

# SAFEGUARDING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

## 2021 BRIEFINGS

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## SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE: ARE YOU PROFESSIONALLY CURIOUS?

**Asking uncomfortable questions to establish the facts is not always easy but, however, it is sometimes necessary**

**Safeguarding involves keeping children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse and maltreatment. It means ensuring they have the best outcomes and are provided with safe and effective care, and that they can grow and develop happily and healthily without the risk of abuse or neglect.**

We have a duty of care to those patients and citizens who use our services. That duty equally extends to our own people.

We also have a shared responsibility to uphold the positive reputation of St John Ambulance. People may do and say things with no harmful intent but their comments and actions can be misconstrued. The duty of care extends to protecting the reputations of those who may have been wrongly accused.

There are, however, some cases when negative and harmful actions are intentional and it is important that we deal with these promptly, firmly and fairly.



helps us to understand a situation more thoroughly and enables us to understand the degree of seriousness and intent when harm or abuse may have occurred.

### Who might cause harm?

The person who is responsible for the abuse is often well known to the person being mistreated or exploited. They could be:

- a spouse or partner
- another family member
- a neighbour
- a friend
- an acquaintance
- an unpaid carer
- a health or social care worker
- other paid staff member or professional
- another resident of a care home or user of a care service
- someone who is supposed to provide a service
- a local resident
- a volunteer
- a stranger or
- a work colleague.

They could also be people who deliberately exploit adults they perceive as vulnerable to abuse, whether those people are already known to them or not.

Whoever is causing the abuse, and wherever it happens, it is not acceptable – particularly when the victim is not able to protect themselves.

We all have a responsibility to follow the 5 Rs of safeguarding, which are to:

- **recognise**
- **respond**
- **record**
- **report** and
- **refer.**

### The six principles of safeguarding

Embedded in the Care Act, these six principles apply to all health and care settings:

**IT TAKES MANY GOOD DEEDS  
TO BUILD A GOOD REPUTATION  
AND ONLY ONE BAD ONE TO  
LOSE IT** Benjamin Franklin

Examples of safeguarding issues include:

- bullying
- radicalisation
- sexual exploitation
- grooming
- allegations against staff
- incidents of self-harm
- forced marriage and
- female genital mutilation (FGM).

These are the main examples you are likely to come across; however, there may be others.

### Seeing the big picture

'Seeing the big picture' means appreciating the wider context. It's easy to jump to conclusions before you realise that you are only hearing one, limited perspective. Whilst focusing on details is important, it is also good to take a step back and think about the situation in the round. Looking at the bigger picture also helps to give you a clearer vision of what you need to do next.

Taking a broader view, seeking to work out what's really going on and considering the various risks and protective factors are often referred to as 'professional curiosity'. We need to remember that we in St John are professionals working/volunteering in our chosen role. Applying professional curiosity in our work may help to improve outcomes and reduce potential harm.

Case reviews often reveal that there were missed opportunities to ask more probing questions in order to gain the all-important information that may have improved both the course of action and the outcomes. With good professional curiosity we might nip 'a simple issue' in the bud, saving unnecessary frustration for all concerned. Equally, a professionally curious mindset

- 1 Empowerment** People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and giving informed consent
- 2 Prevention** It is better to take action before harm occurs
- 3 Proportionality** The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented
- 4 Protection** Support and ensure representation for those in greatest need
- 5 Partnership** Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse
- 6 Accountability** Accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice.

### Exploring the facts: what does 'professional curiosity' look like in practice?

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on information received. It means not taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value. We all tend to see issues through our own 'lenses' and filters, or we quickly go with one person's point of view. Being professionally curious helps us to take a more objective view of the situation.

This means testing out assumptions about what you are hearing and/or seeing. It means triangulating information from different sources to gain a better understanding of the issue. This helps us to reach reasonable judgments about what has occurred and any likely risk. It means seeing past the obvious and recognising when to escalate concerns or seek clarification.

