

Home Visits

Your place or mine

By Laurence Chester
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Introduction

My name is Laurence Chester. I qualified as a social worker in 1995. I have undertaken a range of roles with social work.

Currently, I am working as a Locum and Independent Social Worker.

I am passionate about equality issues and the need to ensure our clients are treated with respect. This includes ensuring that children benefit from our intervention in a way that secures their best interest as far as is reasonably possible. Listening to their voices and ensuring that they are central to our plans and decisions.

Home visits are an underpinning part of social work practice and this session is to support you in undertaking effective home visits to clients in order to facilitate the Care Plan objectives, whether this is within Child Protection, Child in Need or an initial Duty visit.

How would you feel?

- ▶ How would we want to be treated if we were visited by social workers?
- ▶ Please come up with three ways you would want a visiting social worker to act towards you on an initial visit.

Types of visits

Initial visits may be as a result of a planned intervention to support a family. Or may be a 'Blue light' visit - Emergency response to report from other agency or person. Section 47.

Most common are:

- ▶ • Initial Assessment visits / s47
- ▶ • CP Visits
- ▶ • CIN Visits
- ▶ • CiC Visits

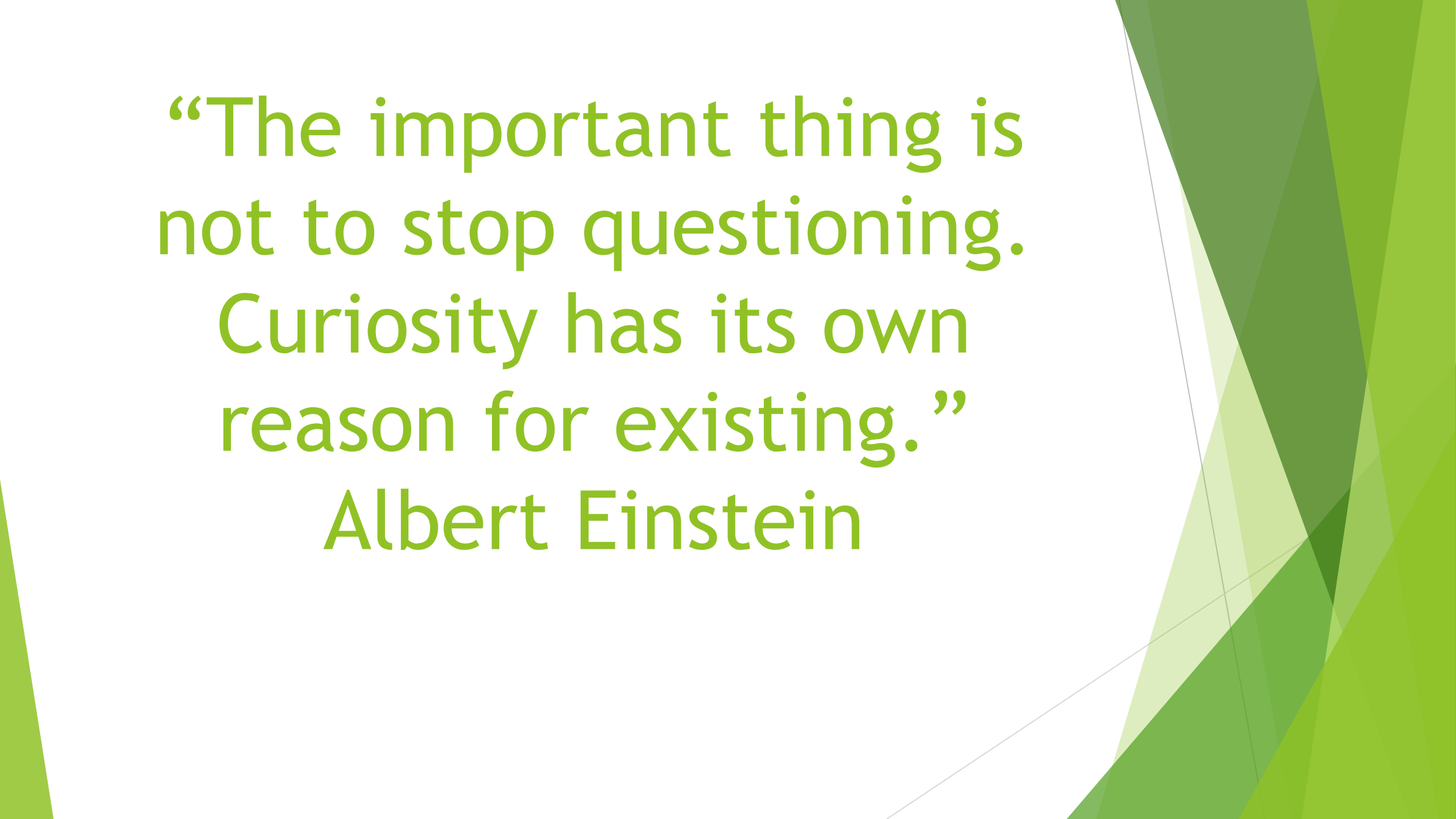
More than just eyes and ears of local authority. We are there to utilise our professional skills to actively engage with families for a very defined purpose, to ensure that children are safe and well supported.

