

## Safeguard Guide No. 9 – December 2018

### Professional Curiosity and Challenge

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#### What is it?

**Professional curiosity**, also known as ‘healthy scepticism’ is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening in a child, young person, or adult at risk’s circumstances rather than making assumptions or accepting accounts or observations at face value. It is also about being able to identify risk, and have the resolution to enquire deeper, and ask more questions to clarify the situation.

**Professional challenge** is about challenging decisions, practice or actions which may otherwise compromise the safety or well-being of the child, young person or adult at risk. Professional curiosity often precedes professional challenge. Examples of professional challenge are highlighted in the policy: [https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p\\_res\\_profdisag.html?zoom\\_highlight=challenge](https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_res_profdisag.html?zoom_highlight=challenge)

#### Why is it important?

Local and national Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) have identified practitioner reluctance to question observations or explanations provided by those receiving services, family members/carers or professionals; and a reluctance to challenge interagency decision making. SCRs and SARs have identified professionals who feel that something is ‘not right’ or who are concerned with a decision made by a different agency however have not followed up their concerns with robust professional curiosity or challenge which may have altered the professional response and ultimately the outcome for the child, young person or adult at risk. Lessons from SARs and SCRs identify that had the practitioner been more curious and professional challenge used, the outcome may have been different. Professional curiosity and challenge are positive activities and a sign of good professional practice, a healthy organisation and together can promote effective multiagency working. Being professionally challenged should not be seen as a slur on the person’s professional capabilities.

#### What are the difficulties?

- It can be difficult to question service users or colleagues, especially if they present as defensive, hostile or potentially disengaging; or to challenge professionals who may have higher status or more experience, but none of these should prevent professional curiosity or challenge.
- The safety and wellbeing of individual children, young people or adults at risk must remain the paramount consideration of any professional. Lack of assertive practice or professional disagreements which obscure focus on the child, young person or adult at risk must be avoided.

#### What should practitioners do?

To be professionally curious, practitioners need to:

- Be interested in the individuals they are working with and fully explore accounts or their observations rather than making assumptions.
- Have an open mind - be aware of their own values affecting judgements.
- Triangulate information received. Seek independent confirmation of individuals’ accounts and weigh up details from a range of sources and/or practitioners. Think holistically.

- Focus on the need, voice and “lived experience” of the person or family. Ask relevant questions and be ‘brave’. Be prepared to have ‘difficult’ conversations. But also be respectful.
- Focus on the individual or family’s strengths – this will reduce the chances of resistance, and can help to develop a relationship.
- Take part in reflective practice and regular supervision.
- **KEEP THE WELFARE OF THE CHILD, YOUNG PERSON, OR ADULT AT RISK IN MIND AT ALL TIMES**

Disagreements between professionals can often be resolved on an informal basis by discussing the issue in an open and honest way. If agreement is not achieved:

1. **Both professionals should raise the issue with his/her manager/agency named professional.**
2. **If the manager considers it appropriate; an interagency meeting should be held between the agency raising the professional challenge and the receiving agency to discuss the different views.**
3. **If the issue cannot be resolved at this interagency meeting; the worker’s manager should discuss it with the relevant Head of Service.**
4. **If resolution still cannot be found, the relevant Head of Service should raise the issue with the agency’s representative on the CSCP or CSAB and the CSCP/CSAB Business Manager. The CSCP/CSAB Manager will determine the course of action including informing the Board Chair.**
  - It is imperative that this process should fit **within the child or adult at risk’s timescale** and resolved quickly, at a maximum **each step in this process should not exceed 5 working days.**
  - At all stages, a **clear record** of the progress of the disagreement should be kept by all parties on each agency’s service user’s file.
  - Where applicable, records of any **learning** from the disagreement should be shared with the relevant Board, and collated and considered to aid wider learning and improvement.

### Further guidance and information:

#### Training:

Face to face training can be undertaken to support professionals: ***Taking the ‘Difficult’ out of ‘Difficult Conversations’ Workshop*** runs twice a year and includes learning from SARs/SCRs, reflecting on communication styles, strategies to manage conversations and using professional authority. Training is accessed via: <https://calderdalescb.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/>

#### Policy and Procedures:

##### Adults

- [Resolving Professional Disputes and Escalation Procedure](#) (Adults)

##### Children

- West Yorkshire Procedure for: [Resolving Multi-Agency Professional Disagreements and Escalation](#)
- [Resolving Professional Disagreements Flowchart](#) (Children)
- Dissent about the need for a Child Protection Conference: The decision whether or not to convene a [Child Protection Conference](#) rests with Children’s Social Care Services. However, those professionals involved with the child and family have the right to request that Children’s Social Care Services convene a Child Protection Conference if they have serious concerns that a child’s welfare may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded.

#### Resources

[‘A Day in the Life’](#) – a tool to capture the person’s ‘lived experience’