

Curiosity

Using professional curiosity alongside other skills and tools makes it easier to identify vulnerabilities

First published 18 November 2021

Written by College of Policing

Curiosity – guideline introduction

Officers and staff should exercise professional curiosity to actively identify and investigate vulnerability-related risks, so they can deliver the appropriate policing response.

Professional curiosity includes:

- exploring and understanding what is happening by asking questions and maintaining an open mind
- not necessarily accepting things at face value, enquiring more deeply and challenging your own assumptions
- understanding your own responsibility to investigate and knowing when and how to take action

Evidence summary

The review findings concerning barriers to disclosing and reporting abuse suggest that professional curiosity is particularly important in relation to identifying risk of harm.

Professional curiosity means challenging assumptions, and exploring and understanding the potentially complex dynamics of a situation, rather than taking things at face value. The literature on coercive control, in particular, shows how perpetrators seek to manipulate situations, and how victims may minimise abuse for a number of reasons, including shame, coercion and threats from the perpetrator.

In line with evidence supporting [**guideline 3 \(communication\)**](#), good communication skills – including active listening and displaying empathy – are needed to exercise professional curiosity and facilitate procedurally fair encounters. Good communication skills are key both to identifying and encouraging disclosure of abuse, and to engaging victims and vulnerable people in ongoing safeguarding and investigations.

Empirical evidence

Moderate

Practitioner evidence

Available

Identifying vulnerability at an early stage

Professional curiosity was considered to be important in eliciting information and encouraging the disclosure of abuse or harm for all risks. Professional curiosity may also require practitioners to think outside the box and consider the circumstances more holistically. For example, understanding any discrepancies between a risk assessment tool outcome and professional judgement.

When practitioners come into contact with individuals who may be at risk of harm, this presents a crucial opportunity for protection. The lack of evidence relating to effectiveness of frontline-focused risk assessment tools further enhances the importance of professional curiosity.

The [national vulnerability action plan \(NVAP\)](#) states that by adopting a principle of 'professional curiosity', potential indicators of vulnerability can be identified at an early stage and inform the appropriate steps to make vulnerable people safe, including where partners should be involved.

Practitioners and committee members considered it important for officers and staff to use professional curiosity, in conjunction with the tools (for example, checklists, risk assessment tools) and systems (for example, computer systems) available to them, to guide their investigation and determine any follow-up actions. Examples of actions are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Encouraging professional curiosity

Hints and tips from other sectors

Professional curiosity can be enhanced if practitioners:

- are supported by good-quality training to help them develop
- have access to good management, support and supervision
- consistently challenge and check information
- display empathy

- remain diligent and develop professional relationships to understand what has happened and its impact
- use reflective practice, collaboration and supervision, so practitioners work together to explore alternative explanations behind situations
- are willing and able to obtain and combine information from a range of sources, identifying alternative explanations and risks to enable more effective responses

Tags

Vulnerable people Risk Evidence-based policing