New 'virtual' ways of working through phone and video conferencing mean that vital signs about how someone is feeling may easily be missed. It is therefore more important than ever to really listen to what you are



being told and get clarification about what seems not quite right.

### Is exercising professional curiosity easy and straightforward?

Not always. Asking probing questions may make you worry that you will be seen as nosey and interfering. Sometimes people who want to 'bend the rules', who are not transparent or who demonstrate disguised compliance or coercive control, will accuse others of interfering; this is used to deflect away from the problem or concern. People can appear to be engaging and compliant with you but are not able or willing to change even when offered a positive intervention. This is when it is important to trust your judgement, based on all the information you have collated.

It's important to remember that some people will feel that they can't be open and honest with you through fear about being judged or feeling shame. They may be worried by the dynamics of the group, or the organisation, or concerned about gossip and imagining what the repercussions will be.

It is with these people that professionals and line managers need to exercise both curiosity but also empathy, providing that safe space for people to talk about genuine mistakes and reminding them that we are fostering a culture of learning. In order to learn and move on we need to understand what the problem is that we are trying to solve.

If you can demonstrate a willingness to listen and really hear what people have to tell you, this can make it easier to ask more more probing questions. After any kind of questioning it's important to discuss and agree what will happen next, reassuring people that information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis. Most situations can be resolved positively. However, there are a few times when the seriousness of what you have seen and heard





- Ensure that your practice is reflective and that you have access to good quality supervision from a senior line manager or specialist from a relevant function
- Be comfortable with your actions and what you are accountable for in this process.

### Completing the process

- Ensure that you and they have a supporter present or at least the offer is made (some people may not want anybody else with them but check that they can access support after the conversation)
- Make accurate notes of what is said or, if conducting interviews over O365 Teams, ask permission to record. That confidential recording can then be shared with both parties afterwards, but be clear about how the recording can and cannot be used and when it will be deleted
- Write your report and conclusions in a timely manner and forward to whoever needs to decide about the next course of action.

**Remember, your professional curiosity can make the difference in getting a potentially difficult situation right for all concerned.**

will not result in happy endings. Managing those endings respectfully and professionally is important. This does not mean that difficult situations and decisions can be avoided but it does mean that they are handled as positively as possible.

### How to demonstrate professional curiosity in the process of 'fact finding'

- Remain open minded and expect the unexpected
- Prepare for any anxiety you might have about the way hostile or resistant people might react to being asked direct or difficult questions
- Appreciate that respectful scepticism and challenge are healthy - it is OK to question what you are told
- Demonstrate a willingness to have 'less than comfortable' interactions when this is necessary to gain the whole picture (as an example, this may mean waiting in silence for people to respond to a question, rather than prompting them)
- Be prepared to be challenged - that is OK, as it should be a constructive two-way dialogue
- Question your own assumptions about how people function and be aware of the ways your conscious and unconscious biases impact on your views. Your guidelines are the organisational policies and procedures of St John, and our values
- Look for signs of disguised compliance - appearing to agree with everything you say as a means of ending the conversation and avoiding any resolution of the issues
- Understand the impact of coercive control or someone's perceived position/reputation on the behaviour and responses of immediate members of peer groups

### Help us build a repository of useful organisations

People struggling will need help for some time to come. Organisations mentioned in this briefing and others may be of assistance to them. We would like to build a repository of useful regional and national organisations. If you know of organisations to add to that list, please email [safeguarding@sja.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@sja.org.uk) with the subject header 'Safeguarding yourself and others', and tell us the name of the organisation, what support they offer and contact details, including their website address. We will aim to publish these monthly as an annex to a briefing.

You can download a CFC form [here](#) or an Ambulance Operations CFC form [here](#)

You can download a safeguarding pocket card or an Ambulance Operations safeguarding pocket card [here](#)

You can download the SJA Safeguarding Policy and Procedures [here](#)

