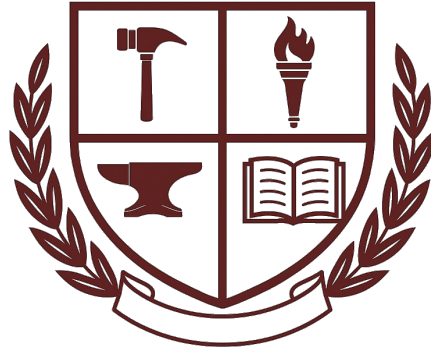


FORGE



FORGE FACILITATOR GUIDE

Phase 1: Foundation

Know Yourself

Weeks 1–12

Dooly State Prison

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Building Awareness

Week 1: Orientation and Community Building

Week 1 Overview

Purpose: Establish the foundation — who we are, why we're here, how we'll work together, and what we're building. By the end of this week, every participant should understand FORGE's mission, have committed to the Code of Conduct, and have experienced their first circle process.

Sessions This Week: - Session 1 (Tuesday): Welcome to FORGE - Session 2 (Thursday): Building the Container - Session 3 (Saturday): Service Over Self

Materials Needed: - FORGE Handbooks (1 per participant) - Participant Commitment forms (1 per participant) - Pens/pencils (1 per participant) - Journals/notebooks (1 per participant — these will be used throughout the program) - Talking piece for circle process (any meaningful object — a book, a stone, something the group selects) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) — otherwise verbal works fine

SESSION 1: Welcome to FORGE

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain FORGE's mission and purpose in their own words 2. Recite the FORGE elevator speech 3. Describe the stakeholder model and what it means for them personally 4. Understand the 9-month program structure and what's expected 5. Sign the Participant Commitment with full understanding

Session Plan

Opening (10 minutes)

Facilitator arrives early. Set up the room so that chairs are in a circle — no tables between people if possible. This is intentional. FORGE runs on connection, and connection starts with being able to see each other.

Welcome (5 min)

Facilitator:

"Welcome. Every one of you made a choice to be here today. That choice already separates you from the majority. Most men in this facility will serve their time and leave exactly the same as they came in — or worse. You're here because something in you said, 'I want something different.'

My name is [name]. I'm going to be straight with you from the start: this program is not easy. It's not a check-the-box program. You won't get through this by just showing up and sitting quietly. FORGE is going to ask you to look at yourself honestly, to change how you think, to learn skills most people never learn, and eventually to take responsibility for helping other men do the same thing.

But here's what you get: over the next 9 months, you'll become someone who can walk into any room — any dorm, any situation — and make it better. Not through muscle. Not through reputation. Through skill, composure, and service. That's what a FORGE mentor is.

Let's start by going around the circle. Just your name and one sentence — why are you here today?"

Go-around (5 min) - Each person: name + one sentence on why they're here - Facilitator goes first to model vulnerability and brevity - No crosstalk — just listen

The FORGE Story (15 minutes)

Purpose: Connect participants to the "why" behind FORGE — not just the program description, but the human reality that created it.

Facilitator:

"Let me tell you why FORGE exists.

In the last 6 years, violence inside Georgia's prisons has skyrocketed. Not just the murders you hear about on the news. Stabbings, fights, extortion, intimidation — most of which never even get reported. You know this. You live it.

Staff know it too. COs come to work wondering if today's the day something goes sideways. They want to go home to their families at the end of their shift. We want to go home to ours — whenever that day comes.

Here's the truth that most people won't say out loud: the conditions inside this facility are shaped more by us — by inmate behavior and inmate culture — than by anything the administration does. How conflicts get handled, whether violence is encouraged or discouraged, whether someone new gets tested or gets helped — that's on us. Every day.

*FORGE was built on one idea: **we are stakeholders in this system.** Not victims of it. Not passengers in it. Stakeholders. That means we have a responsibility — not just to ourselves, but to everyone living in this space.*

FORGE exists to train men who can change the culture of a dorm. Not by force. By example. By skill. By service."

Pause. Let it sit.

Facilitator:

"I want to hear from you. When I say 'we are stakeholders in this system' — what does that stir up? Agreement? Skepticism? Questions? Be honest."

Open discussion (5 min) — Let 3-4 people respond. Don't argue or correct. Just acknowledge.

Facilitator (closing this section):

"Whatever you're feeling about that right now is fine. Skepticism is welcome here. By the end of this program, you won't believe it because I told you to — you'll believe it because you'll have lived it."

Program Overview (20 minutes)

Purpose: Give participants a clear map of the 9-month journey so they know what they're committing to.

Facilitator:

"Let me walk you through exactly what this program looks like. No surprises."

Explain the three phases:

Phase 1: Foundation — 'Know Yourself' (Weeks 1-12)

"The first 12 weeks are about you. Before you can mentor anyone else, you have to do your own work. We'll cover how your thinking drives your behavior, how to understand and manage your emotions, how to resolve conflict without making it worse, how to communicate in a way that actually works, and how to take accountability without drowning in shame."

This is the hardest phase for most people — not because the material is complicated, but because it requires honesty. You'll keep a journal. You'll write thinking reports. You'll do exercises that make you uncomfortable. If you're willing to be honest with yourself, you'll grow faster in these 12 weeks than most people do in years."

Phase 2: Development — 'Build Others' (Weeks 13-24)

"Phase 2 is where you learn to be a mentor. You'll learn how to teach, how to facilitate a group, how to listen in a way that actually helps someone, and how to handle the hardest situations you'll face in a dorm — through simulation training."

Simulation training is one of the things that makes FORGE different. We don't just talk about what to do when a conflict breaks out or someone has a weapon or a mentee tells you he's thinking about hurting himself. We practice it. In real time. With coaching. So when it happens for real, you've already done it."

Phase 3: Practicum — 'Lead and Serve' (Weeks 25-36)

"Phase 3 is where you do it for real. You'll be assigned mentees. You'll facilitate sessions. You'll run community circles. First with supervision, then on your own. By the end of Phase 3, if you've met all the requirements, you'll be certified as a FORGE Mentor."

Explain the schedule:

"We meet three times a week — Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Each session is 2 hours. That's 6 hours a week for 36 weeks. Attendance is mandatory — you need to be at 85% of sessions minimum to stay in the program. If you're late by more than 5 minutes, that counts as an absence. This isn't to be rigid for the sake of being rigid. It's because the man sitting next to you is counting on you to be here. When you don't show up, you're not just missing a class — you're breaking trust with your cohort."

Questions (5 min) — Answer practical questions about schedule, expectations, etc.

The Elevator Speech (15 minutes)

Purpose: Give every participant the words to explain FORGE to anyone — a CO, a dorm mate, a family member, a skeptic.

Facilitator:

"Every FORGE participant needs to be able to explain what this program is in 30 seconds. Not because it's a test — because people will ask you. COs will ask. Other inmates will ask. Some will be curious. Some will be mocking. Either way, you need to own it."

Read the elevator speech together:

"FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth and Empowerment.

We're building a new prison experience — where men lead by example, support one another, and prepare to make a positive impact — both inside these walls and beyond them. Our goal is simple: to turn time served into time that serves others.

Our purpose: to build mentors who create a culture of peace, responsibility, and service — modeling the change we want to see in every community."

Practice:

Facilitator:

"Now — pair up. Face each other. One of you is going to deliver the elevator speech from memory. The other one is going to pretend to be a skeptical dorm mate who just asked, 'What's this FORGE thing you keep going to?' Don't just recite the words — deliver them like you mean it. Then switch."

Pairs practice (5 min) — Facilitator walks the room, listens, coaches.

Debrief (3 min):

"How did that feel? For most of you, that's the first time you've stood behind something and said it out loud to another person. That discomfort? That's growth. By next week, I want every one of you to be able to deliver that speech without looking at the page."

Homework: Memorize the elevator speech. Practice it at least 3 times before Thursday.

The Code of Conduct and Participant Commitment (20 minutes)

Purpose: Establish the non-negotiable standards — not as rules imposed from above, but as agreements the group makes together.

Facilitator:

"Open your handbooks to the Code of Conduct. I'm going to read through each section. As I read, I want you to think about one question: Is there anything here you can't commit to? Because if you sign this, it's not symbolic. It means something."

Read each section aloud — Integrity & Accountability, Leadership & Service, Learning & Growth, Peace & Safety, Community & Conduct, Mindset & Mission.

Pause after Peace & Safety:

Facilitator:

"I want to be very clear about this section. Weapons are not tolerated. Period. Anyone found with a weapon will be removed from the program immediately, without exception. This isn't a gray area. This isn't a three-strikes situation. One strike.

Violence, threats, bullying, intimidation, gang language — none of it has a place here. If you can't commit to that, this isn't the right program for you. There's no judgment in that — but there's no flexibility either."

Open it up:

"Questions? Concerns? Anything you need to discuss before you sign?"

Allow genuine discussion. If someone raises a real concern (e.g., "What if I need to defend myself?"), address it honestly:

"Self-defense is a human right. No one's asking you to let yourself be hurt. What FORGE asks is that you don't go looking for trouble, you don't escalate, and you don't carry weapons. If you're in a situation where your safety is at real risk, we'll work with you on that. That's what this community is for."

Signing (5 min): - Distribute Participant Commitment forms - Participants sign - Facilitator or Senior Mentor signs as witness - Collect forms — these go in each participant's program file

Closing Exercise (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're going to close every session with a go-around. Today's question is simple:

Name one thing you want to be different about yourself in 9 months.

Not what you want to happen to you — what you want to be different about who you are. One sentence."

Go-around. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (after everyone has shared):

"I heard [briefly reference 2-3 themes — e.g., 'patience,' 'being a better father,' 'controlling my temper']. Hold onto what you just said. Write it down tonight. In 9 months, we'll come back to it.

Before Thursday — memorize the elevator speech, and think about this: What does it mean to you to be a stakeholder? Journal at least half a page on that.

See you Thursday."

Session 1 Checklist

- Room set up in circle before participants arrive
- Handbooks distributed
- Journals/notebooks distributed
- Go-around: introductions completed
- FORGE story delivered
- Stakeholder discussion held
- Three phases explained
- Schedule and attendance expectations clear
- Elevator speech read, practiced in pairs
- Code of Conduct read and discussed
- Participant Commitments signed and collected
- Closing go-around completed
- Homework assigned (memorize elevator speech + journal on stakeholder question)

SESSION 2: Building the Container

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Participate in a circle process using a talking piece 2. Articulate the group agreements they've co-created 3. Explain why trust is the foundation of the program 4. Begin using their journal as a reflective tool

Session Plan

Opening Circle (15 minutes)

Purpose: Introduce the circle process that will be used throughout FORGE.

Set up: Chairs in circle. Place talking piece in the center.

Facilitator:

"Today we're going to learn a practice that's been used for thousands of years — in tribal councils, in communities, in peacemaking traditions around the world. It's called a circle process, and it's going to be a core part of how FORGE works.

*The rules are simple: 1. **Only the person holding the talking piece speaks.** Everyone else listens. 2. **Speak from the heart.** Say what's true for you, not what you think people want to hear. 3. **Listen from the heart.** When someone is speaking, your only job is to hear them. 4. **Say just enough.** Don't give a speech. Say what needs to be said and pass the piece. 5. **Trust the process.** Circles feel strange at first. That's normal. Give it a chance.*

This [holding up the talking piece] is our talking piece. When you're holding it, the room belongs to you. When you're not, your job is to listen — not plan your response, not judge, not check out. Listen."

First circle round:

*"Let's try it. The question for this round: **What's one thing on your mind today — something you're carrying that you'd be willing to share?***

It can be big or small. 'I didn't sleep well.' 'I'm worried about my daughter.' 'I'm not sure I belong here.' Whatever is true. You can also say 'I pass' — no one is forced to speak."

Send the talking piece around the circle. Facilitator receives it last.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you. What you just did — sharing something real with a group of men you don't fully trust yet — takes courage. That's the muscle we're going to build."

Co-Creating Group Agreements (30 minutes)

Purpose: The group creates its own rules of engagement. This is the "normative culture" principle — when people create the standards, they own the standards.

Facilitator:

"Every program has rules. The Code of Conduct gives us the non-negotiables. But there's another layer — the agreements we make with each other about how we show up in this room. Those can't come from me. They have to come from you.

I want us to build a set of group agreements together. These are the promises we make to each other about how we'll treat each other in this space. Think about what you need from the people in this circle in order to do the hard work this program is going to ask of you.

