



Curiosity vs. Assumptions

What curiosity is (and why it matters)

Curiosity means setting aside your agenda long enough to understand what the other person might be experiencing. Instead of assuming you already know what is happening, you pause and get genuinely interested in their perspective.

Think about the last time you had a conflict with someone important to you. Did you go in curious and open, asking questions to understand their point of view? Or did you do what most of us naturally do — walk in armed with all the reasons you were right?

Curiosity is vulnerable and brave. It can feel uncomfortable because it involves uncertainty. We can't control where the conversation will go, and it's tempting to rush to a resolution. Slowing down to be curious gives the relationship — and the nervous system — room to settle.

Why we jump to assumptions

Our brains hate not knowing. When something feels off, your mind quickly fills in the blanks with a story to protect you:

- “They’re mad at me.”
- “I must have done something wrong.”
- “They don’t care.”
- “This is going to turn into a fight.”

Assumptions are usually protective — they try to prepare you or help you avoid hurt. The problem is that once the story starts, you begin reacting to the story in your head instead of the real person in front of you.

Curiosity interrupts that loop and helps you check the story instead of believing it as fact.

The shift: from assumption → curiosity → question

Here's the simple three-step move:

- Notice the story you're telling yourself
- Remind yourself it is a story, not a fact
- Ask a curious question instead of acting on the assumption

Example:

- Assumption: "They're annoyed with me."
- Curiosity: "I don't actually know that yet."
- Question:
 - "I'm noticing I'm telling myself you might be annoyed. Is anything coming up for you?"

This is how we stop mind-reading and start relating.

Example in everyday life

You notice your partner has become quiet and has a concerned look on their face.

Curiosity sounds like:

"I'm noticing you look a bit concerned. Are you okay?"

Instead of:

- assuming something is wrong
- trying to fix it without asking
- avoiding them because you feel uncomfortable

Unchecked assumptions interfere with connection. Curiosity strengthens it.

Simple sentence starters you can use right away

You don't have to be poetic — just honest and curious:

- “The story I’m telling myself is _____. Is that true?”
- “I noticed _____ and I’m wondering how you’re feeling.”
- “Can you help me understand what was going on when _____?”
- “I realize I assumed _____. What was it like for you?”
- “When you _____, I interpreted it as _____. Did I get that right?”
- “I might be off — can I check something with you?”

Common assumptions turned into curiosity:

Assumption your brain makes	Curiosity you can say out loud
“They’re mad at me.”	“Are you feeling upset, or is something else going on?”
“They’re pulling away.”	“I’m noticing some distance. How are you feeling between us?”
“They don’t care.”	“When that happened, I felt unimportant. What was happening for you?”
“I must have done something wrong.”	“Did anything I did impact you?”
“They’re quiet because of me.”	“You seem quiet — what’s going on for you right now?”

How to do this in the heat of the moment

When you feel triggered:

- **Pause**

One slow breath. Relax your jaw and shoulders.

- **Name the story silently**

“This might just be a story my brain is making.”

- **Get curious**

1. What else could be true?
2. What don't I know yet?

- **Ask one question**

1. Not a speech. Not a defence. Just one curious question. Flip your assumption into a question.

These steps can completely change the direction of a conversation.