



# What is critical companionship?

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## What is a critical companion?

A critical companion can be any person committed to developing a supportive and challenging relationship, for the purpose of mutual learning and inquiry based on being person-centred.

## Do they need to be from my specific specialty?

A critical companion does not need to be in the same field, profession or specialism. It is often preferable that critical companions come from different perspectives as it is easier to ask questions about areas of work that are often taken for granted.

## Aim of critical companions:

The aim of critical companionship is to enable mutual learning and empowerment through joint inquiry, to enhance professional practice and improve experience and outcomes for those both experiencing care and providing care, by focussing on what matters to them.

This can be achieved through creating a safe, person centred, trusting relationship and environment for reflection, high support and high challenge. This will enhance mutual learning, creativity, growth and development so that everyone can thrive – the characteristics too of good learning cultures.

The framework below (see appendix 1) is evidence based and was developed by Angie Titchen, a physiotherapist who supported other health care professionals to develop their own practice expertise, as well as enabling others to learn, develop and improve in the workplace.

The symbol  $\beta$  identifies the strategies that critical companions would use to support and enable others in their formal and informal learning, development and improvement activities.

Whilst critical companionship is a sophisticated model, Michelle Hardiman has teased out two steps towards becoming a critical companion: first as a critical ally and then as a critical friend.

## How is it different to mentorships and coaching?

Whilst some strategies used in critical companionship may be similar to coaching and mentorship. The main difference is that critical companionship focuses on:

- being person centred and knowing the person you are helping in their contexts. A critical companion brings who they are as a person, as well as a professional, to the relationship and their multiple ways of knowing.
- what matters to people
- providing and evaluating high support and high challenge
- commitment to mutual growth and learning for all.

## Critical Companionship for supporting multi-professional consultant practice in all its domains

Critical companionship as an approach is at the heart of multi professional consultant practice as a way of being, knowing, doing and becoming in any kind of relationship to support others, their learning and their practice.

Critical companionship embraces all multi-professional consultant practice domains and contexts from micro to meso and macro levels of the system. Such relationships have been instrumental in achieving positive impact in care and services (See Akhtar et al, 2016) for people. For this reason, identifying a critical companion as a participant in a developmental programme is important, ideally one from within your own organisation and one external to it to focus on specific and or different development needs.

### **Choosing a critical companion**

There are no specific fulfilment criteria except those commitments identified above combined with an interest in pursuing mutual interests and embarking on a journey of inquiry together. You may decide to draw on different critical companions for specific areas of development that you are pursuing in your developmental journey based on your own self-assessment. Critical companions would be able to help you to identify opportunities for growing expertise in various capabilities and consider the appropriate range of evidence sources required to demonstrate their achievement for your portfolio.

### **Commitment required as a critical companion**

A single critical companion would not support more than 2 people at any one time. They would normally negotiate with the participant what is mutually realistic in terms of frequency of meeting, length of time and also the medium which could vary from virtual, face to face, informal and formal settings or all perspectives at different times.

The role of a critical companion is not funded as this is a professional role, but one that can also benefit the critical companion, as well as the participant, in the joint learning together as well as the skills developed.

Several resources are being developed to support both those who are critical companions and those learning to develop skills in being critical companions to continue on a journey of continuous learning.

### **References**

Akhtar, M; Casha, JN; Ronder, J; Sakel, M; Wight, C and Manley K (2016) Leading the health service into the future: transforming the NHS through transforming ourselves. *Original Practice Development and Research* Volume 6, Issue 2, Article 5  
<http://www.fons.org/library/journal/volume6-issue2/article5>

Titchen, A. (2001) Critical companionship: a conceptual framework for developing expertise. Chp 10 in Higgs, J. and Titchen, A. (2001) (Eds.) *Practice Knowledge and Expertise in the Health Care Professions*. pp 80-90. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

