learning and development that are meaningful tend to be successful (Kashdan & Fincham, 2004), creating conditions for curiosity to be optimised (Mantell & Jennings, 2016). Case studies/reviews, role-play and discussions are good examples of learning opportunities that can capture imagination and stimulate curiosity (Shennar-Golan & Gutman, 2013).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Design or commission a comprehensive learning and development offer with a range of methods to support different ways that people like to learn (Shennar-Golan & Gutman, 2013).
- > Review the continuing professional development of team members, identifying gaps and supporting individuals to meet skills and knowledge deficits, including those that relate to professional curiosity (Preston-Shoot, 2017).



Reflective questions

- > Are your learning and development offers varied and tailored to the needs of all practitioners, taking account of different ways of learning?
- > Do your practitioners have the skills to manage challenging situations and ask difficult questions? Is training available to support them to develop these skills?
- > Is learning and development delivered in ways that will encourage and stimulate curiosity?

Open culture

In addition to a culture of learning, an open organisational culture will support curiosity across adult social care teams. Open cultures which hear the practitioner's voice, enable respectful challenge to occur within the organisational hierarchy, and can potentially prevent or stop dangerous or abusive practices from happening (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).

Reactive and blame-based organisational cultures can stifle curiosity and lead to risk-averse practice, with emphasis placed on protecting the reputation of the organisation and practitioners rather than on a person-centred approach (Burton & Revell, 2018). Francis (2013) noted that a closed organisational culture can lead to defensiveness and mistakes being hidden, preventing organisational learning and development from taking place.

The NHS 'duty of candour' requires every healthcare professional to be open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care and causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress (*Health and Social Care Act 2008*, Regulation 20). This concept is adopted by some SABs, which require their partners to have a culture of openness, transparency and candour within their day to day work and with the SAB. This enables the partnership to learn and grow when mistakes occur (see, for example, Coventry SAB, 2016).

Preston-Shoot (2017) draws attention to positive aspects of agency participation in SARs, including establishing escalation and accountability structures, and a determination to incorporate learning from the review into improvement plans. Also noted were organisations which had engaged reflectively in the SAR process, where practitioners, supported by their line managers, were open, committed and collaborative.

The *Post Qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care* (DHSC, 2018) require that supervisors should recognise and articulate the dilemmas and challenges they face and use this expertise to guide, support and influence the provision of the organisation's services. As such, responsibility is placed in the hands of operational supervisors and managers to encourage the expression of concerns from practitioners and escalate these appropriately.

SCIE (undated) provides a range of resources and guidance to support leadership in strengths-based social care, including guidance on achieving an open, no-blame culture. This includes an example which illustrates how delegation of responsibility and control to staff has led to a more trusting relationship between staff and senior leaders in Wolverhampton.

> Key messages

Evidence suggests that an open culture within organisations encourages professional curiosity to flourish, by enabling challenge to existing norms, and developing innovative practice (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Listen to, and act on, the concerns of operational managers about staffing pressure and stress levels (Burton & Revell, 2018).
- > Review the organisation's culture to promote one of openness and willingness to learn and improve (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).
- > The SAB has a role in challenging managers but also offers learning and service development events as part of a change and implementation strategy (DHSC, 2020).
- > Escalate concerns about staffing pressure to senior managers (Swindon SAB, undated).
- > Carefully plan the introduction of working practices such as agile or remote working (Cooper, 2019).
- > Support practitioners when mistakes are made and encourage reflection, review and learning (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).



Reflective questions

- > Are practitioner views and comments encouraged by senior managers? Are senior managers visible and available?
- > If problems are raised from direct practice, how are they given consideration? Are they acted upon?
- > How do you gather feedback from your practitioners?

Partnership work

Working in partnership enhances the likelihood that professional curiosity will flourish (Thacker et al., 2019), but analysis of SARs highlights consistent concerns about the way agencies work together to safeguard adults (Martineau et al., 2019; Preston-Shoot, 2017).