*I'll start with a question: **What do you need from this group in order to feel safe enough to be honest?**"*

Facilitation process:

1. Open the floor. As participants offer ideas, write them down (on paper, whiteboard, or have a participant write them).
2. After each suggestion, ask: "Does everyone agree to this?"
3. Allow discussion if someone disagrees — work toward consensus.
4. Common agreements that usually emerge:
5. What's said in the circle stays in the circle (with safety exceptions)
6. No side conversations when someone is speaking
7. No phones/distractions during sessions

8. Respect — even when you disagree
9. Be on time
10. No judgment — people are here to grow, not be perfect
11. Call people in, not out (address behavior, not character)
12. If you have a problem with someone, bring it up — don't let it fester
13. Everyone participates — no spectators

Important facilitation note: If the group doesn't naturally bring up confidentiality, raise it:

Facilitator:

*"I want to address confidentiality directly. In this program, people are going to share things they might not share anywhere else. For that to work, there has to be a commitment: **what's shared in this room stays in this room.***

But I need to be honest about the limits. If someone shares something that involves an immediate safety risk — a weapon, a plan to hurt someone, a plan to hurt themselves — I have an obligation to act on that. I won't ignore a safety issue. Outside of that, what you share here is yours. It doesn't become gossip in the dorm. It doesn't get used against you. That's the deal.

Can everyone commit to that?"

Finalize the agreements. Read them back to the group.

"These are YOUR agreements. I didn't write them — you did. That means you own them. When someone breaks one, it's not me policing you — it's the group holding each other to what we promised."

Trust-Building Exercise: "Two Truths and a Question" (25 minutes)

Purpose: Begin building real connection between cohort members. This is a modified version of "two truths and a lie" designed for a corrections environment where trust is especially fragile.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do an exercise to start getting to know each other beyond the surface. It's called Two Truths and a Question. Here's how it works:

Each person shares two true things about themselves — things the group probably doesn't know. Then you ask the group a question — something you genuinely want to know from them. It can be serious or light. The group doesn't have to answer right away — it's just putting the question out there.

I'll go first."

Facilitator models:

"Two truths: [personal, authentic examples — e.g., 'I was terrified of public speaking until I was 30' and 'I learned more from my failures than my successes']. My question to the group: What's one thing you're good at that most people don't know about?"

Go around the circle. Each person shares. No crosstalk during sharing. After each person, the group can briefly respond to the question if they want.

Debrief (5 min):

Facilitator:

"What did you notice? What surprised you? What did you learn about someone that you didn't expect?"

Allow 3-4 responses.

"This is how trust gets built — not all at once, but one honest moment at a time. Over the next 9 months, you're going to know these men better than almost anyone else in your life. That's the power of a cohort."

Introduction to Journaling (15 minutes)

Purpose: Establish the journaling practice that will run throughout the entire program.

Facilitator:

"Every FORGE participant keeps a journal. This isn't for me to read — it's yours. I'll never ask to see it unless you choose to share something from it. But I will ask you to write in it regularly, because the research is clear: people who write about their experiences process them better, learn faster, and change more than people who just think about them.

Your journal is going to be your private space to be completely honest. In here, you don't have to perform. You don't have to be tough. You don't have to have it figured out. You just have to be real.

Some of you haven't written anything beyond a letter in years. That's fine. There's no grade. There's no minimum length. A journal entry can be three sentences. The only requirement is honesty."

Journaling types you'll use in FORGE:

"Throughout the program, I'll ask you to journal in different ways:

1. **Free writing** — whatever's on your mind. Stream of consciousness.
2. **Prompted writing** — I'll give you a specific question to respond to.
3. **Thinking reports** — you'll learn these next week. They're a structured way of analyzing your own thinking.
4. **Reflections** — after exercises and simulations, you'll write about what you experienced and what you learned.

Tonight, I want you to do your first journal entry."

First journal prompt:

Facilitator (write this where everyone can see it, or read it twice slowly):

"Tonight's prompt: **What does it mean to you to be a stakeholder in this system? Do you believe it? Why or why not?**

Write at least half a page. Be honest — if you think it's BS, write that. If it resonates, write why. This is for you."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Talking piece round:

Facilitator:

"Closing round. One sentence: **What's one word that describes how you're feeling right now about being part of FORGE?**"

Send the talking piece around.

Facilitator (closing):

"Before Saturday, I need two things from you: 1. Memorize the elevator speech. Be ready to deliver it without looking at the page. 2. Complete your journal entry on the stakeholder question.

Saturday we're going to dig into the principle that holds this entire program together: Service Over Self. See you then."

Session 2 Checklist

- Room in circle formation
- Talking piece selected and placed
- Opening circle completed
- Group agreements co-created and documented
- Confidentiality discussed with limits clearly stated
- Trust-building exercise completed
- Journaling practice introduced
- Journals distributed (if not done in Session 1)
- First journal prompt given
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (elevator speech memorization + journal entry)

SESSION 3: Service Over Self

Day: Saturday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain "Service Over Self" in their own words with personal examples 2. Deliver the FORGE elevator speech from memory 3. Distinguish between service and submission, leadership and control 4. Identify concrete acts of service available to them in their daily environment 5. Commit to a 1-week service challenge

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. Two things: **How are you doing today — honestly? And did you write your journal entry?"***

Send the talking piece. Note who completed the journal entry and who didn't — not punitively, just to track engagement.

Elevator Speech Check (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Before we get into today's topic — elevator speech time. I need three volunteers to stand up and deliver it from memory. No handbook."

Call on 3 volunteers (or assign if no one volunteers).

Each person stands and delivers the elevator speech. After each: - Group gives brief feedback: Was it clear? Confident? Believable? - Facilitator coaches: "Slow down." "Look people in the eye." "Say it like you mean it — because you do."

"By next Tuesday, every single person in this room should be able to deliver that speech cold. Practice it tonight. Practice it tomorrow. Say it to yourself in the mirror. Say it to your bunkmate. Own it."

What Is Service? (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"FORGE is built on a principle: **Service Over Self**. It's on the wall. It's in the handbook. You've heard it three times already. But what does it actually mean?*

Let me start with what it doesn't mean."

What Service Over Self is NOT:

"Service is not submission. It doesn't mean letting people walk over you. It doesn't mean being a doormat. It doesn't mean saying yes to everything. It doesn't mean sacrificing your safety or your dignity.

Service is not performing. It's not doing things so people think you're a good person. It's not looking for credit. If you're only helping when someone's watching, that's image management, not service.

Service is not control. It's not 'I know what's best for you.' It's not fixing people. It's not telling everyone what to do because you went through a program."

What Service Over Self IS:

"Service is a daily decision to make things better for the people around you — even when it costs you something. Especially when it costs you something.

Service is the guy who cleans the common area even though it's not his turn — not because he's told to, but because it needs doing.

Service is the man who sits down with the new arrival who's scared and confused and says, 'Let me show you how things work here.'

Service is the mentor who stays calm when a mentee is testing every boundary — because he knows the mentee isn't the enemy; the mentee's pain is the enemy.

Service is the leader who addresses a conflict early — before it becomes violence — even though it would be easier to mind his own business.

*Service Over Self means: **I choose to use my time, my energy, and my influence for something bigger than my own comfort.**"*

Pause.

"Here's the deeper truth: service isn't a sacrifice. The men who practice it — in this facility and in every successful program we studied — will tell you the same thing: serving others is what finally made them feel free. Not free as in released. Free as in unburdened. Free from the selfishness that got most of us here in the first place."

Learning from Other Programs (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"FORGE isn't the first program to discover this. Let me tell you about three others."

PEP — Prison Entrepreneurship Program (Texas):

"In Texas, there's a program called PEP. It takes men in prison and puts them through a 4-month mini-MBA — business plans, financial models, pitch competitions in front of real CEOs and venture capitalists. Sounds impressive, right? But here's the part that matters:

During the program, every participant has to turn around and teach the lessons they just learned to the next class coming in behind them. They call it 'servant leadership.' You learn, then you serve by teaching. 90% of PEP's staff today are graduates of the program. They went from inmates to mentors to employees — because they learned to serve first."

GRIP — Guiding Rage Into Power (California):

"At San Quentin in California, there's a year-long program called GRIP. It has a 0.5% recidivism rate — that means of 421 graduates who've been released, only 2 went back to prison. The California average is 42%. You know what drives GRIP? The same thing we're talking about. Experienced participants co-facilitate classes. They mentor newer participants. They set the standards for the group — not the outside facilitators. The participants own the culture. Sound familiar? That's the stakeholder model."

RSVP — Resolve to Stop the Violence (San Francisco):

"In San Francisco, there's a program called RSVP that reduced violent rearrests by 80%. Eighty percent. The men live together in a dedicated housing unit. They do 50 hours a week of programming. And the men who've been in the longest? They mentor the men who just arrived.

No formal certification. No titles. Just men who've changed their behavior showing men who haven't that it's possible. Peer accountability. Service. Culture."

Facilitator:

*"These programs work because they figured out the same thing FORGE is built on: **the most powerful force for change in a prison is not staff, not programs, not policies. It's one man who's changed his life showing another man that he can change his.***

That's what you're training to become."

Group Exercise: Service in Our Environment (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's get practical. Service Over Self sounds great as a philosophy. But what does it look like on a Tuesday afternoon in your dorm?"

*I want to break into groups of 3-4. Each group is going to brainstorm: **What are 10 specific acts of service you can do this week in your dorm?** Be concrete. Not 'be a good person' — that's too vague. Specific, observable actions."*

Small groups brainstorm (8 min). Facilitator circulates, pushes for specificity.

Share out (8 min): Each group reports their top 5. Facilitator captures the list.

Common examples that should emerge: - Help someone who's struggling to read a legal document - Clean a common area without being asked - De-escalate a situation instead of watching it blow up - Sit with someone

who's having a bad day and just listen - Help a new arrival get oriented - Tutor someone working on their GED
- Share a book or resource - Check on someone who's been quiet/withdrawn - Help someone write a letter home - Mediate a minor dispute before it grows

Facilitator:

"Look at this list. None of these require permission. None require a program. None require staff approval. Every single one of these is available to you right now. Today. The question is: will you do them?"

The Service Challenge (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's your first real FORGE assignment — and it's not a written one.

*Between now and next Tuesday, I want each of you to perform **3 deliberate acts of service** in your dorm. They can be anything from the list we just made, or something you come up with on your own. The only rules:*

- 1. It has to be for someone else's benefit, not yours*
- 2. You don't ask for credit or recognition*
- 3. You write about it in your journal — what you did, how it felt, how the other person responded*

This is where FORGE stops being a class and starts being a way of life."

Closing Exercise: Personal Commitment (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're going to close today with something more than a check-out. I want each of you to make a personal commitment — out loud, to this group.

Complete this sentence: 'The kind of man I'm committed to becoming through FORGE is...'

Take a minute to think about it. Then we'll go around."

One minute of silence for reflection.

Talking piece goes around. Each person completes the sentence.

Facilitator (closing):

"Write down what you just said. Put it in the front of your journal. On the hard days — and there will be hard days — read it. Remind yourself why you're here.

Homework for Tuesday: 1. Complete your 3 acts of service and journal about each one 2. Make sure you can deliver the elevator speech from memory — I'm going to call on people randomly 3. Read the 'Attitude & Mindset' section in your handbook

Week 2, we start getting into the real work — how your thinking controls your behavior. It's going to challenge you. That's the point.

Service Over Self. See you Tuesday."

Session 3 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
 - Elevator speech check (3 people delivered from memory)
 - Service Over Self — defined what it is and isn't
 - Three program examples shared (PEP, GRIP, RSVP)
 - Small group brainstorm on acts of service (10+ specific actions)
 - Service challenge assigned (3 acts before Tuesday)
 - Personal commitment exercise completed
 - Homework assigned (service journal + elevator speech + handbook reading)
-

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 1

What to Watch For

Engagement levels: Who's leaning in? Who's checked out? Who's performing vs. being genuine? Don't call anyone out in Week 1 — just observe. You'll address engagement issues individually as trust builds.

Group dynamics forming: Who gravitates toward whom? Are cliques forming already? Is anyone being excluded? Are there natural leaders emerging? Note these — they'll matter as the program progresses.

Resistance: Some participants will be skeptical. That's healthy. Don't try to convert skeptics in Week 1. Give them space. The program will do its own work over time. The most resistant participants often become the strongest mentors.

Emotional responses: The FORGE story and stakeholder discussion may hit some people hard. Be aware of who gets quiet, who looks away, who seems activated. Check in with them individually after the session if needed.

