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Critical Incidents Protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to provide a formal process for critical friendship using a variation of Costa and Killick's model (See "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend" by Costa and Killick, Educational Leadership, October 1993) and based on the theory and language used by David Tripp in Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgment (Routledge, 1993). Revised February 2002 by Gene Thompson-Grove. Revised January 2007 by Kim Feicke.

Roles

- The facilitator's role is to keep the conversation moving through each phase and to facilitate the final conversation and to keep time. The facilitator should also participate.
- The presenter shares a critical incident from within the context of his or her work. This is to be used as a text for professional learning within the group.

Process

- The presenter writes about an incident, with as much detail as s/he can muster. This writing should tell only what happened, like a snapshot. The writing should be crisp and succinct, but it should be clear that the group's discussion will be about what happened, and not about the quality of the writing. (10 minutes)

Time

35-40 minutes for each round (after the writing).

1. Presenter reads the written account of what happened and sets it within the context of professional goals or outcomes that he or she is working on. (5 minutes)
2. Colleagues ask clarifying questions about what happened or about why the incident occurred. (5 minutes)
3. The group raises questions about what the incident might mean in the context of the presenter's work. They discuss as professional, caring colleagues. The presenter listens and takes notes. (10 minutes)
4. The presenter reflects back to the group what s/he heard that was significant, and then the group engages in a general conversation about what the implications might be for the presenter's practice and/or for their own practice. A useful question at this stage might be, "What new insights occurred for all of us?" (10 minutes)
5. Debrief the process. The group talks about what just happened. How did the process work? (5 minutes)

Adaptation: *This protocol can also be designed in a way that allows everyone in a group to share a critical incident. In this version, provide time for everyone in the group to write their critical incident and then break into small groups of 3 or 4 to go through the protocol. You will need 30-40 minutes for each presenter in the small group to do this option.*

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrharmony.org.