Fail to prepare, prepare to fail

- ▶ 1) Read case information and identify why we are involved and what the expectations are of the work we do with the family.
- ▶ 2) Identify gaps in our knowledge.
- ▶ 3) Think about how best to engage with the child/ren e.g. age appropriate (social work tools website).
- ▶ 4) What sense to I have of the family? What are my assumptions and areas of doubt?
- ▶ 5) Cultural & language issues. What do we understand about the 'culture' of this family? Do we need an interpreter. Are we visiting on a religious holiday? NB Every home has its own unique culture.
- ▶ 6) Are there any special needs that require us to adopt a specific approach to be understood by the family. Do we have those skills and if not, where can we get support?
- ▶ 7) What risks might there be to personal safety?

Reflections

- ▶ What is my view of the conclusions reached on basis of previous work by other social workers?
- ▶ Do I have the skills/ emotional resilience to deal with the concerns of the case?
- ▶ Do I feel well supported and safe?
- ▶ Am I clear what it is that I need to get out of the visit. Often we can't do everything in one visit. It's about eating elephants, i.e. bit by bit!

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered on the white space of the slide.

“The important thing is
not to stop questioning.
Curiosity has its own
reason for existing.”

Albert Einstein

“We trust you as much as you trust us”

- ▶ Trust is an essential part of working in genuine partnership with our clients.
- ▶ **ABC** - **A**ssume nothing **B**elieve nothing and **C**heck everything
- ▶ How do I feel? Transference can be a key tool so we must try to keep our heads as free as possible. Allow time for self reflection before entering the home eg 5 mins in car or bus.

Home as Castle

- ▶ A family may well view their home as their safe place. We must tread lightly in peoples home by being respectful and kind as far as is possible. Difficult discussion are best held outside the family home, eg the office.
- ▶ In some cases, the family home is not safe for the child. We may not be aware of this at the time we meet with them so a mix of home and school visits are most effective.

IS IT SAFE!

**Do you need to ask a colleague
to accompany you?**

“If in doubt, get the hell out!!”

Risk

- ▶ Social workers go into people homes without knowing the risks beforehand. In some situations, police will do joint visits. We can also speak to Housing to ask them to check ECINS (their data base) to see of any safety concerns.
- ▶ What questions does this pose for lone working
- ▶ What steps can we take to move towards safety on visits (sitting close to an exit , parking vehicle in the direction you need to leave, lone workers device)

Although very rare, things can go wrong :

- ▶ <https://nypost.com/2022/01/09/family-of-murdered-social-worker-deidre-silas-devastated-by-her-brutal-end/>
- ▶ <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/08/08/man-charged-attempted-murder-social-worker-stabbed-home-visit/>
- ▶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-59684207>
- ▶ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/social-worker-stabbed-checking-vulnerable-children-wood-green-b949647.html>

First Conversation

- ▶ “My aim is to ensure your child/ren is doing well (and any concerns addressed) and to get out of your life asap, do you agree?”

Building rapport and faffing around are not the same thing!