SABs have a statutory duty to bring agencies together. Strategic leaders have a responsibility to involve their agency in the local safeguarding partnership at a senior level and set the expectation of engagement from their organisation. SABs work across organisations with partners at local, regional and national levels, and curiosity can be encouraged by examining effective strategies, systems and structures, recognising that authorities and organisations work in very different ways. For example, some SABs have set up 'high risk panels' (Newham SAB, 2017) or 'self-neglect panels' (Bromley SAB).

Panels include representation from SAB partner agencies - including the local authority, health, police, fire service, mental health services and housing. The panels seek to share information and decision-making and identify joint solutions to managing or mitigating complex risk. They have been shown to reduce worker stress and isolation as there is a joint approach and shared responsibility for navigating through the complexities of practice (Braye et al., 2014). As part of this process information can be shared to develop an integrated chronology which can help identify critical events in the life of the adult, enabling all partners to consider the whole picture when making joint and shared decisions (Nicolas, 2016).

Petch (2008) and Pike et al. (2019) identify important aspects of partnership working which convey preventative and protective effects. These include identification of a lead point of contact, clear, understood procedures and protocols for information sharing, senior management-level commitment, shared budgets, multi-agency training, mutual respect, identified and agreed outcomes, and a focus on the person at the heart of the process.

Many SABs have procedures in place to manage disagreements between agencies which set out processes for escalation, reducing the number of communications between frontline staff and delays in the management of complex situations, for example Norfolk SAB (2018).

Working in partnership brings different perspectives and increases understanding between agencies. For example, the Norfolk Safeguarding Partnership received a presentation from an occupational therapist (OT) on identifying abuse or neglect in care provider settings. This is an illustration of how the safeguarding partnership can learn from its members, and how presenting a view on a situation can spark the curiosity and reflection of practitioners across different disciplines.

Participation of SABs in undertaking SARs offers the opportunity to employ professional curiosity at strategic level. Further opportunities to use curiosity arise through local authority scrutiny committees that hold authorities to account for the way they spend public money, or clinical governance/serious incident processes which review and learn from adverse incidents in health settings.

Good practice in this area is highlighted in SARs. For example, in a SAR carried out for Leicester SAB, the housing department was commended for practitioners' good practice in demonstrating curiosity through their persistence in working with a couple and instigating a coordinated response from partner agencies, rather than merely following established procedures (Leicester SAB, 2019). Preston-Shoot (2020) highlights the importance of 'the team around the person', respectful of each other's expertise, coming together in multi-agency meetings to share information, plan and coordinate actions.

Operational managers overseeing practice can use their influence to facilitate appropriate information-sharing, and to help their practitioners secure support from other agencies, as well as modelling an integrated approach - valuing and respecting multi-agency colleagues and those owed the duty of care. This is evidenced in the example of a s42 enquiry into alleged physical and financial abuse, during which a GP advised the social worker that the adult had said:

He got hold of my credit card and used it to do his internet shopping and there were times when he laid hands on me. I was so relieved when you saw me on my own and asked me about it. I can't thank you enough for that. I'm glad I don't have to live with him anymore.

This example, in which a conversation between a GP and social worker identified the opportunity to see the adult alone, demonstrates the value of taking a multi-agency approach.

> Key messages

Working in partnership enhances the likelihood that professional curiosity will flourish (Thacker et al., 2019) and conveys preventative and protective effects (Petch, 2008; Pike et al., 2019).



Actions to support curiosity

- > Establish a strong culture of strategic-level agency representation (Thacker et al., 2019).
- > Speak positively about, and set an expectation of, partnership working. Respect and value the contributions of other agencies (Petch, 2008; Martineau et al., 2019; Thacker et al., 2019).
- > Consider introducing multi-agency panels for discussions to support practitioners (Braye et al., 2014).
- > Develop procedures for managing professional and organisational difficulties between agencies (Martineau et al., 2019).
- > Use established procedures to support strong partnership working (Thacker et al., 2019).



Reflective questions

- > How far is your agency engaged in partnership working with other agencies in the SAB?
- > Do you speak positively about partner agencies and demonstrate that you value the role of other professionals?

- > Does your SAB have a policy for managing disagreements between practitioners? If not, could you be instrumental in developing a policy?