Hardiman M and Dewing J ( 2015) Critical Ally and Critical Friend: stepping stones to facilitating practice *development International Practice Development Journal* 4 (1) [3] <http://www.fons.org/library/journal/volume4-issue1/article3>

**Appendix 1: Framework for Critical Companionship: Supporting mutual learning, development, improvement and inquiry in all contexts (Manley & Hammond, 2015, after Titchen 2001)**

DOMAIN <sup>1</sup>	ENABLERS	ATTRIBUTES/ACTIVITIES	CONSEQUENCES
<b>RELATIONSHIP</b>	<p><b>CRITICAL COMPANIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a desire to work in a person centred way with critical companion (<b>Particularity</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Shared values</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Want to engage in the critical companionship relationship (<b>Particularity</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Prepare for the experience</li> <li>✓ Identify a shared purpose to this experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have emotional intelligence to develop effective companionship relationships (<b>Graceful care</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Being human:</li> <li>✓ Feelings</li> <li>✓ Being courageous</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>WITHIN CRITICAL COMPANIONSHIP RELATIONSHIPS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying learning together (<b>Reciprocity</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Building respectful relationships</li> <li>✓ Demonstrating mutual respect</li> <li>✓ Developing mutual understanding</li> <li>✓ Showing authentic presence</li> <li>✓ Active listening skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Negotiating working together (<b>Mutuality</b>)</li> <li>• Developing critical inquiry questions to explore together (<b>Graceful care</b>)</li> </ul>	<p><b>PEOPLE/STAFF/TEAMS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone flourishes</li> <li>• Empowered and committed staff</li> <li>• Improved social capital leading to better sense of personal wellbeing</li> </ul> <p><b>LEARNING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning evidenced by enlightened moments of insight (light bulb) and deeper understanding</li> <li>• Actions informed by self-awareness</li> <li>• Professional artistry</li> </ul> <p><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships built on trust and mutual respect</li> <li>• Healthy relationships</li> </ul>
<b>RATIONALITY - INTUITIVE DOMAIN:</b> Making conscious and unconscious decisions to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having commitment to be on a learning journey</li> <li>• Having skills in transformational leadership</li> <li>• Willing to reflect on and enable others to grow and be person centred</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using strategies and tools to help build relationships (<b>Intentionality</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Role modelling – person centred practice/</li> <li>✓ Transformational leadership</li> <li>✓ Demonstrating credibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Developing appropriate timely critical inquiry questions to explore within companionship (<b>Saliency</b>)</li> <li>• Using timing and pacing within the Critical companionship relationship to develop a deeper understanding and awareness (<b>Temporality</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Being, Knowing, Doing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>FACILITATOR DEVELOPMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of skilled facilitators</li> <li>• Practice development methods used in practice</li> <li>• Critical reflection increasingly used by staff</li> <li>• An integrated model for all purposes</li> </ul>
<b>FACILITATION DOMAIN:</b> Skilled facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a safe environment to help the companion reflect on their own experiences of learning about self and learning from their own practice (<b>Self-reflection &amp; Collaborative Critique</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Creating a safe environment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the companion to reflect on their own experiences of learning about self and learning from their own practice (<b>Self-reflection &amp; Collaborative Critique</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Articulation of craft knowledge</li> <li>✓ Critical reflection</li> <li>✓ Self-reflection</li> <li>✓ Observational skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Engaging in critical dialogue to increase Critical companions awareness/insight (<b>Consciousness-raising</b>)</li> <li>• Asking critical inquiry questions to help the critical companion think differently (<b>Problematization</b>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Give And Receive Feedback</li> <li>✓ High support High challenge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>WORKPLACES &amp; CARE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patients, service users and communities needs are met in a person centred way</li> <li>• Effective workplace cultures delivering person centred safe effective care that are good places to work</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> In Critical Companionship, 'domain' denotes a collection of different kinds of knowledge that have conceptual connections (Titchen, 2001, p 81). The concepts from the original model are included in brackets for reference