

## Supervision of Front-Line Staff: Addressing Inter- and Intra-Cultural

### Issues in ESD and SVP Programs in the Schools

- How many folks attended my presentation on mutual aid last year?
- The focus of this presentation is on supervision of front-line staff of their work with students, parents and school faculty.
- The presentation will explore some of the ways inter-cultural issues (e.g., white program staff interacting with students, faculty, staff or parents of color; straight staff working with students who are gay) as well as intra-cultural issues (e.g., Hispanic program staff dealing with Hispanic students) can impact the working relationship.
- Strategies will be discussed for addressing directly and respectfully taboo issues that often exist under the surface and yet, have a powerful impact on the work.
- Medical school story

### **Assumptions:**

- There are cultural barriers in our society to talking honestly about taboo subjects such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class and others.
- This presentation will focus on method – how the supervisor helps program staff address these issues when they emerge.
- There is a “parallel process” in that the way the program coordinator-supervisor deals with these issues in work with program staff will model how the program staff needs to address them with others.
- This is true in supervision on all work issues. In effect, “more is caught than taught”.

### **Presentation Method:**

- The workshop will consist of presentation, discussion and analysis of examples some shared by me and others by participants.
- Those who attended my workshop last year know that I believe in the power of

mutual aid – the ability of people who share common problems and concerns to help each other.

- I believe this is also true in an educational group, such as this one, so I will be asking all of you, for the two hours we are together, to be a mutual aid support group for each other.
- I would like you to treat this as a conversation between me and you and between each other.
- In this way I hope to model in this group the powerful ways your staff can support each other.
- This presentation itself will be an example of both inter- and intra-cultural issues that can affect my relationship with you (what I refer to as the authority theme) as well as your relationship with each other (what I refer to as the intimacy theme).
- Don't worry, this won't be an encounter group and I won't be asking you to share intimate details of your childhood experiences and there will be no touchy-felly which may be a disappointment to some of you. You are on your own at the end of the day.

## **Creating a Culture for Work**

- In working with groups such as this one, participants have told me of experiences that have had which resulted in a negative impact on their ability to have discussions with others on taboo subjects (For example, Oppression courses).
- To set the stage for this work in this group can we spend a few minutes discussing what makes it so hard to talk about these taboo subjects? Also, can we discuss what would make it easier this morning?

## **Problem Swapping**

- Let's take a few minutes to identify the kind of issues you run into as supervisors and I will try to integrate them into our conversation.
- You are working in an inner-city school with a large population of kids of color and

you get a complaint from a parent, student or teacher telling you that your white staff member doesn't understand these kids. When you, a supervisor of color, try to discuss this with the staff member you run into defensiveness.

- You are discussing the program with your staff and comments are made about how “these people” really don't want to get involved and help their own kids. Nobody, including you, responds to this stereotyping of kids and parents of color. You don't want to put the staff member on the spot.
- You're a white supervisor and you hear from others that one of your front-line staff of color was confronting a student of color on a behavior issue when the student called him a “sell out” or an even more ugly term. The staff member became very upset and angry but never raised this incident with you.
- Your program is in a largely white and middle class suburban or rural school with only a small group of students of color. One of your staff describes a discussion with an African-American student who describes being bullied by the white students. You believe race is involved but your staff member, describing the conversation with the student, seems to have ignored this factor.
- Do any of these hit home? What are your versions?

## Presentation

- Phase of Work as a Framework for Understanding Front-line Work with Students and Staff and your Work as a Supervisor
- The need to create a positive working relationship: Rapport, Trust and Caring  
Question number one: Who are you and what kind of person are you going to be?
- Preliminary Phase: Tuning In and Responding Directly to Indirect Communications (Preliminary empathy). Example: “How many children do you have”.
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## Examples

- **Inner-City African American Teen with a White Worker in a**

## **Suburban Residential Center**

- **An “Anger Management” Group for Angry 15- and 16-Year-Old Girls**
- **White High School Worker with an African American Teenager**
- **African American Teacher with a Black Student**