Conclusion

This Strategic Briefing has drawn together evidence on the nature and value of professional curiosity. SARs have been used to illustrate some of the ingredients that promote curiosity across the local safeguarding partnership. It also sets out the areas where SAB chairs, elected members and strategic leaders from SAB partner agencies could focus attention within their respective agencies to promote cultures of curiosity.

SABs have a duty to bring together agency partners and to commission SARs, offering the opportunity for agencies to employ professional curiosity at a strategic level. Senior managers in different professional contexts are well positioned to put in place policies and practices across the organisation which promote the conditions for curiosity to be optimised for practitioners.

The following table summarises actions strategic leaders, elected members and operational managers could take to support a culture in which professional curiosity can thrive in their organisations.

Enabler to support professional curiosity	What strategic leaders can do	What operational managers can do
Involving people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Develop strategies to involve adults and carers and adapt practice and service development in accordance with their feedback (Droy & Lawson, 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Use resources to review the extent to which MSP is implemented in the organisation and make changes as necessary (Local Government Association, 2020). > Capture feedback from adults and carers and share with strategic leaders via local systems (Droy & Lawson, 2017). > Adapt practice and service development in accordance with feedback from adults and carers (Droy & Lawson, 2017).
Time and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Review recruitment and retention practices (such as pay, learning and development offer, policy on secondments/study leave) as adequate staffing levels are key to promoting professional curiosity (Mantell & Jennings, 2016). > Develop strategies to promote the efficient use of resources across the system to meet actual and projected need (Local Government Association, undated resource). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Build in time for themselves and their teams to reflect and analyse (Broadhurst et al., 2010). > Monitor workloads and worker stress levels (Burton & Revell, 2018). > Review process and practice to become more efficient and release capacity so individual workloads become more manageable and staff are freed up/enabled to develop and use curiosity in their practice (Hampshire SAB, 2015).
Structure and working practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Develop remote working strategies to enable and encourage frequent discussion and support across teams (Cooper, 2019). > Introduce a strengths-based practice framework which requires that the person's story is heard and where there is continuity in support (SCIE, 2015a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Carefully plan the introduction of working practices such as agile or remote working to build in opportunities for regular discussion and support for practitioners (Cooper, 2019) . > Work with practitioners to embed their understanding and consolidate their strengths-based and professionally curious practice (SCIE, 2015a).

Enabler to support professional curiosity	What strategic leaders can do	What operational managers can do
Recording, processes and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Balance performance data gathering with quality, reflection and critical analysis when setting recording and reporting strategies (Revell & Burton, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Balance performance data gathering with quality, reflection and critical analysis when designing forms and recording practices, and when carrying out quality assurance checks (Revell & Burton, 2016).
Supervision and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Model a curious approach (Revell & Burton, 2016). > Provide systems and structures to support operational managers and enable them to access their own reflective supervision (Revell & Burton, 2016). > Establish an expectation that reflective supervision will be offered and prioritised by managers (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Model a curious approach (Revell & Burton, 2016). > Provide regular reflective supervision for all practitioners and managers, asking reflective questions and facilitating critical analysis of work, including a focus on wellbeing, emotional resilience and the ability to initiate and manage challenging or difficult conversations (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016). > Don't overestimate the abilities or resilience of staff, particularly long-serving or experienced people (Revell & Burton, 2016).
Legal and safeguarding literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Offer training in legal and safeguarding literacy, noting the importance of up-to-date knowledge about the application of the <i>Mental Capacity Act 2005</i> and changes to legislation as appropriate (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Develop practitioners' legal and safeguarding literacy in supervision using reflective questions and approaches that include curiosity (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot, 2017).
Learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Design or commission a comprehensive learning and development offer with a range of methods to support different ways of learning (Shennar-Golan & Gutman, 2013). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Review the continuing professional development of team members, identifying gaps and supporting individuals to meet skill and knowledge deficits - including those that relate to professional curiosity (Preston-Shoot, 2017).