Common Week 1 Challenges

"This sounds soft." Some men will worry that FORGE makes them look weak. Address this directly if it comes up: "There's nothing soft about choosing restraint when everyone expects you to react. There's nothing soft about sitting with a man in crisis when it would be easier to walk away. What's soft is doing nothing and pretending that's strength."

"What do I get out of this?" Fair question. Be honest: "You don't get time cut. You don't get extra privileges. What you get is skills that will change how you handle every situation for the rest of your life — in here and out there. And you get to be someone who matters to other people in a way that actually helps them."

"I don't trust these guys." Correct response: "You shouldn't. Not yet. Trust isn't a starting point — it's earned over time. All I'm asking is that you stay open to the possibility that it can be built."

Preparation for Week 2

- Review the Thinking for a Change (T4C) curriculum materials, especially Lessons 1-3

- Prepare blank thinking report templates (enough for each participant + extras)
- Review Session 4-6 lesson plans
- Have examples of completed thinking reports ready to share as models

Week 2: How Thinking Works

Week 2 Overview

Purpose: Introduce the cognitive behavioral foundation that the rest of the program is built on. Participants will learn that their thinking drives their feelings and behavior — not the other way around. They'll learn to identify automatic thoughts, recognize the 8 common thinking errors, and begin practicing cognitive restructuring. By the end of this week, every participant should be able to complete a thinking report and use the STOP technique.

Sessions This Week: - Session 4 (Tuesday): Thinking Controls Behavior - Session 5 (Wednesday): Thinking Errors - Session 6 (Thursday): Cognitive Restructuring

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (participants should have these from Week 1) - Pens/pencils - Blank thinking report templates (enough for each participant + extras — at least 30 copies) - Completed sample thinking reports (2-3 examples prepared by facilitator) - Thinking Errors reference sheet (1 per participant — list of all 8 with definitions and examples) - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available)

SESSION 4: Thinking Controls Behavior

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain the Think-Feel-Act cycle in their own words 2. Identify automatic thoughts in a given situation 3. Describe how the same situation can produce different outcomes depending on the thought 4. Complete a thinking report using the five-column format: Situation → Thought → Feeling → Action → Consequence 5. Recognize at least one automatic thought pattern of their own

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Set up: Chairs in circle. Talking piece ready.

Facilitator:

"Welcome back. Week 2. You made it through orientation — now the real work starts.

*Check-in round. Two things: **How are you doing today? And how did the service challenge go?***

If you completed your three acts of service, tell us about one. If you didn't, just be honest about that."

Send the talking piece around. Facilitator goes first, briefly — model the format.

Facilitator note: Don't lecture anyone who didn't complete the service challenge. Just note it. Accountability at this stage is about awareness, not punishment.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Before we get into today's topic, I want to check in on something from last week. We talked about the stakeholder model — that we're not passengers in this system, we're stakeholders. We talked about Service Over Self.

*Quick question for the room: **Did anything change for you this past week because of what we discussed?** Even something small. A moment where you thought differently about a situation. A choice you made that you might not have made before."*

Allow 3-4 responses. Acknowledge each one. Don't force it if people are quiet — the material is still settling.

Facilitator:

"If nothing shifted yet, that's fine. Change doesn't happen in a week. But I want you to keep watching. Today we're going to learn why — the actual mechanics of how your thinking controls everything you do."

Instruction: The Think-Feel-Act Cycle (40 minutes)

Purpose: Teach the foundational concept that thinking drives feelings and behavior. This is the backbone of cognitive behavioral work and will be referenced in every session going forward.

Part 1: The Big Idea (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Here's the single most important thing you'll learn in this entire program. I'm not exaggerating. If you get nothing else from FORGE, get this:

Your thinking controls your behavior.

Not the situation. Not the other person. Not what happened to you. Your thinking.

Most of us walk around believing that situations cause our reactions. Someone disrespects me, so I get angry. Someone takes my stuff, so I fight. My girl stops writing, so I shut down. It feels automatic — like the situation pulls the reaction out of you.

But here's the truth: between every situation and every reaction, there's a thought. You might not notice it. It might happen in a split second. But it's there. And that thought — not the situation — is what drives what you feel and what you do.

*This is called the **Think-Feel-Act cycle.**"*

Draw or describe the cycle:

"Picture a chain with three links:

SITUATION → **THOUGHT** → **FEELING** → **ACTION** → **CONSEQUENCE**

Something happens. You have a thought about it — usually automatic, usually fast. That thought creates a feeling. The feeling drives an action. The action creates a consequence. Every time."

Part 2: The Same Situation, Two Different Outcomes (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Let me prove it to you. Same situation, two different men, two completely different outcomes.

Situation: You're walking through the dorm. You pass a group of guys. One of them says something and the group laughs. You didn't hear what was said.

Man A thinks: 'They're laughing at me. They're disrespecting me. I need to check that right now.' **Man A feels:** Anger. Adrenaline. Face gets hot. **Man A does:** Walks up to the group. 'You got something to say? Say it to my face.' **Consequence:** Confrontation. Maybe a fight. Maybe a write-up. Maybe worse.

Man B thinks: 'Somebody said something funny. Has nothing to do with me.' **Man B feels:** Nothing. Keeps it moving. **Man B does:** Walks past. Nods. Goes about his day. **Consequence:** Nothing. Peace.

Same situation. Same group of guys. Same laughter. What was different?"

Pause. Let someone answer. They should say "the thought" or "what they were thinking."

Facilitator:

"The thought. That's it. Man A's thought — 'They're laughing at me' — created anger, which created confrontation. Man B's thought — 'Has nothing to do with me' — created calm, which created peace.

Now here's the hard question: **How many times have you been Man A?** How many times has a thought you didn't even examine push you into a situation that cost you? A fight. A disciplinary report. A relationship destroyed. Years added to your time.

Every single one of those started with a thought."

Part 3: Automatic Thoughts (15 min)

Facilitator:

"The reason this is so hard to change is because most of our thinking is automatic. You don't choose these thoughts. They show up on their own — fast, loud, and convincing. They feel like facts.

'He's disrespecting me.' That doesn't feel like a thought. It feels like reality. But it's not reality — it's an interpretation. A story your brain is telling about what happened. And your brain might be wrong.

Automatic thoughts come from your history. If you grew up in an environment where disrespect could get you hurt, your brain learned to scan for it constantly. If you were betrayed by people close to you, your brain learned to assume the worst about people's intentions. If you were powerless as a kid, your brain learned that aggression is the only way to be safe.

These thoughts made sense at some point in your life. They were survival strategies. But most of them aren't serving you anymore. They're running the show — and they're running you into walls.

The goal of this week is simple: **slow down enough to see the thought before it takes over.** That's the first step. You can't change what you can't see."

Practice/Exercise: Thinking Reports (30 minutes)

Purpose: Introduce the thinking report — the core written tool participants will use throughout Phase 1.

Facilitator:

"We're going to learn a tool that you'll use for the rest of this program. It's called a **thinking report**. It's simple — five columns. But it's one of the most powerful things you can do to understand your own behavior."

Hand out blank thinking report templates.

"A thinking report has five parts:

Situation	Thought	Feeling	Action	Consequence
What happened? Just the facts — no interpretation.	What went through your mind? The automatic thought.	What did you feel? Name the emotion.	What did you do?	What happened as a result?

Let me show you a completed one."

Share a sample thinking report:

"Situation: Another man cut in front of me in the chow line.

Thought: 'He thinks I'm soft. If I let this go, everyone will see.'

Feeling: Anger. Embarrassment.

Action: I confronted him. Got loud. Told him to get to the back.

Consequence: He got loud back. A CO came over. We both almost got written up. I was worked up for the rest of the day.

See how it works? The situation was small — a guy cutting in line. But the thought — 'He thinks I'm soft' — made it about respect and reputation. That thought created anger, which created confrontation, which created consequences.

Now — if the thought had been different — 'This dude's just being impatient. Not worth my energy' — the whole chain changes. Different feeling, different action, different consequence."

Exercise: Complete 2 thinking reports (20 min)

Facilitator:

"Your turn. I want you to write two thinking reports from your own life. Pick two situations from the past week — or past month — where you had a strong reaction. It doesn't have to be a fight. It could be getting frustrated, shutting down, snapping at someone, or stewing about something all day.

Use the five columns. Be specific. Don't write what you think you should have thought — write what actually went through your mind. The point is honesty, not perfection.

You have 20 minutes. If you finish early, start a third one."

Facilitator circulates. Help anyone who's stuck: - "What's a recent situation where you got angry or frustrated?" - "What was the very first thing that went through your mind?" - "What emotion was that? Give it a name." - "What did you do next? What happened after that?"

Don't read anyone's thinking report without permission. These are personal.

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about what that was like. I'm not going to ask you to read your thinking reports out loud — that's your business. But I want to talk about the process.

What was hard about it? What did you notice?"

Allow open discussion. Common responses to address:

"I didn't realize I was thinking anything — it just happened."

"That's exactly the point. The thought was so fast you didn't catch it in the moment. That's what automatic means. The thinking report slows it down enough to see it. The more you practice, the faster you'll catch it in real time."

"My thought wasn't wrong — the guy really was disrespecting me."

"Maybe he was. But here's the question: did your thought lead to the best possible outcome? If your thought is accurate AND it leads you to a good outcome, great. But if your thought — even an accurate one — leads you to a consequence you don't want, then the thought isn't serving you. We're not asking whether thoughts are true or false. We're asking whether they're helpful."

"This feels like you're telling us not to react to anything."

"Not at all. Reacting is human. The goal isn't to become a robot. The goal is to choose your reaction instead of having it chosen for you. Right now, for most of us, our automatic thoughts are in the driver's seat. We're going to change that."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Closing round. One sentence: **What's one automatic thought you have that you realized is running the show?**"*

You don't have to share the details — just the pattern. Something like 'I always assume people are trying to play me' or 'I jump to the worst-case scenario.' Pass if you need to."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Here's your homework. Between now and tomorrow:

- 1. **Complete 3 more thinking reports.** Find three situations — from today, from this week, from whenever — and write them out. Situation, thought, feeling, action, consequence.*
- 2. **Start noticing your automatic thoughts in real time.** You don't have to change them yet. Just notice. 'There it is again.' That awareness is the first step.*

Tomorrow we're going to put names on those thoughts. You'll learn the 8 thinking errors — and I promise you, you'll recognize yourself in at least half of them.

See you tomorrow."

Session 4 Checklist

- Room set up in circle before participants arrive
- Blank thinking report templates ready (enough for everyone + extras)
- Sample completed thinking reports ready
- Opening circle completed — service challenge check-in
- Review of Week 1 concepts (stakeholder model, Service Over Self)
- Think-Feel-Act cycle explained with diagram
- Same-situation/different-thought example delivered
- Automatic thoughts concept explained
- Thinking reports introduced — five-column format
- Sample thinking report walked through
- Participants completed 2 thinking reports
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing round completed
- Homework assigned (3 thinking reports + notice automatic thoughts)

SESSION 5: Thinking Errors

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Name and define all 8 thinking errors 2. Identify thinking errors in example scenarios 3. Recognize at least 3 thinking errors in their own thinking reports 4. Explain how thinking errors distort perception and drive harmful behavior 5. Begin catching thinking errors in real time

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you doing today, and did you complete your 3 thinking reports?"

If you did them, tell us what it was like — not the content, just the experience. If you didn't, be straight about it."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator note: If most of the group did not complete the homework, address it directly but briefly:

"I get that this is new. Writing about your own thinking isn't something most of us have ever done. But here's the reality: FORGE doesn't work without the work between sessions. The homework isn't busywork — it's where the change happens. If you didn't do it, do it tonight. No judgment, but no excuses either."

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Yesterday we learned the Think-Feel-Act cycle. Quick review — someone tell me, in your own words: **what's the big idea?**"*

Let 2-3 people respond. Reinforce the core concept:

"Right. Your thinking drives your feelings and behavior. The situation doesn't control you — your interpretation of the situation controls you. And most of that interpretation happens automatically, without you even noticing.

Today we're going to get more specific. We're going to learn that automatic thoughts aren't random — they follow patterns. And those patterns have names."

Instruction: The 8 Thinking Errors (40 minutes)

Purpose: Teach the 8 common thinking errors. These are adapted from T4C (Thinking for a Change) and represent the most common distorted thinking patterns found in cognitive behavioral research.

