01 Background:

All professionals who come into contact with children, parents and carers in the course of their work need to be aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and alert to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. This requires **professionals** to be **curious** and inquisitive about family circumstances and events so that they can effectively identify vulnerabilities and potential or actual risks of harm.

Children rarely disclose abuse and neglect directly to practitioners and, if they do, it will often be through unusual behaviour or comments. This makes identifying abuse and neglect difficult for professionals across agencies.

The first step in keeping children safe is to be professionally curious and to engage with children and their families at the earliest opportunity before problems escalate into crisis.

02 Why it matters:

Reviews into child deaths repeatedly highlight the need for practitioners to be alert to the risk of fixed thinking and perceptual bias. Munro (2005b) comments that repeated inquiry reports show the extraordinary lengths to which some abusive parents can go in their efforts to deceive practitioners through disguised compliance and the Daniel Pelka review emphasised the need for professionals to be able to "think the unthinkable" rather than accept parental versions of what is happening at home.

Locally, the Child D Serious Case Review has highlighted the importance of *'professional recognition and response to deliberate and systematic efforts to conceal the abuse of a child'*.

Assessments are fallible, and contexts constantly changing. Therefore, professionals need to remain curious and to keep their judgements under constant critical review.
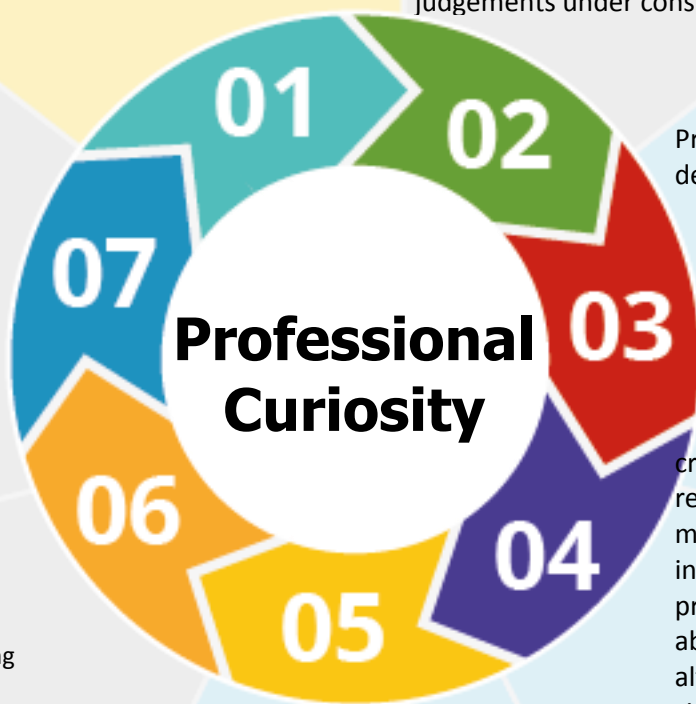
03 Information:

Professional Curiosity - also described by Lord laming (2003) in the Victoria Climbié inquiry as "respectful uncertainty" - is the capacity to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, ", applying critical evaluation to any information received and maintaining an open mind. By acquiring an open minded, inquiring and curious mindset, professionals can avoid linear and absolute explanations by exploring alternative, multiple perspecives on a situation.

Professional Curiosity

07 What to do?

Further research:

NSPCC: Disguised compliance
C4EO Briefing
Action for Children: Be Professionally Curious!
Ten pitfalls & how to avoid them
Working with families who display disguised compliance

06 Questions:

- Am I remaining **curious** and inquisitive about what I am seeing and assessing?
- Am I open to new information?
- How confident am I that I have sufficient information upon which to base my judgements?
- Do I need to add a "health warning" about the strength of evidence contained in this assessment/implications for decision making?
- Would I be prepared to change my mind ?
- What aspects of supervision are getting prioritised at the moment?
- Is sufficient time being allowed for critical reflection /decision making?

05 Information: Professional curiosity is supported by

- A child focused approach with an ability to create suitably safe and trusting listening environment for children and young people
- Identifying and exploring what is not discussed as much as what is.
- An openness to other perspectives/ willingness to try different responses.
- An ability to build close partnership style relationships with families whilst being constantly aware of the child's needs/ degree to which they are met
- Critical thinking skills, sensitivity and persistence.
- Judgements based on evidence not optimism.
- Familiarity with the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Children procedures
- A willingness to research, ask questions and seek specialist advice, for example, in relation to culture and race, disability race, drug/alcohol misuse.
- Access to high quality supervision where practitioners and their managers routinely play their own 'devil's advocate in considering alternative actions, explanations or hypotheses.