Enabler to support professional curiosity	What strategic leaders can do	What operational managers can do
Open culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Listen to and act on the concerns of operational managers about staffing pressure and stress levels (Burton & Revell, 2018). > Review the organisation's culture to promote one of openness and willingness to learn and improve (Mantell & Jennings, 2016). > The SAB has a role in challenging managers but also in offering learning and service development events as part of a change and implementation strategy (DHSC, 2020). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Escalate concerns about staffing pressure to senior managers (Swindon SAB, undated). > Carefully plan the introduction of working practices such as agile or remote working (Cooper, 2019). > Support staff when mistakes are made and encourage reflection, review and learning (Mantell and Jennings, 2016).
Partnership work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Establish a strong culture of strategic-level agency representation (Thacker et al., 2019). > Speak positively about, and set an expectation of, partnership working - respecting and valuing the contribution of other agencies (Martineau et al., 2019; Petch, 2008; Thacker et al., 2019). > Consider introducing multi-agency panels for discussions to support practitioners (Braye et al., 2014). > Develop and implement procedures for managing professional and organisational difficulties between agencies (Martineau et al., 2019). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Support staff to manage professional difficulties when the situation is complex (Martineau et al., 2019). > Respect and value the contribution of professionals from other agencies (Petch, 2008). > Use established procedures to support strong partnership working (Thacker et al., 2019).



Useful resources

39 Essex Chambers mental capacity resources:
www.39essex.com/resources-and-training/mental-capacity-law

Local Government Association Making Safeguarding Personal resources:
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/making-safeguarding-personal

Research in Practice supervision resources:
www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/topics/supervision

Research in Practice legal literacy resources:
www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/topics/legal-literacy

SCIE SAR Library:
www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/reviews/library

SCIE supervision resources:
www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide50/foundationsofeffectivesupervision/reflectionandcriticalthinking.asp

Appendices

Appendix 1: Professional curiosity in practice – a case study

Meera is a hypothetical social worker working in a hypothetical department. The following case study draws out the ways in which barriers to professional curiosity can manifest in practice situations and poses questions for managers and senior leaders to consider.

Meera is a social worker with five years' experience. She carries out a review with Sharon Johnson, a 55-year-old woman who had a stroke which affected her mobility and resulted in left-sided weakness.

Meera is shown through to the sitting room by a man Sharon introduces as her new partner. As they pass by, Meera notices an older woman next to a walking frame sitting at the table in the dining room. The woman looks confused and disorientated. Meera fleetingly wonders who this is as Sharon has previously lived alone.

The review conversation begins and Meera explains the purpose of the review.

Evidence suggests that a professionally curious practitioner would explore less 'obvious' details as well as the most visible or pressing problem (Broadhurst et al., 2010).

1. Do you feel confident your staff would ask questions about who the older woman in this scenario was and think about any potential risks to her?

Evidence suggests that in a council that 'thinks family', questions are embedded at first contact and subsequently, such as "Who else lives in your house?" or "Is there a child [or other person with care and support needs] in the family?" (SCIE, 2015b).

2. Are you confident your practitioners would take a 'whole family' approach?
3. How can you assure yourself that, in this circumstance, the practitioners in your department would ask further questions and take a whole family approach?

Evidence suggests that legal literacy is required to enable practitioners to make connections between legal rules and their professional practice (Preston-Shoot & McKimm, 2013; Preston-Shoot 2017).

4. Would practitioners in your organisation consider whether the *Mental Capacity Act 2005* was applicable and make further enquiries in relation to Sharon and the older woman in this scenario? How can you ensure professionals in your agency are able to apply relevant legislation appropriately and with confidence?
5. Do your practitioners understand the principles of the *Care Act 2014*, and that assessments/reviews are about establishing needs, identifying outcomes, considering impact on wellbeing and meeting eligible needs in the most cost-effective way? Can they articulate this to individuals and families in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of a challenging situation arising? How do you know if they are doing this well? Are your practitioners up-to-date with any changes or amendments to the *Care Act 2014*?

Strengths and asset-based approaches rely on practitioners demonstrating curiosity by finding out more about the person in their environment (SCIE, 2015a), and encourage a narrative approach. Listening to individuals' stories and showing interest and curiosity can lead to new ways to uncover potential harm and risks as well as identification of strengths and assets, which can lead to new ways to work with risk (Felton & Stickley, 2018) and promote risk enablement.

6. Has your organisation introduced a strengths/asset-based approach to assessment and service delivery?
7. Do your practitioners understand the strengths/asset-based approach, can they explain what this means, and apply it in practice?
8. How can you be assured that the voice of the person and their story is always heard during interventions?