Facilitator:

"Every one of us has thinking errors. Not some of us — all of us. These aren't signs of being stupid or crazy. They're habits — patterns your mind falls into, usually without you knowing it. The reason we name them is so you can catch them. You can't fix what you can't see.

There are 8 thinking errors we're going to learn. As I go through each one, I want you to be honest with yourself about which ones you recognize. I guarantee you'll find at least three or four that feel like they were written about you specifically."

Hand out the Thinking Errors reference sheet. Go through each one:

Thinking Error #1: Closed Thinking

"Closed thinking is: 'I'm right. I don't want to hear it. My mind is made up.' It's refusing to consider another perspective, another possibility, another way of looking at something.

What it sounds like: - 'That's just the way I am.' - 'Nobody's going to change my mind.' - 'I already know what happened — I don't need to hear their side.'

In the dorm: A guy decides his bunkmate is stealing from him. He's certain. He won't listen to any explanation. He won't consider that he might be wrong. He's already decided.

Closed thinking is dangerous because it shuts down learning. If you're always right, you never grow."

Thinking Error #2: Victim Stance

"Victim stance is: 'It's not my fault. This was done to me. I had no choice.' It's seeing yourself as permanently acted upon — never the actor.

What it sounds like: - 'I'm locked up because the system is rigged.' - 'She made me do it.' - 'If I'd had a different upbringing, I wouldn't be here.'

In the dorm: A guy gets into a fight and says 'He started it — I didn't have a choice.' You always have a choice. You might not like your options, but the choice is always there.

Now — let me be real. Some of you have been genuine victims of terrible things. Abuse, neglect, violence, injustice. That's real. Victim stance isn't about denying what happened to you. It's about staying stuck there. It's using your past as a reason to never take responsibility for your present.

The difference: 'I was harmed, and I need to heal' is honest. 'Everything is everyone else's fault' is a thinking error."

Thinking Error #3: Lack of Empathy

"Lack of empathy is: 'I don't care how they feel. That's their problem.' It's an unwillingness or inability to consider the impact of your actions on other people.

What it sounds like: - 'He shouldn't have been in the way.' - 'That's not my problem.' - 'She'll get over it.'

In the dorm: A guy plays his music loud at midnight. Someone asks him to turn it down. He says 'Deal with it.' He's not thinking about the 30 other people trying to sleep. He's only thinking about himself.

Lack of empathy isn't always about being cruel. Sometimes it's just not thinking about others at all. It's living in a bubble where only your needs exist."

Thinking Error #4: Minimizing

"Minimizing is: 'It's not that serious.' It's downplaying the harm you've done, the seriousness of a situation, or the impact of your choices.

What it sounds like: - *'I only pushed him.'* - *'It was just a little weed.'* - *'Nobody got hurt — what's the big deal?'*

In the dorm: *A guy borrows something without asking and says 'Relax, I was going to give it back.' He's minimizing. He took something that wasn't his. The impact on the other person is real, regardless of his intention.*

Minimizing is one of the most common thinking errors in here. It's the one that lets you sleep at night after doing something you know was wrong."

Thinking Error #5: Power Thrust

"Power thrust is: 'I'll make them do it. I'll force the outcome I want.' It's using intimidation, threats, aggression, or manipulation to control people or situations.

What it sounds like: - *'If he doesn't back off, I'll handle it.'* - *'I need to show these people who's in charge.'* - *'Nobody's going to punk me.'*

In the dorm: *A guy doesn't like how someone looked at him, so he gets in their face. He's using force to control how he's perceived. He's not solving a problem — he's asserting dominance.*

Power thrust feels like strength. It's not. It's the opposite of real strength. Real strength is being able to hold power and choose not to use it destructively. Anybody can intimidate. Not everybody can lead."

Thinking Error #6: Entitlement

"Entitlement is: 'I deserve this. I shouldn't have to wait, work, or earn it.' It's believing that the rules don't apply to you, or that you're owed something special.

What it sounds like: - *'I shouldn't have to clean — that's beneath me.'* - *'I've been here longer, so I get first pick.'* - *'I deserve better than this.'*

In the dorm: *A guy takes the best seat in the common area and won't move for anyone because he's been in the dorm the longest. He thinks his time gives him special privileges. That's entitlement.*

Entitlement is the enemy of service. You can't serve others and feel entitled at the same time."

Thinking Error #7: Cognitive Indolence

"Big words, simple idea. Cognitive indolence is mental laziness. It's: 'I don't want to think about it. I'll deal with it later.' It's refusing to do the hard mental work of thinking things through.

What it sounds like: - *'Whatever, I'll figure it out.'* - *'I don't want to think about that right now.'* - *'It'll work out somehow.'*

In the dorm: *A guy knows he needs to address a problem with someone but keeps putting it off. 'I'll talk to him tomorrow.' Tomorrow becomes next week. Next week the problem explodes.*

Cognitive indolence is how small problems become big ones. It's choosing comfort now over effort now — and paying for it later."

Thinking Error #8: Discontinuity

"Discontinuity is: 'I meant to, but...'. It's having good intentions but not following through. It's the gap between what you say and what you do.

What it sounds like: - *'I was going to apologize, but then I got busy.'* - *'I know I said I'd be there, but something came up.'* - *'I planned to do my homework, but I forgot.'*

In the dorm: *A guy promises his kid on the phone that he's going to be different, that he's changing. Then he goes back to the dorm and acts exactly the same. He meant it when he said it. But meaning it isn't enough.*

Discontinuity is the gap between intention and action. Good intentions without follow-through don't help anyone."

Wrap-up of all 8:

Facilitator:

"So there they are. Eight patterns of thinking that distort reality and drive harmful behavior:

- 1. Closed thinking — I'm right, period.*
- 2. Victim stance — It's not my fault.*
- 3. Lack of empathy — I don't care how they feel.*
- 4. Minimizing — It's not that serious.*
- 5. Power thrust — I'll make them do it.*
- 6. Entitlement — I deserve it.*
- 7. Cognitive indolence — I don't want to think about it.*
- 8. Discontinuity — I meant to, but...*

*Here's what I want you to notice: these aren't rare. These aren't disorders. These are everyday habits that every person in this room — including me — falls into. The difference between someone who keeps making the same mistakes and someone who grows is this: **the person who grows learns to catch the error before it drives the action.***

That's what we're training you to do."

Practice/Exercise: Finding Thinking Errors in Your Thinking Reports (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now we're going to go back to the thinking reports you wrote — the ones from yesterday and the ones you did for homework. Pull them out.

*Here's the exercise: **Go through each thinking report and identify which thinking errors were present in your thinking.** Use the reference sheet. Write the name of the thinking error next to the 'Thought' column.*

Most situations involve more than one thinking error. Don't stop at the first one you find — look deeper.

You have 15 minutes."

Facilitator circulates. Help people who are stuck: - "Read me the thought you wrote down. Now look at the list — which one does that sound like?" - "Could there be a second error hiding in there?" - "Is there any minimizing happening? Any victim stance?"

Share-out (15 min):

Facilitator:

"I'd like some volunteers to share — not the details of your situation if you don't want to, but the thinking errors you found. Which ones showed up for you?"

Go around — allow 6-8 people to share. Likely patterns: - Power thrust and closed thinking tend to travel together - Victim stance and lack of empathy often coexist - Minimizing shows up in almost everyone's reports

Facilitator (after sharing):

"Notice anything? Almost everyone found the same 3-4 errors showing up again and again. That's because thinking errors are habits. You have go-to errors — the ones you default to under stress. Knowing your go-to errors is like knowing your weak spots. It's the first step to defending against them."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Let me ask the room: **Which thinking error do you think is the most common in this facility? Not just in you — across the whole dorm, the whole compound?**"*

Open discussion. Let 4-5 people respond with their reasoning.

Facilitator:

*"Now a harder question: **Which thinking error is the most dangerous?**"*

Allow discussion. There's no single right answer, but guide toward this:

*"They're all dangerous in different ways. But I'll tell you which combination I see cause the most damage: **power thrust plus lack of empathy.** When a man believes force is the answer AND doesn't consider the impact on others — that's where violence comes from. That's where harm happens.*

*And here's the one that keeps people locked up the longest — not in here, but mentally: **victim stance.** Because as long as everything is someone else's fault, you never have to change. You stay stuck. You stay the same person who got here.*

The moment you say 'My thinking led me here, and my thinking can lead me somewhere different' — that's the moment everything changes."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Name your top two thinking errors — the ones you fall into most often. Be honest. This isn't confession — it's awareness."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Homework for tomorrow:

- 1. Catch yourself in 3 thinking errors between now and tomorrow's session. They'll happen — they happen every day. When you notice one, write it down: What was the situation? What was the thought? Which error was it?*
- 2. Review the thinking errors reference sheet. Know all 8 by name. Tomorrow we're going to learn what to do with them — how to challenge and replace them.*

You've spent your whole life running on autopilot thinking. This week, we're taking the wheel. See you tomorrow."

Session 5 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Thinking Errors reference sheets distributed
- Opening circle completed — homework check-in
- Review of Think-Feel-Act cycle
- All 8 thinking errors taught with definitions and dorm-life examples
- Participants reviewed their own thinking reports for thinking errors
- Share-out on identified thinking errors completed
- Discussion on most common and most dangerous thinking errors
- Closing round completed (top 2 personal thinking errors)
- Homework assigned (catch 3 thinking errors + review reference sheet)

SESSION 6: Cognitive Restructuring

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define cognitive restructuring in plain language 2. Challenge a thinking error by asking "Is this thought helpful? Is it accurate? Is there another way to see this?" 3. Demonstrate the STOP technique: Stop → Think → Options → Plan 4. Rewrite a thinking report with corrected thinking 5. Begin building a personal alternative thought bank

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you doing today? And did you catch any thinking errors since yesterday?"

If you caught one, tell us which error it was and how you noticed it."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator note: Celebrate the catches. Every time someone says "I noticed I was doing power thrust" or "I caught myself minimizing," that's real progress. Awareness is the hardest step.

Facilitator (after the round):

"The fact that some of you are catching these in real time after one day — that's significant. Most people go their entire lives without ever examining their own thinking. You're doing it after 48 hours."

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Quick review. Someone give me the 8 thinking errors. Let's see how many we can name as a group."

Let the group call them out. Fill in any they miss.

*"Good. So now you can identify the problem. But identifying the problem isn't enough. If all we do is label our thinking errors, we become really self-aware people who keep making the same mistakes. That's not the goal. Today we learn what to do about them. Today we learn how to **change your thinking.**"*

Instruction: Cognitive Restructuring and the STOP Technique (40 minutes)

Part 1: What Is Cognitive Restructuring? (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Cognitive restructuring. Sounds academic. It's not. Here's what it means in plain English:

Catching a bad thought and replacing it with a better one.

That's it. You notice the automatic thought. You check it. You challenge it. And you replace it with a thought that's more accurate, more helpful, or both.

This isn't about lying to yourself. This isn't positive thinking where you pretend everything's fine. This is about asking honest questions about your own thoughts:

- 1. Is this thought accurate?*** *Do I have all the facts, or am I filling in blanks with assumptions?*
- 2. Is this thought helpful?*** *Even if it's true, is it leading me toward the outcome I want?*
- 3. Is there another way to see this?*** *What would a calm, clear-headed version of me think about this situation?*

Those three questions will change your life if you actually use them."

Part 2: Challenging Thinking Errors (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Let me show you how this works with each thinking error. I'm going to give you the error, the automatic thought, and the challenge."

Walk through examples:

"Closed Thinking: 'I already know what happened — I don't need to hear his side.' **Challenge:** 'Do I really know? Or am I assuming? What if there's something I'm missing? What would it cost me to listen for 2 minutes?'

Victim Stance: 'I'm in here because the judge had it out for me.' **Challenge:** 'Did the judge put the drugs in my car? Did the judge make me sell? I can be angry about the sentence AND honest about my choices.'

Lack of Empathy: 'That's his problem, not mine.' **Challenge:** 'If I was in his situation, how would I feel? Would I want someone to help? What kind of man do I want to be?'

Minimizing: 'I only yelled at him — it's not like I hit him.' **Challenge:** 'How did he experience it? Would I want someone yelling at me? The impact matters, not just the degree.'

Power Thrust: 'I need to show him who he's dealing with.' **Challenge:** 'What am I actually trying to accomplish? Is intimidation going to get me what I want? Or is it just going to start something?'

