

# Critical Friendship Protocol

**Definition:** A trusted colleague who asks provocative questions and examines the facts through a different lens.

**A Critical Friend...** listens to what is said and notices what is unsaid, takes the time to understand the context, tells the truth (without agenda or subtext), gives undivided attention, acts with wholly positive motives and allows you to test ideas & develop your thinking in a safe environment.

*(Source: Costa, A & Kallick, B, 1993, Through the Lens of a Critical Friend. Educational Leadership)*

**The role of the critical friend is therefore a strategic one and can be important in assisting improvement. It is essentially a role of support and challenge.**

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## An effective critical friend is someone who:

- you trust and respect
  - you have a strong relationship with, or believe you could develop a relationship with
  - provides honest and critical feedback
  - is a skilled observer and listener
  - is able to ask provocative/stretch questions
  - provides balance between support and challenge
  - understands you and/or the school context very well or takes the time to develop this understanding
  - provides a different perspective/new eyes
  - provides critique utilising higher order thinking
  - is available.
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## Critical friends do not:

- assume a directive role
  - offer solutions to problems or provide “quick fixes”
  - rush to judge
  - impose agendas of their own
  - undermine the authority of others.
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## In working with your critical friend, you need to be mindful that:

- confidentiality is essential
  - the “critical” aspect relates to the task and the “friend” aspects relates to you as a person
  - comments should be seen as professional challenges rather than criticisms
  - expectations of each other with regard to availability, commitment to the process, reliability and how progress will be evaluated need to be discussed and agreed
  - you need to own the agenda and so need to take responsibility for preparation and follow-up
  - openness to discussions about performance is essential
  - an agreed process for exploring any conflicts needs to be discussed at the outset of the process
  - a simple critical friend agreement can make clear expectations and responsibilities from the outset.
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## Effective feedback is:

- **Clear and purposeful - designed and carefully prepared to achieve your purpose**
  - Is it feedback to appreciate and empower?
  - Is it feedback to improve effectiveness?
  - Is it feedback to address specific behaviours, improve situations, or evaluate current performance / progress against agreed standards?
- **Specific, descriptive and non-judgmental**
  - Focused on the behaviour, not the person’s ‘self’.
  - NO generalisations or judgments
- **Focused on evidence and data**
  - NO inferences, assumptions or guesses
- **Respectfully honest**
  - Honesty without respect = brutality
- **Regular and timely**
  - i.e. close to the event and not a one-off event
- **Focused on sharing information and exploring alternatives**
  - Not giving solutions or advice
- **Skillfully communicated**
  - Proactive, positive language

## Techniques for receiving effective feedback

- Place clear boundaries around the feedback
- Listen carefully to all that is said
- Listen beneath the words
- Ask open questions for clarity
- Explore gently
- Acknowledge the feedback
- Acknowledge the valid points
- Don't defend yourself
- Take time to sort out what you have heard and what you want to do with it
- Express your thanks.

## Feedback to improve effectiveness - 5 Practical Steps:

**Step 1:** Identify what was done well

**Step 2:** Identify what needs improving or changing

**Step 3:** Identify how to improve

**Step 4:** Identify next steps and provide time for the person to act on them

**Step 5:** Follow up on the feedback and actions taken

Structure Feedback: draw from a repertoire		
More directive	Collaborative	Empowering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct / tell</li> <li>• Specific guidance</li> <li>• Determine requirements, specify choices</li> <li>• Provide feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite / explore ideas together / suggest</li> <li>• Joint problem-solving / pose wonderings</li> <li>• Negotiate requirements</li> <li>• Give and receive feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen / clarify / ask</li> <li>• Learner ownership and decision-making</li> <li>• Learner responsibility and self-plan</li> <li>• Offer and ask for feedback</li> </ul>