Sharon's partner, Liam, is becoming increasingly agitated as the conversation progresses and Meera feels intimidated. She remembers she did an e-learning course last year about managing difficult conversations, but she'd been in a terrible hurry at the time, and as you could click quickly through the screens to complete it, she hadn't taken in a great deal of the content.

Evidence shows that anxiety inhibits curiosity (Kashdan, 2007) and disagreement, disruption or aggression from families can undermine confidence and divert meetings from topics practitioners want to explore in more depth (Stevens et al., 2017).

9. Do your staff have the skills to manage challenging situations and ask difficult questions?

The evidence suggests that programmes of learning and development that are meaningful to the student tend to be successful (Kashdan & Fincham, 2004), creating conditions for curiosity to be optimised (Mantell & Jennings, 2016). Case studies/reviews, role-play and discussions are good examples of learning opportunities that can capture imagination and stimulate curiosity (Shennar-Golan & Gutman, 2013).

10. Is learning and development delivered in a way that will encourage and stimulate curiosity?
11. Are your learning and development offers tailored to the needs of all staff, taking account of different learning styles?

Liam's behaviour starts to become threatening and he shouts at Meera about how Sharon needs all her care and how he is tired of social workers interfering.

Meera decides to leave and says she will come back and finish the review another time. She is shaky and tearful as she reaches the car and could really do with talking to someone about the difficult visit, but since the new remote working policy was introduced, she is pretty sure that if she went back to the office, her colleagues wouldn't be there.

Instead, Meera decides to go home and start to write up the review. There are so many boxes to check and bits of information to add, it will be good to get as much of it completed as she can before tomorrow when she will be allocated another couple of cases as the team is under a lot of pressure due to sickness. Meera rings her manager and leaves a message asking for a call back. At 6pm she hasn't heard back so pours herself a glass of wine and finally starts to feel a bit better.

Evidence suggests that remote working presents challenges to practising in a curious way (Stevenson, 2019). This is particularly likely for those who are not naturally curious, through a reduction in opportunities for asking questions or receiving challenge.

- 12. Are you confident your managers have put remote working policies into practice in a way that ensures there will always be some support available? How can you ensure your practitioners have access to support when they need it?**

Evidence from Safeguarding Adult Reviews suggests that a performance culture which prioritises performance data collection hinders reflection and critical analysis – key ingredients for professional curiosity (Swindon SAB, undated).

- 13. Is there a balance between the need to gather performance data and opportunities for reflection and critical analysis?**
- 14. Does your recording system encourage an analytical approach or is its primary focus recording pieces of information for reporting purposes?**

Evidence suggests that invoking curiosity is challenging when the working environment is pressured and stressful (Burton & Revell, 2018).

- 15. How can you ensure workloads in your organisation are at safe levels?**
- 16. Have you made arrangements for your practitioners to have enough time and space for reflection?**

Meera decides to discuss Sharon Johnson in her supervision session. Her manager is ten minutes late and is clearly in a hurry, telling Meera she has only got half an hour for the session as she needs to chair an urgent meeting. She suggests they do a quick caseload review to see if there are any that could be closed, as she has a high priority person she needs to allocate. Meera doesn't feel able to talk about her anxieties - her manager is clearly as stressed as she is and does not appear to be very interested.

Meera's manager feels relieved that Meera is happy to cut the supervision session short. Meera is a good, experienced worker and gets through the casework, so she knows that Meera will be fine.

Evidence indicates that reflective supervision is vital for developing and maintaining professional curiosity (Broadhurst et al., 2010; Revell & Burton, 2016).

- 17. What is the quality of supervision delivered in your organisation? How can you ensure managers are delivering good quality supervision?**
- 18. Does supervision allow for reflection/critical analysis or is it limited to caseload monitoring and allocation issues?**
- 19. Does the organisation provide systems and structures in which managers are supported to participate in reflective supervision? Who is supporting managers in their roles?**

Evidence suggests that an open culture within organisations encourages professional curiosity to flourish, by enabling challenge to existing norms and developing innovative practice (Mantell & Jennings, 2016).