Entitlement: 'I shouldn't have to wait in line like everyone else.' **Challenge:** 'Why not? What makes me special? Am I living by Service Over Self or Service Over Everyone Else?'

Cognitive Indolence: 'I don't want to think about that right now.' **Challenge:** 'What happens if I keep avoiding this? Is it going to go away or get worse? What would the man I'm becoming do?'

Discontinuity: 'I was going to do my homework, but I forgot.' **Challenge:** 'Did I really forget or did I choose not to? What am I going to do differently right now to follow through?'"

Facilitator:

"Notice the pattern. Every challenge does the same thing — it slows you down and makes you think honestly. It interrupts the automatic chain. That's the whole game."

Part 3: The STOP Technique (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Now let me give you a tool you can use in real time — not just when you're writing a thinking report, but in the actual moment. It's called **STOP**.

S — Stop. Physically pause. Don't say anything. Don't move toward the situation. Just stop. If you can, take one breath. That one breath is the most important thing you'll ever do, because it creates a gap between the trigger and your response.

T — Think. Ask yourself: What am I thinking right now? What's the automatic thought? Is there a thinking error here?

O — Options. What are my options? Come up with at least two different ways to respond. There is always more than one option — even if your brain is telling you there isn't.

P — Plan. Choose the option that leads to the best outcome. Not the option that feels best in the moment — the one that leads to the best outcome in an hour, a day, a week.

STOP. Think. Options. Plan.

Let me walk you through it with an example."

STOP in action:

"Situation: You're in the common area. A guy you have history with walks past and bumps your shoulder. Doesn't say anything.

Without STOP: Automatic thought: 'He did that on purpose. He's testing me.' Feeling: anger. Action: You say something aggressive. Consequence: Confrontation.

With STOP:

S — Stop. Don't move. Don't say anything. Take a breath.

T — Think. 'My first thought is he did that on purpose. Is that accurate? I don't know. There are 60 guys in this room. People bump into each other. Even if he did mean it — what do I want to happen next? Do I want a fight? A write-up? Or do I want to keep my record clean?'

O — Options. Option 1: Confront him. Option 2: Let it go completely. Option 3: Make a mental note and stay alert, but don't escalate.

P — Plan. Option 3. I'm going to stay alert, but I'm not going to hand this guy the power to ruin my day. If it happens again, I'll address it calmly. One bump isn't worth my peace.

Same situation. Completely different outcome. The difference: four letters. **STOP.**"

Practice/Exercise: Rewriting Thinking Reports (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's today's exercise. Pull out one of your completed thinking reports — the one where the thinking error was most obvious, or the one where the consequence was worst.

You're going to **rewrite it**. Same situation. But this time, you're going to: 1. Identify the thinking error in the original thought 2. Apply the STOP technique 3. Write the corrected thought — the challenged, restructured version 4. Trace the new chain: New Thought → New Feeling → New Action → New Consequence

Use this format:

	Original	Restructured
Situation	(same)	(same)
Automatic Thought	(your original thought)	(challenged/replaced thought)
Thinking Error	(name it)	—
Feeling	(original feeling)	(new feeling)
Action	(what you did)	(what you would do)
Consequence	(what happened)	(what would happen)

You have 15 minutes for the first one. If you finish, do a second."

Facilitator circulates. This is where people often struggle — help with the restructured thought:

- "Okay, so the original thought was 'He's trying to play me.' What's another way to see it?"
- "What would your best self think in that situation?"
- "If you were giving advice to a friend, what would you tell him to think?"

Share-out (15 min):

Facilitator:

"Who's willing to share their before and after? You don't have to share the personal details — just the original thought, the thinking error, and the restructured thought."

Allow 4-5 people to share. After each one: - Acknowledge the honesty - Point out how the new thought changes the entire chain - Ask the group: "Does the restructured thought seem realistic? Could you actually think that in the moment?"

Facilitator:

"That last question is important. If the replacement thought feels fake — if you don't believe it — it won't work. The restructured thought doesn't have to be cheerful. It has to be honest. 'This isn't worth my peace' is honest. 'Everything is wonderful!' is not.

*Over time, you're going to build a bank of these replacement thoughts — a library of better ways to think about the situations you face. We call this your **alternative thought bank**. The more entries in your bank, the more options you have when a situation hits."*

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about the real challenge with everything we've covered this week. I'm going to name it, because if I don't, it'll become the reason people quit trying.

The real world doesn't pause for you.

In here, sitting in this room, writing a thinking report, you can slow things down. You can analyze. You can come up with a better thought. But in the dorm, in the chow hall, on the yard — things happen fast. Someone gets in your face. Someone says something. Tension rises. You have seconds, not minutes.

*So the honest question is: **Can you actually use this stuff in real life?**"*

Let 3-4 people respond.

Facilitator:

"Here's the answer: not right away. And that's okay. This is a skill. Like any skill, it takes practice. The first few times you try to STOP in a real situation, you probably won't catch it until after. You'll react first and think later. And you'll say, 'I should have STOPped.'

That's still progress. Last week, you wouldn't have recognized the thinking error at all. Now you're recognizing it after the fact. Next week, you'll recognize it during. Eventually, you'll recognize it before. That's how the skill develops:

After → During → Before.

The thinking reports are your training ground. Every one you write builds the muscle. So when the real moment comes, you're not starting from zero.

I'm going to be honest with you: the men I've seen do best in programs like this aren't the ones who get it fastest. They're the ones who keep doing the work even when it feels pointless. Keep writing the reports. Keep catching the errors. Keep practicing STOP. It works."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What's one replacement thought you want to start using this week? Something you're going to try to think instead of your automatic thought."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Those are the first entries in your alternative thought bank. Write them down. Put them somewhere you'll see them."

Homework for next Tuesday:

- 1. Practice the STOP technique at least twice before Tuesday. Use it in a real situation — even a small one. Journal what happened: What was the situation? Did you stop? What did you think? What options did you consider? What did you choose?*
- 2. Continue writing thinking reports. Aim for at least 2 more between now and Tuesday. And on each one, include the restructured version.*
- 3. Start building your alternative thought bank. In your journal, start a list: 'Thoughts that get me in trouble' on one side, 'Thoughts that keep me steady' on the other. Add to it all week.*

Next week we're shifting from how you think to how you feel. Week 3 is Emotional Literacy — understanding your emotions, managing them, and getting underneath the anger to find out what's really going on.

Good work this week. You've learned more about your own mind in three days than most people learn in years. Now the question is what you do with it. See you Tuesday."

Session 6 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed — thinking errors catch check-in
- Review of 8 thinking errors (group recall)
- Cognitive restructuring explained — three challenge questions taught
- Each thinking error demonstrated with challenge example
- STOP technique taught (Stop → Think → Options → Plan)
- STOP demonstrated with dorm-life example
- Participants rewrote a thinking report with corrected thinking

- [] Share-out on before/after thinking reports
- [] Alternative thought bank concept introduced
- [] Real-world application discussed (After → During → Before progression)
- [] Closing round completed (one replacement thought)
- [] Homework assigned (STOP practice x2 + 2 thinking reports with restructuring + start thought bank)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 2

What to Watch For

Intellectual understanding vs. real engagement: Some participants will grasp the concepts quickly and treat this like a class — answering questions correctly without actually applying it to their own lives. Watch for the difference between someone who can define "victim stance" and someone who admits "I use victim stance every day." The second person is doing the work.

Resistance to self-examination: This week asks men to look at their own thinking honestly. Some will resist. Common forms: joking it off ("I don't have thinking errors — I'm perfect"), deflecting to others ("My cellie needs this more than me"), or going quiet. Don't push too hard. The tools are planted — they'll grow at different rates.

Emotional activation: Thinking reports can surface painful memories and realizations. A man writing about a fight that got him 5 extra years might suddenly realize it started with a thought he could have changed. That's heavy. Be ready to acknowledge it: "That takes courage to see. The fact that you can see it now means you can choose differently next time."

The "this is soft" reaction: Some men will feel that examining their thinking is weakness. Reframe it: "This is what special forces operators do — they train their minds to respond under pressure instead of react. There's nothing soft about it. What's soft is letting your autopilot make your decisions for you."

Common Week 2 Challenges

"But my thought was right — he really was trying to disrespect me."

Address this directly: "Maybe he was. The question isn't whether your thought is right or wrong. The question is whether it led to the outcome you wanted. You can have a 100% accurate thought that still drives you into a wall. 'That guy is disrespecting me' might be true. But if it leads you to a fight, a write-up, and 6 months in the hole — was the thought useful? We're training you to think strategically, not just accurately."

"I've been this way my whole life — I can't change how I think."

"That's discontinuity right there. 'I can't change' is a thought — and it's the one that keeps you exactly where you are. The men who built this program had the same automatic thoughts you have. They changed. Not overnight. But they changed. The question isn't whether you can — it's whether you're willing to do the work."

Participants who can't identify thoughts (they go straight to feelings):

This is common. Many men have never been taught to distinguish between a thought and a feeling. Coach it: "When you say 'I felt disrespected' — that's actually a thought. You thought you were being disrespected. The feeling that came from that thought might be anger, or hurt, or shame. Try to separate the interpretation (the thought) from the emotion (the feeling)."

Preparation for Week 3

- Review the GRIP emotional literacy curriculum framework
- Prepare an emotion wheel visual (printed or drawn) — large enough for the group to reference
- Prepare body outline templates for the body mapping exercise (Session 7)
- Review the escalation curve model — have a visual ready
- Practice the 4-4-4 breathing technique yourself so you can model it naturally
- Prepare the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise instructions
- Be emotionally prepared for Session 9 (The Anger Beneath the Anger) — this session goes deep. Plan how you'll hold the space if men share about shame, grief, or abuse.
- Have a referral plan ready in case anyone is activated beyond what the group can hold — know who your mental health contact is at the facility

Week 3: Emotional Literacy

Week 3 Overview

Purpose: Move from cognitive work to emotional work. Participants will learn to identify, name, and understand their emotions — especially the ones they've been trained to suppress or convert into anger. By the end of this week, every participant should be able to use the emotion wheel, recognize where emotions show up in their body, use at least two regulation techniques, and begin to explore what's underneath their anger.

Sessions This Week: - Session 7 (Tuesday): Understanding Emotions - Session 8 (Wednesday): Emotional Regulation - Session 9 (Thursday): The Anger Beneath the Anger

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks - Pens/pencils - Emotion wheel printout (1 per participant — showing primary emotions in the center with secondary and tertiary emotions radiating outward) - Body outline templates for body mapping exercise (1 per participant — simple front-facing human outline) - Escalation curve diagram (large visual for the group — either drawn on easel paper or printed) - Emotion tracking log template (1 per participant — columns: Time, Situation, Emotion, Body Signal, Intensity 1-10) - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available)

SESSION 7: Understanding Emotions

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Name at least 15 distinct emotions using the emotion wheel 2. Explain why anger is called a "secondary" emotion 3. Identify at least 3 physical body signals associated with different emotions 4. Complete a body mapping exercise showing where they personally experience emotions 5. Begin tracking emotions using the daily log format

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Welcome back. Check-in round: **How are you doing today — and give me a specific emotion, not just 'good' or 'fine.'***

If you're not sure what emotion you're feeling, that's fine — say that. We're going to spend this whole week learning the language for it."

Talking piece goes around. Facilitator goes first and models specificity: not "I'm good" but "I'm a little anxious about today's session because we're going into deeper territory."

Facilitator note: Many men will say "good" or "alright" because they don't have the vocabulary yet, or because naming emotions feels unsafe. Don't correct anyone — just note the pattern. By the end of this session, they'll have more words to work with.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last week we learned about thinking — how your thoughts control your behavior, the 8 thinking errors, and how to restructure your thinking using the STOP technique.

How did the STOP practice go this week? Did anyone use it in a real situation?"

Allow 3-4 responses. Celebrate any attempt, even partial:

"Even if you only remembered STOP after the moment had passed — that counts. That's the 'after' stage. You're building the muscle."

Facilitator:

"This week we're adding the next layer. Last week was about your head. This week is about your heart. Thinking errors are one half of the equation. Emotions are the other half. If you can understand your thinking AND your emotions, you're operating with a full dashboard instead of driving blind.

*Let's start with a question: **How many emotions can you name? Right now, off the top of your head?"***

Let a few people call them out. Most men will name 4-6: happy, sad, angry, scared, maybe frustrated or stressed.