## Sample sentence scaffolds for different types of interaction

More Directive	Collaborative	Empowering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I am concerned about... because...</li> <li>● My observations show that...</li> <li>● The data collected shows...</li> <li>● Our agreement states that...</li> <li>● Your role description requires you to...</li> <li>● This is the criteria for this standard...</li> <li>● This is what needs to happen...</li> <li>● This is what you need to do...</li> <li>● There are two choices here... which one do you think...</li> <li>● So, let's review the actions you need to take...</li> <li>●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do you feel things have been working with...</li> <li>● Let's each share our perceptions on...</li> <li>● Let's look at the ideas we have...</li> <li>● Let's look together at what needs improving...</li> <li>● What might happen if...?</li> <li>● Let's look at which of these might best help you to...</li> <li>● A couple of possibilities I see are... which one do you think...</li> <li>● How might you go about that?</li> <li>● What steps are you agreeing to take?</li> <li>● How might I support you?</li> <li>● Let's review our agreed plan.</li> <li>● When will we meet to review how things have gone?</li> <li>●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tell me what you would like to achieve?</li> <li>● What is your goal?</li> <li>● What will indicate success for you?</li> <li>● What evidence of success will you be looking for?</li> <li>● What support would you like from me?</li> <li>● What would you like me to observe?</li> <li>● How would you like me to gather this data?</li> <li>● What do you think worked successfully?</li> <li>● What does the data tell you?</li> <li>● What do you think caused / enabled that to happen?</li> <li>● Where would you like to go from here?</li> <li>● What will your next steps be?</li> <li>● How will we check in?</li> <li>● How has this process worked for you?</li> <li>●</li> </ul>

## A quick reference guide for being someone's Critical Friend

### LISTEN

#### Self-check

- What is my listening intent?
- What am I doing to listen fully and without judgment?
- How am I using pause before responding?
- How is my body language modelling openness?

1	2	3	4
Paraphrase	Inquire	Test assumptions	Explore different perspectives & implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● So, you're suggesting...</li> <li>● You're thinking...</li> <li>● In essence, you're wanting...</li> <li>● There seem to be two key issues here, ... and ...</li> <li>● So, you believe...</li> <li>● Your goal is...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clarify</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explain a bit more about...</li> <li>● Help me understand what you mean when you say...</li> <li>● I'm curious to know more about...</li> <li>● What is the actual issue you want to address here?</li> </ul> <p><b>Probe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is your purpose here?</li> <li>● What do you believe...?</li> <li>● As you think about ... how might you...?</li> <li>● What possibilities do you see...?</li> <li>● What might be a concrete example of...?</li> <li>● Given your experience in this area, how...?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Check evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What might be some assumption here?</li> <li>● Help me understand how you came to that conclusion.</li> <li>● When you say ..., are you supposing that...?</li> <li>● What evidence suggests ...? (data, research, examples)</li> <li>● What might need further investigation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How might ... view this?</li> <li>● What other perspectives might need to be considered?</li> <li>● What might be some different ways to approach this?</li> <li>● How might this affect...?</li> <li>● What implications might there be for...?</li> <li>● What might happen if you didn't take that pathway...?</li> <li>● What might your next steps be in relation to this?</li> </ul>

## A quick reference guide for approaching your CF for feedback / support

State your ideas	Explain your reasoning	Test your thinking: invite critique	Seek diverse perspectives & feedback	Use feedback to learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● My intent here is to share...</li> <li>● One idea might be...</li> <li>● Here's one suggestion...</li> <li>● One possibility might be...</li> <li>● A concern I have is...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I came to this conclusion because...</li> <li>● My thinking is based on this evidence...</li> <li>● Here's a concrete example of what I mean by...</li> <li>● I feel... because...</li> <li>● I think... and my reasoning is...</li> <li>● Here are some implications I see... these will affect... in these ways...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What's your thinking about what I've just said?</li> <li>● From what I've shared, what gaps or inaccuracies do you see?</li> <li>● What might I be missing here?</li> <li>● What assumptions might I be making?</li> <li>● What concerns or wonderings do you have about this?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What different thoughts do you have?</li> <li>● How else might I look at this?</li> <li>● What other perspectives might need to be considered?</li> <li>● What implications do you see for...?</li> <li>● I'm feeling unsure on this aspect... and would value your thoughts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thank you; that suggestion will help me to...</li> <li>● As a result of our conversation, I now realise...</li> <li>● Having listened to your feedback my thinking has shifted from ... to...</li> <li>● I will think through what you've raised; let's talk further about this on...</li> </ul>

### References:

<http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/performance/resources/readings/critical-friend-toolkit.pdf>

Joan Dalton - Learning Talk books