- ▶ The most important task at the outset of a visit is to build rapport with adult carers and then child(ren). If there is a pet, try best to acknowledge the important place it may well have in the life of the child and the family.
- ▶ Building rapport by speaking about things of interest to the carer and child(ren) helps us to learn more about the family in terms of how the family communicate when discussing 'safe' subjects and, in contrast, how they respond to more challenging areas of discussion. It also provides a doorway into the world of the family and establish 'safe ground'.
 - Note:
 - Who is present?
 - If children not present do carers know where they are and that it is safe?
 - On you way to the family home what is their immediate environment like, (avoid generalised comments)?
 - What is home environment like eg cleanliness, pictures of children, state of oven, is fridge/freezer stocked up sufficiently.
 - Talk to child(ren) in age appropriate way.

Reflections

- ▶ Who am I in the eyes of the family and who are they in the eyes of the local authority?
- ▶ If no previous contact, what are their assumptions about us and what are our assumptions about them? What is its purpose. How we communicate our role and purpose of the visit to the parent and child is crucial. The parent needs to be empowered to explain to the child or hear it from us rather than a misrepresentation by a parent. Transparency is key to building trust. Sometimes we cant be transparent eg if a child shares information that is inappropriate to share with parents.
- ▶ Have I expressed the information to the family in a way that they can understand and relate to for their age and maturity ? If so, record this clearly in your write up of the visit.
- ▶ Why do the family think I am doing this visit and why do we think this visit is needed?
- ▶ What is the best time/place to do the visit? What are the key objectives of the visit?
- ▶ How should I engage with the family and as the visit progresses, how do we feel? How do we think the client is feeling? Especially re children.

Seeing a Bigger Picture

- ▶ When writing analysis/reflections of visit, Who plays what role in the family? What is my view of the family functioning including risks? Why is this the case? How will the family effect sustained positive change? You may not always know what you feel, until you write how you felt



- ▶ How do you recognise SELF (self-awareness)? - this is a PCF indicator -Professional Capabilities Framework - Systems Theory (Pincus and Minahan (1973))
- ▶ Informal systems that include family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues; these provide advice and emotional support and also contribute to our sense of worth and personal functioning.
- ▶ Formal systems that include clubs and societies, trade unions and other types of groups that can provide support.
- ▶ Public systems including the police, council and local government services, hospitals and schools. These systems tend to have service related functions and duties and powers in their delivery to the community

Disguised compliance AKA “Faking It”

- ▶ *Disguised compliance involves parents and carers appearing to co-operate with professionals in order to allay concerns and stop professional engagement (Reeder et al, 1993)*
- ▶ ‘Disguised compliance’ aka pretending to comply: There may be a number of reasons why people are not honest with social workers. What might these be?

Respond don't React

- ▶ Clients may present as challenging. They may show anger and dysregulation for one of a number of reasons. As social worker, we are not obligated to accept personal abuse. **WE MUST NEVER RESPOND WITH ANGER.**
- ▶ The way clients communicate with us should be seen as part of our assessment of them, not a personal matter.
- ▶ Racism and discrimination is always unacceptable and requires a response. Barnet managers will support workers who experience this.

Abuse of Power

It is cruel to threaten families with removing their child(ren) if it is not the plan!

Example: Family C were told that unless things improved in the home environment, we would remove the children. This led to the mother suffering increased mental health challenges, a decline in the emotional wellbeing of the children. One child stopped engaging with CAMHS for fear of information coming back to us, even though there were no serious concerns.

Saying Goodbye

- ▶ Before leaving, ensure that the family have fully understood what has been said. Often, especially in initial visits, parents are so stressed that they struggle to recall what has been said.
- ▶ Double check that family are clear of your view of them, as far as it is safe to do so, and what will happen next and/or date of next visit.

Making Changes

- ▶ The **change agent system** refers to the social worker and the agency they are representing.
- ▶ The **client system** focuses on the service user and their system.
- ▶ The **target system** makes reference to the desired outcomes.
- ▶ The **action system** is the work that is agreed between the service user and the social worker to resolve the identified issues.
- ▶ Karpmans Drama Triangle: We are not ‘saviours’ we should be, wherever possible, supportive enablers for positive change.

Other Discussion Points

- ▶ Osmosis Learning (pandemic has impacted social work for ASYE social workers - peer learning is more difficult virtually)
- ▶ ASYE, “Pressure of knowing how to do our job - university does not teach you how to have difficult conversations, how to carry out initial visit, or even how to write case notes - you have to bring your own style to the role and be able to relate to people”

Thank you and good luck!
Remember:

**Embrace curiosity, tread lightly, be kind
and stay attuned**

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