"That's about what most people come up with. Four to six emotions. But here's the problem: human beings experience dozens of distinct emotions. If you only have 4-6 words for what you feel, it's like trying to paint a picture with 4 colors. Everything gets lumped together. 'I'm angry' might actually mean you're embarrassed, or hurt, or afraid, or grieving. But if 'angry' is the only word you have, angry is all you'll ever feel — and angry is all you'll ever act on.

Today we're going to expand your emotional vocabulary. Dramatically."

Instruction: The Emotion Wheel and Anger as a Secondary Emotion (40 minutes)

Part 1: The Emotion Wheel (15 min)

Hand out emotion wheel printouts.

Facilitator:

"This is an emotion wheel. Look at it. In the center, you've got the primary emotions — the big ones. Most models list 6 or 7: anger, sadness, fear, joy, surprise, disgust, and sometimes shame. These are universal — every human being on the planet feels these.

But look at what surrounds each primary emotion. These are the secondary and tertiary emotions — the more specific versions. Under 'anger,' you might find frustrated, hostile, irritated, resentful, jealous, bitter. Under 'sadness,' you might find lonely, hopeless, guilty, grief, hurt, disappointed. Under 'fear' — anxious, insecure, rejected, threatened, inadequate.

This is your new vocabulary. *Instead of 'I'm angry,' you can say 'I'm resentful.' Instead of 'I'm sad,' you can say 'I feel inadequate.' Instead of 'I'm scared,' you can say 'I feel rejected.'*

Why does specificity matter? Because the more precisely you can name what you feel, the more precisely you can respond to it. 'I'm angry' gives you one option: deal with the anger. 'I feel disrespected and hurt' gives you two things to work with — and they need different responses."

Quick exercise (5 min):

"Look at the wheel. Pick three emotions you've felt in the last 24 hours — but don't use 'angry,' 'sad,' or 'fine.' Find the more specific word. Circle them on your wheel."

Allow a few people to share what they circled. No commentary needed — just normalize the practice.

Part 2: Anger as a Secondary Emotion (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Now let me tell you something about anger that might change how you understand yourself.

***Anger is almost always a secondary emotion.** That means anger is rarely the first thing you feel. Something comes before it — something faster, something more vulnerable. Anger is what covers it up.*

Think about it like this: anger is the bodyguard. The real emotion — the one that actually hurts — is standing behind it. Anger's job is to make sure nobody sees the real emotion, because the real emotion feels weak.

What are the emotions that anger covers up? Usually these:

- **Fear** — 'I'm scared' becomes 'I'm pissed off'
- **Shame** — 'I'm embarrassed' becomes 'I'm furious'
- **Hurt** — 'That wounded me' becomes 'I'll wound them back'
- **Rejection** — 'I feel left out' becomes 'I don't need any of them'
- **Powerlessness** — 'I have no control' becomes 'I'll take control by force'
- **Grief** — 'I'm devastated' becomes 'I'm enraged'

In here — in this environment — which emotion is acceptable to show? Anger. Which emotions will get you tested if people see them? Fear. Shame. Hurt. Sadness.

So what does every man in this facility learn to do? Convert everything into anger. It's the only emotion that feels safe. But here's the cost: when everything gets converted to anger, you never actually address what's really going on. You're treating the bodyguard instead of the person it's protecting.

Let me give you an example."

Example:

"A man calls home. His kid's mother tells him she's seeing someone new. What he feels first — for a split second — is hurt. Rejection. Fear that his kid will call another man 'Dad.' Grief over a relationship he's losing.

But in the dorm, he can't sit with that. He can't cry. He can't say 'I'm heartbroken.' So what happens? Within seconds, those feelings get converted to anger. He hangs up the phone, slams something, snaps at his bunkmate, starts a fight over nothing.

Everyone around him sees an angry man. But underneath? He's a man in pain who doesn't know what to do with it.

How many of you have lived that exact scenario — or something like it?"

Pause. Let it land. Some men will nod. Some will look away. That's the recognition.

"One of the most important skills you'll learn in FORGE is this: **look beneath the anger**. Not just in yourself — eventually, in the people you'll mentor. When someone's raging, ask yourself: what's underneath? Fear? Shame? Grief? If you can get to the real emotion, you can actually help. If you only deal with the anger, you're just managing symptoms."

Part 3: Body Signals (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Here's the other thing about emotions that nobody teaches you: **your body knows what you're feeling before your mind does**.

Emotions don't just live in your head. They show up in your body — in physical sensations. And if you learn to read those signals, you get an early warning system. You can catch what's happening before it takes over.

Let me give you some common examples:

Anger: Clenched jaw. Tight fists. Heat in your chest or face. Muscles tensing. Heartbeat speeding up.

Fear/Anxiety: Stomach tightening. Shallow breathing. Cold hands. Feeling jittery. Heart racing.

Shame: Wanting to shrink or disappear. Heat in your face. Looking down. Chest caving in. Feeling heavy.

Sadness/Grief: Heaviness in your chest. Tightness in your throat. Feeling drained. Stinging behind your eyes.

These are not weaknesses. They're data. Your body is giving you information. The question is whether you're paying attention or ignoring it until it explodes."

Practice/Exercise: Body Mapping (30 minutes)

Hand out body outline templates.

Facilitator:

"Here's your exercise. You have a body outline in front of you. We're going to map where you personally feel your emotions in your body. This is different for everyone — there's no right answer.

Here's how it works:

- 1. Pick a color or symbol for each emotion — anger, fear, shame, sadness, and joy. If you only have one pen, use different patterns: X's for anger, circles for fear, lines for shame, dots for sadness, stars for joy.*
- 2. Think about the last time you felt each emotion strongly. Where in your body did you feel it? Mark that spot on the outline.*
- 3. Next to each mark, write a brief note: what the sensation was. 'Tight.' 'Hot.' 'Heavy.' 'Buzzing.' 'Hollow.'*

Take your time with this. Close your eyes if it helps you remember the physical sensation. You have 15 minutes."

Facilitator circulates quietly. Some men will struggle because they've disconnected from their bodies as a survival strategy. Help them:

- "Think about the last time you were really angry. Where in your body did you feel it first?"
- "When you get bad news, what does your body do? Does your stomach drop? Does your chest get tight?"
- "It's okay if you don't know yet. Just put a question mark in the areas where you think something happens. You'll learn to read it better over time."

Debrief the exercise (15 min):

Facilitator:

"Who's willing to share what they found? Tell us one emotion and where you feel it in your body."

Allow 5-6 people to share. Point out patterns:

"Notice how many of you feel anger in your chest, jaw, or fists? That's almost universal. And notice how shame tends to hit the face and stomach? Those patterns aren't accidents — they're hardwired.

*Here's why this matters: **your body signals are your early warning system.** If you learn to notice the tight jaw before the explosion, you have a chance to intervene. You can use STOP before the anger takes over. Your body is faster than your mind — use it.*

This week, I want you to start paying attention to your body like it's an instrument panel. When something happens — anything — check in. Jaw tight? Stomach churning? Chest heavy? That's your body telling you something important. Don't ignore it."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Let's talk about something real. **Why don't men talk about emotions?**"*

Not in some abstract way — why don't YOU talk about emotions? What did you learn growing up about what you're allowed to feel?"

Open discussion. Let men share their experiences. Common themes: - "Crying meant you were weak." - "My father never showed anything but anger." - "On the street, showing feelings got you hurt." - "In here, emotions are a liability."

Facilitator:

"Every single one of those is a lesson you were taught. And every single one of them is a lesson you can unlearn.

I'm not asking you to become emotional. I'm not asking you to cry in the dorm or share your feelings on the yard. I'm asking you to know what you feel — privately, in here, in your journal, and eventually with this group. Because a man who doesn't know what he feels is a man who can't control what he does.

The toughest men I've ever seen aren't the ones who feel nothing. They're the ones who feel everything and choose how to respond. That's the strength we're building."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Closing round. **Name one emotion you felt today that you normally would have ignored or converted to anger.**"*

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Homework — this one is ongoing all week:

1. **Track your emotions 3 times daily for the rest of the week.** Use the emotion tracking log. Three times a day — morning, midday, evening — stop and write down: What time is it? What's happening? What emotion am I feeling? (Use the wheel.) Where do I feel it in my body? How intense is it, 1 to 10?
2. **Keep your emotion wheel with you.** When you're not sure what you're feeling, look at it. The goal is to expand your vocabulary beyond 'angry,' 'fine,' and 'I don't know.'
3. **Continue your thinking reports** — but now add an emotion column that's specific. Not 'angry' — what KIND of angry? Frustrated? Resentful? Hostile?

Tomorrow we learn what to do with these emotions once you recognize them. Regulation — how to turn the volume down before it turns you up.

See you tomorrow."

Session 7 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Emotion wheels distributed
- Body outline templates ready
- Emotion tracking logs distributed
- Opening circle completed — specific emotion check-in
- STOP technique practice reviewed
- Emotion wheel introduced and explored
- Anger as secondary emotion taught with example
- Body signals explained
- Body mapping exercise completed
- Body mapping debrief held
- Discussion on men and emotions held
- Closing round completed
- Homework assigned (emotion tracking 3x daily + keep emotion wheel + add specificity to thinking reports)

SESSION 8: Emotional Regulation

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Describe the escalation curve and identify its five stages 2. Recognize where they currently are on the curve in a given moment 3. Demonstrate the 4-4-4 breathing technique 4. Demonstrate the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique 5. Coach another person through a regulation technique

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you doing — use a specific emotion from the wheel. And tell us: did you do any emotion tracking yesterday?"

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator note: Expect that some men didn't track. That's okay. The ones who did — even once — acknowledge their effort. This habit takes time to build.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday we learned that anger is usually covering something else — fear, shame, hurt, rejection, powerlessness, grief. And we learned that your body gives you signals before your mind catches up.

*Quick question: **Since yesterday, did anyone catch a body signal?** A moment where your body told you something was happening before your mind registered it?"*

Allow 2-3 responses.

"Good. That's awareness building. Today we're going to learn what to do with it. You can recognize the emotion, you can feel it in your body — now what? How do you keep it from taking over?"

That's emotional regulation."

Instruction: The Escalation Curve and Regulation Techniques (40 minutes)

Part 1: The Escalation Curve (15 min)

Display the escalation curve visual.

Facilitator:

"This is the escalation curve. It shows how emotional intensity works — how you go from calm to crisis, and what happens at each stage. Understanding this curve is like having a map of your own emotional system.

There are five stages:"

*"**Stage 1: Baseline/Calm.** This is your normal resting state. You're thinking clearly. You can make good decisions. Your body is relaxed. This is where you want to be as much as possible.*

***Stage 2: Agitated/Triggered.** Something happens. Your body starts to respond — heart rate picks up, muscles tighten, thinking starts to narrow. You're still functional, but you're moving. This is where your body signals from yesterday come in. This is where you can still intervene.*

***Stage 3: Flooded/Escalated.** Your emotional brain has taken over. Your thinking brain is going offline. You're seeing red. Tunnel vision. Everything feels urgent. Your body is in fight-or-flight mode. At this stage, rational thinking is very difficult. This is where most bad decisions get made.*

***Stage 4: Crisis/Peak.** Full escalation. This is where fights happen, where things get said that can't be taken back, where actions have permanent consequences. Your prefrontal cortex — the part of your brain that thinks things through — has essentially shut down. You're operating on instinct.*

***Stage 5: Recovery/Cool-down.** After the peak, intensity drops. You start coming back to yourself. This is where regret usually shows up. 'Why did I do that?' This stage can take minutes or hours depending on how high you went."*

Facilitator:

*"Here's the critical insight: **the further up the curve you go, the harder it is to come back down.** At Stage 2 — agitated — you have options. You can breathe. You can walk away. You can use STOP. At Stage 4 — crisis — you have almost no options. Your body has taken the wheel.*

*So the goal of emotional regulation is this: **intervene at Stage 2.** Catch it early. Use a technique before you hit Stage 3. Because once you're flooded, you're just trying to survive the moment.*

Think about the last time you lost it — really lost it. Can you identify the moment when you were at Stage 2? That moment where you felt it building but you kept going? That's the window. That's where we're going to train you to act differently."

Part 2: The 4-4-4 Breathing Technique (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Technique number one is the simplest and most powerful tool you'll learn in this entire program. It costs nothing. It takes 30 seconds. You can do it anywhere — in the dorm, in the chow hall, on the phone with someone who's pushing your buttons. Nobody even has to know you're doing it.