- 20. Are practitioner views and comments encouraged by senior managers? Are your senior managers visible and available?**
- 21. If problems are raised from direct practice, are they given consideration? Are they acted upon?**
- 22. How do you gather feedback from your practitioners?**

Evidence suggests that managers can be over-optimistic about the capability of their staff and the quality of their work (Revell & Burton, 2016).

- 23. Are your managers realistic about their team members' abilities and resilience? How can you assure yourself of this?**

Appendix 2: A professionally curious reality

Meera is a social worker with five years' experience. She carries out a review for Sharon Johnson, a 55-year-old woman who had a stroke which affected her mobility and resulted in left-sided weakness.

Meera is shown through to the sitting room by a man Sharon introduces as her new partner, Liam. As they pass by, Meera notices an older woman next to a walking frame sitting at the table in the dining room. The woman looks confused and disorientated.

Meera asks Sharon if she would like to see her alone but Sharon says she is happy for Liam to stay. Meera explains the purpose of the meeting and that she would like to talk about how Sharon is and what Sharon would like to happen to make her life better. Meera explains that this could include looking at what support is available in the community or within Sharon's own network, and that she is keen to hear about the things Sharon enjoys doing, as well as any concerns she may have.

As the review progresses, Liam seems to be getting agitated and questions why Meera keeps suggesting community-based activities when Sharon is happy going to the day centre once a week. Meera remembers she went on a course about managing difficult conversations and, drawing on what she learned, listens to and acknowledges Liam's concerns and gives him assurance that Sharon wouldn't be left without support. He calms down a little and leaves the room.

While Liam is out of the room, Meera asks Sharon about her new partner and the woman in the dining room. Sharon says the woman is Liam's mother Doris and they have both moved in as their landlord has evicted them. She says she has been a bit shocked at how Liam speaks to his mother and that he sometimes shouts and can get 'a bit physical' with her. Sharon says she doesn't want to leave Liam. Meera says she is worried about what Sharon has told her about Liam's mother and thinks that she may need to raise a safeguarding concern. Sharon says Doris is very confused and doesn't know where she is.

When the review is complete, Meera enters the dining room on her way out and says "Hello" to Doris as she is concerned about what Sharon told her about potential physical and psychological abuse. The older woman has a patch of bruising, which looks like finger marks, on her arm. Meera asks what she's done to her arm, but Doris looks very confused and says she's not sure how the bruises got there. Meera wants to ask more questions but is aware that Liam is coming back in, so says goodbye to Doris and leaves.

Meera returns to the office after her visit. She knows that the whole team won't be there because the remote working policy has enabled them to work more flexibly, but there will be a couple of social workers on duty and a duty manager at the very least, and she would like to discuss with someone. Meera is relieved that her manager talked to the team so they could all make suggestions about how they could successfully implement remote working while ensuring everyone has access to support when they need it.

Meera talks to the duty manager and they agree that a safeguarding concern needs to be raised. On the basis of the conversation Meera had with Doris, they cannot be sure she lacks capacity, but they will need to plan with multi-agency colleagues about how to make further enquiries as there is reasonable cause to suspect that the criteria under s42(1) and (2) of the *Care Act 2014* are met.

Meera discusses Sharon in her next supervision. Her manager is busy but prioritises supervision sessions with the team. Her manager encourages an open reflective discussion by asking reflective questions such as "What knowledge/legislation/policy/research have you used and how did it inform your thinking and practice?", "What could you have done differently?" and "How has your critical analysis and decision-making been reflected in your recording?" Meera has carefully documented her rationale for decisions made and the multi-agency risk assessment that she has completed, and feels her decision-making is defensible.



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Photographer: izusek

With grateful thanks to:
Lindsey Bampton, Suzy
Braye, Adi Cooper, Jill
Manthorpe and Michael
Preston-Shoot

Research in Practice is a programme of
The Dartington Hall Trust which is a company
limited by guarantee and a registered charity.
Company No. 1485560 Charity No. 279756 VAT No. 402196875

Registered Office:
The Elmhirst Centre, Dartington Hall, Totnes TQ9 6EL

ISBN 978-1-911638-50-6

© Research in Practice December 2020