*It's called **4-4-4 breathing**. Some people call it box breathing. Here's how it works:*

- **Breathe in for 4 seconds.** Through your nose. Slow.
- **Hold for 4 seconds.** Don't force it. Just pause.
- **Breathe out for 4 seconds.** Through your mouth. Slow and controlled.

That's one cycle. Three cycles takes about 36 seconds. In 36 seconds, you can shift your nervous system from fight-or-flight to calm.

I know it sounds too simple. Let me explain why it works.

When you're escalating, your breathing gets fast and shallow. That tells your brain 'We're in danger.' Your brain responds by pumping out adrenaline and cortisol — stress hormones that prepare your body to fight or run. Your heart races. Your muscles tighten. Your thinking narrows.

When you deliberately slow your breathing, you send the opposite signal. You're telling your brain 'We're safe.' Your brain responds by dialing down the stress hormones. Heart rate drops. Muscles relax. Thinking clears.

You are literally hacking your own nervous system. Navy SEALs use this technique. It's not soft — it's tactical. Let's practice. Right now."

Group practice:

"Everyone sit up straight. Feet on the floor. Close your eyes if you're comfortable — if not, look at the floor. We're going to do 3 cycles together.

In... 2... 3... 4... Hold... 2... 3... 4... Out... 2... 3... 4...

Again. In... 2... 3... 4... Hold... 2... 3... 4... Out... 2... 3... 4...

One more. In... 2... 3... 4... Hold... 2... 3... 4... Out... 2... 3... 4...

Open your eyes."

Pause.

"Notice anything different? Even a small shift. Slightly calmer. Slightly more present. That's what 36 seconds can do. Imagine what it can do when you're at Stage 2 and climbing."

Part 3: The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Second technique. This one is for when your mind is racing — when you're spiraling in your thoughts, replaying something, catastrophizing, or so agitated you can't think straight. It's called **5-4-3-2-1 grounding**. Here's how it works. You use your five senses to anchor yourself to the present moment. Because when you're escalated, you're not in the present — you're either in the past (replaying what happened) or the future (imagining what's going to happen). This brings you back to right now.

Name: - **5 things you can see**. Look around. Name them. The wall. The floor. The light. A chair. Someone's shoes. - **4 things you can touch**. Feel them. The chair under you. Your pants. The pen in your hand. Your own hand. - **3 things you can hear**. The fan. Someone talking in the hall. Your own breathing. - **2 things you can smell**. Whatever's in the air. Even if it's nothing — notice that. - **1 thing you can taste**. The inside of your mouth. Water. Whatever.

By the time you get to 1, you're back in the room. You're in the present. Your spiraling mind has been interrupted.

Let's try it."

Group practice:

"Don't close your eyes for this one — you need them open. Just sit where you are. I'll walk you through it.

5 things you can see. Look around the room. Name them to yourself — silently. Take your time...

4 things you can touch. Feel them right now. The chair. Your clothes. The paper in front of you...

3 things you can hear. Listen. What's actually in the room right now...

2 things you can smell. Take a breath through your nose. What do you notice...

1 thing you can taste. Notice what's in your mouth right now...

That's it. You just grounded yourself."

"The 5-4-3-2-1 is especially useful when you're lying on your bunk at night and your mind won't stop. When you're replaying the phone call that went bad. When you're thinking about your case, your family, your future. It interrupts the loop and puts you back in the present moment — which is the only place where you can actually do anything."

Part 4: When to Use What (5 min)

Facilitator:

"So when do you use which technique?"

4-4-4 breathing: *Use it when your body is escalating. Heart racing, muscles tightening, anger rising. This calms your body.*

5-4-3-2-1 grounding: *Use it when your mind is spiraling. Racing thoughts, replaying events, catastrophizing. This calms your mind.*

STOP technique (from last week): *Use it when you need to make a decision. When a situation is unfolding and you need to choose how to respond. This structures your thinking.*

You now have three tools. They work together. In a real situation, you might use all three: breathe to calm your body, ground to clear your mind, then STOP to make a decision."

Practice/Exercise: Paired Regulation Coaching (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's the exercise. You're going to practice these techniques in pairs — but not just on yourself. You're going to practice coaching someone else through them. Because eventually, as FORGE mentors, you'll be helping other men regulate when they're escalating. You need to be able to guide someone else through it.

Here's how this works:

- 1. Pair up.*
- 2. **Partner A** describes a stressful situation — something that happened recently that made them angry or anxious. Keep it real but don't go to the heaviest thing in your life. Medium intensity.*
- 3. **Partner B** listens, then coaches Partner A through a regulation technique. Choose either 4-4-4 breathing or 5-4-3-2-1 grounding — whichever seems right for what your partner is describing.*
- 4. After the technique, Partner B asks: 'What's your level now? What shifted?'*
- 5. Switch roles.*

Each person gets about 10 minutes. I'll call time to switch."

Facilitator circulates during the exercise. Watch for: - Partners who are rushing through it — slow them down - Partners who are uncomfortable coaching — reassure them: "You're not a therapist. You're just walking them through the steps." - Partners who are going too deep — redirect: "Save the heavy stuff for when we have more support around it. For now, keep it medium."

Debrief the exercise (10 min):

Facilitator:

"How was that? Tell me about the experience — both being coached and coaching."

Allow 4-5 responses. Common observations:

If someone says "It felt weird coaching someone else":

"Get used to it. In 6 months, that's your job. You'll be the calm presence in someone else's storm. The fact that it feels awkward now just means you're learning."

If someone says "It actually worked — I felt calmer":

"That's the science. It's not magic. It's biology. You slowed your nervous system down. You can do that anytime, anywhere."

If someone says "I didn't feel anything":

"That's okay. Some people need to be more activated for the techniques to have a noticeable effect. Try them this week when you're actually stressed — not in a controlled exercise. That's where you'll feel the difference."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me address something head-on. Some of you are thinking: 'Breathing exercises? Really? Some guy's in my face and I'm supposed to breathe?"

Fair question. Let me answer it.

The breathing and grounding aren't for when someone's swinging at you. In that moment, you respond however you need to respond to be safe. These techniques are for the 99% of situations that aren't physical emergencies but feel like they are.

The phone call where she says something that makes your blood boil — but you can't do anything about it because you're locked up. That's when you breathe.

The rumor going around the dorm about you — and you want to go find the guy right now. That's when you ground.

The CO who talks to you like you're nothing — and you want to say something you'll regret. That's when you STOP.

These tools aren't for emergencies. They're for everyday life. And everyday life in here is full of situations that push your buttons constantly. If you can regulate through those — if you can stay at Stage 2 instead of hitting Stage 4 — you'll handle this environment better than 95% of the men in this facility.

Regulation isn't weakness. Regulation is strategy. *A man who can stay calm when everything around him is chaos? That's the most powerful man in the room."*

Open the floor for discussion:

"What other situations can you think of where these techniques would help? Situations you actually face in a typical week?"

Allow 4-5 responses. Build a real list of when to use regulation in daily dorm life.

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What's one situation this week where you plan to use one of these techniques? Be specific — not 'whenever I get angry' but a specific situation you know is coming."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Homework:

1. **Use a regulation technique at least 3 times before tomorrow.** Any of them — 4-4-4, 5-4-3-2-1, or STOP. Journal what happened: What was the situation? What technique did you use? What was your level before and after?
2. **Continue your emotion tracking log.** Three entries per day. This is building your emotional awareness muscle.
3. **Pay attention to other men's escalation.** Watch someone this week who starts to escalate. Where on the curve are they? What body signals do you see? Don't intervene — just observe. We're building your ability to read other people's emotions too.

Tomorrow we go deeper. We're going to explore what's underneath the anger. Session 9 is one of the most important sessions in the entire program. It's going to ask you to be honest in a way that might be uncomfortable. But this is where the real change happens.

See you tomorrow."

Session 8 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Escalation curve visual displayed
- Opening circle completed — specific emotions + tracking check-in
- Review of emotion wheel and anger as secondary emotion
- Escalation curve taught — all five stages explained
- 4-4-4 breathing technique taught and practiced as a group
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique taught and practiced as a group
- When-to-use-what summary provided
- Paired regulation coaching exercise completed
- Paired exercise debriefed
- Discussion on real-world application held
- Closing round completed (specific planned use of technique)
- Homework assigned (3 technique uses + emotion tracking + observe others' escalation)

SESSION 9: The Anger Beneath the Anger

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Identify at least 2 emotions that their anger typically covers 2. Describe how unprocessed pain becomes aggression 3. Complete a "Beneath My Anger" writing exercise 4. Demonstrate increased willingness to name vulnerable emotions in a group setting 5. Recognize the link between past experiences and present emotional reactions

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. Today's check-in is different. I want you to answer this question: **What emotion have you been carrying this week that you haven't told anyone about?***

You can keep it brief. You don't have to explain why. Just name it.

This room is safe. Nothing leaves this circle."

Talking piece goes around. Facilitator goes first and models vulnerability. Not a dramatic disclosure — just honest. Something like: "I've been carrying some worry this week about whether I'm doing right by this group."

Facilitator note: This check-in is intentionally more vulnerable than previous ones. It sets the tone for the session. If someone says "I pass," let them. Don't push.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"How did the regulation practice go? Did anyone use 4-4-4 breathing or grounding in a real situation?"

Allow 2-3 responses. Acknowledge efforts.

"Good. Those techniques are yours now — they work whether you're in a program or not, whether you have a facilitator or not. They belong to you.

Today we're going somewhere deeper. On Tuesday, I told you that anger is almost always a secondary emotion — that it covers up something more vulnerable. Today we're going to explore what's actually underneath. This might be the hardest session so far. It's also the most important.

*Before we start, I want to say this: **no one will be forced to share anything today.** I'm going to ask you to do some writing that's private. At the end, I'll invite you to share — but it's an invitation, not a requirement. Your journal is yours."*

Instruction: The Anger Beneath the Anger (40 minutes)

Part 1: How Unprocessed Pain Becomes Aggression (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Let me explain something about how human beings work. When something painful happens to us — real pain, deep pain — we have three options:

Option 1: Process it. *Feel it. Name it. Talk about it. Grieve it. Let it move through you. This is the healthy option. It's also the hardest, and in most environments — especially this one — the least available.*

Option 2: Numb it. *Push it down. Ignore it. Self-medicate with drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, sleep, food, whatever works. This doesn't make the pain go away — it just stores it. The bill comes due later. Always.*

Option 3: Convert it. *Turn it into something that feels less vulnerable. Turn sadness into anger. Turn fear into aggression. Turn shame into hostility. Turn grief into rage. This is what most men do. Not because they're weak — because they were never taught another way.*

*Here's the problem with Option 2 and Option 3: **the pain doesn't go away.** It goes underground. And from underground, it runs your life. Every overreaction, every explosion over something small, every time you went from zero to a hundred over nothing — that wasn't about the thing that just happened. That was stored pain looking for an exit.*

Think about a pressure cooker. You keep putting heat in. You seal the lid. More heat. More heat. What happens eventually? It blows. And when it blows, it destroys everything around it — including things that had nothing to do with what was cooking inside.

That's what unprocessed pain does. It builds pressure until it explodes — usually at the wrong person, at the wrong time, over the wrong thing."

Part 2: The Emotions Anger Covers (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Let's name them. These are the emotions that men most commonly convert to anger. As I go through each one, I want you to check in with yourself honestly. You don't have to tell anyone. Just notice what resonates."

Go through each one:

"Shame. Shame says: 'I am bad. Not I did something bad — I AM bad. Something is fundamentally wrong with me.'

Shame is one of the most painful human emotions. It attacks your identity, not your behavior. And because it's so painful, anger becomes the shield. 'I'm not ashamed — I'm furious at you for making me feel this way.'

In this environment, shame is everywhere. Shame about being incarcerated. Shame about what you did to get here. Shame about your family seeing you in this uniform. Shame about who you were before. Most men in here carry more shame than they'll ever admit. And most of that shame comes out as anger."

"Rejection. Rejection says: 'I'm not wanted. I'm not good enough. I've been abandoned.'

When your girl stops writing. When your kids stop visiting. When your family moves on. When your appeal gets denied. When the parole board says no. What you feel first is rejection — a deep, gut-level feeling of being thrown away.

But what comes out? Anger. 'I don't need her anyway.' 'They'll see.' The anger feels stronger than the rejection. So you wear the anger like armor."

"Powerlessness. Powerlessness says: 'I have no control. Nothing I do matters. I'm trapped.'

In this facility, you experience powerlessness every day. You don't choose when to eat, when to sleep, when to see the sun. Decisions about your life are made by people who don't know your name. That's a constant source of pain.

And what does powerlessness become? Aggression. Because aggression creates an illusion of power. 'I can't control my sentence, but I can control what happens in this dorm.' The anger gives you a feeling of power — but it's fake power. It doesn't change your situation. It usually makes it worse."

"Grief. Grief says: 'I've lost something I can never get back.'

Lost years. Lost relationships. Lost childhoods — yours or your children's. Lost freedom. Lost opportunities. Lost people — people who died while you're in here and you couldn't even say goodbye.

Grief is the emotion men are least equipped to handle. Because grief requires you to sit still and feel pain. You can't punch grief. You can't outrun it. You can't intimidate it. You just have to feel it. And for most men, that's unbearable. So grief becomes anger. Anger at the system. Anger at God. Anger at everyone and everything — because anger at least gives you something to do with the pain."

Pause. Let the room sit in silence for 10-15 seconds.

Facilitator:

"I'm not telling you this to make you feel bad. I'm telling you this because until you name what's really going on, you're fighting the wrong battle. You're punching the bodyguard when the person you need to talk to is standing behind him.

Naming the real emotion doesn't make you weak. It makes you honest. And honesty is the first step to healing."

Part 3: What This Looks Like in Daily Life (10 min)

Facilitator:

"Let me give you an example of how this plays out in an ordinary day.

A man calls home. His daughter answers but she sounds distant. She says she has to go — her stepdad is taking her to the movies. He hangs up.

What he feels first (the real emotion): *Grief. Fear. 'I'm losing my daughter. Someone else is raising her. I'm missing everything.'*

What he shows (the converted emotion): *Anger. He punches his locker. He snaps at his bunkmate. He's hostile for the rest of the day. If anyone says the wrong thing, he's ready to go.*

What everyone sees: *An angry man looking for trouble.*

What's actually there: *A heartbroken father who doesn't know how to carry the pain.*

Now — if he could name it — if he could say, even to himself, 'I'm grieving. I'm scared of losing my daughter. This hurts.' — what changes? Maybe he writes about it. Maybe he talks to someone he trusts. Maybe he just sits with it and lets himself feel it instead of converting it. The pain doesn't disappear. But it doesn't explode on innocent people either.

That's the difference between emotional literacy and emotional illiteracy. Both men hurt. One destroys things. The other endures it with dignity."

Practice/Exercise: "Beneath My Anger" Writing Exercise (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's today's exercise. This one is in your journal — it's private unless you choose to share.

I want you to write about a specific time you were angry. Really angry. Pick a moment that stands out — a time when your anger led to something you regret, or a time when the anger felt bigger than the situation deserved.

Write about it using these prompts:

- 1. **What happened?** Describe the situation.*
- 2. **What did you show?** What did your anger look like on the outside? What did you do?*
- 3. **What was underneath?** If you peel back the anger — what was really there? Was it shame? Rejection? Powerlessness? Grief? Fear? Hurt? Name it.*
- 4. **Where did that deeper emotion come from?** Is this the first time you've felt it, or does it connect to something older — something from your childhood, your family, your history?*
- 5. **If you could go back to that moment with the knowledge you have now — what would you do differently? Not just the action — what would you let yourself feel?***

Take your time. This isn't a race. Write honestly. Nobody reads this but you.

You have 20 minutes."

Facilitator sits quietly during the writing. Do not circulate aggressively during this exercise — give people space. If someone looks stuck, you can walk by and quietly say: "Just start with what happened. The rest will come."

Some men may get emotional during this exercise. That's expected. If someone needs to step outside for a minute, let them. If someone is visibly struggling, make eye contact and give a small nod — 'I see you. You're okay.'

Voluntary sharing (10 min):

Facilitator:

"Thank you for doing that work. That wasn't easy.

I want to open the floor for anyone who's willing to share. You don't have to share the whole thing. You can share just the emotion you found underneath the anger, or you can share the whole story. This is an invitation, not a requirement. If you share, the group's only job is to listen — no advice, no comments, just witnessing."

Allow sharing. This might be 1 person. It might be 5. Whatever happens is right.

After each share:

"Thank you. That took courage."

Do not analyze, interpret, or therapize anyone's share. Don't say "It sounds like you have unresolved trauma with your father." Just receive it.

Facilitator (after sharing):

"What you just heard — and what you just wrote — is the kind of honesty that changes men. Not talking about change. Not performing change. Actually sitting with the truth of who you are and what you carry.

You don't have to solve any of this tonight. You just have to know it's there. Because once you know it's there, it stops controlling you from the dark."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me pull this whole week together.

On Tuesday, you learned the emotion wheel and that anger is a secondary emotion. You learned to read your body signals. On Wednesday, you learned the escalation curve and techniques to regulate — 4-4-4 breathing, 5-4-3-2-1 grounding. Today, you went underneath the anger and named what's really there.

Here's the progression:

1. **Recognize** the emotion (emotion wheel, body signals)
2. **Regulate** the emotion (breathing, grounding, STOP)
3. **Understand** the emotion (what's beneath the anger)

That's emotional literacy. You're learning to read yourself like you'd read a dashboard. When the engine light comes on, you don't smash the dashboard — you check the engine.

*A question for the group: **What's different about a man who has this awareness versus a man who doesn't? How does it change how he moves through the world — and especially through this place?"***

Allow 3-4 responses. Guide toward the key insight:

"The man who knows what he feels — and knows what's underneath — doesn't get hijacked by his emotions. He doesn't explode over nothing. He doesn't destroy relationships. He doesn't lose years of his life to a split second of rage.

*And here's the part that connects to your future as mentors: **you'll see this in other men every day.** A man raging in the dorm — he's not just angry. A man shutting down completely — he's not just tired. When you can see what's underneath, you can respond to the real problem, not just the surface behavior.*

That's what makes a FORGE mentor different from everyone else in this facility."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Closing round. This one is simple but important: **Name one emotion you usually convert to anger, and say it out loud.***

Just the emotion. 'I convert fear to anger.' 'I convert shame to anger.' 'I convert grief to anger.' That's it. Saying it out loud — in front of other men — is an act of courage."

Talking piece goes around. Facilitator goes first.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you. What just happened in this room — that doesn't happen in very many places. Certainly not in very many prisons. You named the thing. That's the beginning.

Homework for next Tuesday:

- 1. **Continue your emotion tracking log.** By Tuesday, you should have at least 5 days of entries. Three entries per day. Start noticing patterns — are there certain times of day, certain situations, certain people that trigger the same emotions?*
- 2. **Continue using your regulation techniques.** At least once per day. Journal the result.*
- 3. **Write a second 'Beneath My Anger' entry.** Pick a different situation. Go through the same prompts. The more you practice this, the faster you'll be able to do it in real time.*
- 4. **Read this prompt and think about it: 'What is one thing that happened to me that I've never fully let myself feel about?'** You don't have to write about it yet. Just sit with the question.*

Next week is Trauma Awareness. We're going to talk about how the things that happened to you shaped who you are — and how understanding that can set you free. It's heavy material. But you've already shown you can handle heavy.

Take care of yourselves this weekend. Practice what you've learned. And remember: naming what's underneath the anger isn't weakness. It's the strongest thing you'll ever do.

See you Tuesday."

Session 9 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed — vulnerable emotion check-in
- Regulation practice reviewed
- How unprocessed pain becomes aggression — explained
- Four emotions anger covers explored (shame, rejection, powerlessness, grief)
- Real-life example walked through (father/daughter phone call)
- "Beneath My Anger" writing exercise completed
- Voluntary sharing facilitated with group witnessing
- Week 3 progression summarized (recognize → regulate → understand)
- Closing round completed (naming converted emotion)
- Homework assigned (emotion tracking + regulation practice + second writing exercise + reflection prompt)
- Safety check: no participant left in visible distress without acknowledgment



FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 3

What to Watch For

Emotional activation: This week goes deeper than Week 2. Some participants may be confronting emotions they've suppressed for years or decades. Watch for: - Men who go very quiet during or after exercises — check in privately after the session - Men who laugh or joke during serious moments — humor is a defense. Don't shut it down in the moment, but note it - Men who seem agitated after Session 9 — the "Beneath My Anger" exercise can surface real pain. Make sure no one leaves the room visibly distressed without a brief check-in

The "I don't feel anything" response: Some men have dissociated from their emotions as a survival strategy. They genuinely cannot identify what they feel. This is not defiance — it's protective. Don't push. Say: "That numbness is actually data too. Your body learned that shutting down was safer than feeling. Over time, as the container gets safer, feeling will come back. For now, just notice the numbness. That counts."

Men who over-share: The opposite can also happen — a participant who uses the safe space to disclose severe trauma, abuse history, or ongoing safety concerns. This is good (it means the container is working) but can overwhelm the group. Manage it gently: "Thank you for trusting us with that. What you're describing is bigger than what this group can hold right now. I want to talk with you after the session to make sure you're getting the right support."

Group bonding: Week 3 often produces a significant jump in group cohesion. When men share vulnerable emotions together, bonds form quickly. Notice this and name it: "What's happening in this room right now is what FORGE is built on. This trust. This honesty. This is the container."

Common Week 3 Challenges

"This is therapy. I didn't sign up for therapy."

"Fair point. FORGE is not therapy. We don't diagnose anyone. We don't treat mental health conditions. We don't have couches and clipboards. What we do is teach you to understand your own emotional system — because if you don't understand it, it controls you. Understanding your emotions is a life skill, not a clinical service. Soldiers learn it. Athletes learn it. Leaders learn it. You're learning it."

"Real men don't talk about feelings."

"That's a story you were told. Let me tell you another story. The men in this room who just named their shame, their fear, their grief — out loud, in front of other men, in a prison — are doing something that most men on the outside will never have the courage to do. Tell me which one takes more strength: pretending you feel nothing, or being honest about what you carry? The toughest man in the room isn't the loudest. He's the most honest."

A participant who was triggered by Session 9 and doesn't come back for Session 10:

Reach out individually. Not with pressure — with concern. "I noticed you weren't in session today. This week hit some deep stuff for some people. I just want to check in. You good? Do you need anything?" Sometimes a man needs a day. If he's gone for more than two sessions, have a one-on-one conversation.

A participant discloses something that requires a mandated report (self-harm, plan to harm someone, child abuse):

Follow your facility's reporting protocols. Be honest with the participant: "I care about you, and what you just told me means I need to involve someone who can help with this. I'm not going to pretend I didn't hear it. Let me walk you through what happens next." FORGE's confidentiality has clearly stated limits — this is one of them.

Preparation for Week 4

- Review SAMHSA's Three E's framework (Event, Experience, Effect) — be able to explain it clearly and simply
- Prepare ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) questionnaire for anonymous scoring activity — enough copies for each participant
- Research current statistics on trauma prevalence in incarcerated populations
- Review fight/flight/freeze/fawn responses and prepare dorm-specific examples for each
- Prepare the safe vs. unsafe coping strategies list
- Prepare blank "personal safety plan" or "safe coping card" templates
- **Critical:** Be prepared for the heaviest emotional content in Phase 1. Week 4 discusses childhood trauma, abuse, neglect, and ACEs. Some participants may be hearing the word "trauma" applied to their own experiences for the first time. Have your mental health referral contact confirmed and available.
- Consider whether to invite a mental health professional to be present or on standby during Session 10 (ACE activity)

- Remind yourself: FORGE is trauma-aware, not therapeutic. Your job is to help men understand trauma, not to treat it. Know the line and hold it.

Week 4: Trauma Awareness

Week 4 Overview

Purpose: Help participants understand trauma — what it is, how it works, and how it shapes behavior — without turning FORGE into therapy. By the end of this week, every participant should understand the basics of trauma science, recognize trauma responses in themselves and others, distinguish between safe and unsafe coping strategies, and have a personal safety plan they can actually use. The key message: trauma is not an excuse for harmful behavior. It is an explanation that creates a pathway to change.

Sessions This Week: - Session 10 (Tuesday): Understanding Trauma - Session 11 (Wednesday): Trauma Responses in the Dorm - Session 12 (Thursday): Coping and Safety

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks - Pens/pencils - ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) questionnaire — anonymous scoring copies (1 per participant) - SAMHSA Three E's handout (1 per participant — simple one-page summary) - Trauma responses reference sheet (fight/flight/freeze/fawn with correctional examples) - Safe vs. Unsafe Coping Strategies handout (1 per participant) - Blank "Safe Coping Card" templates (1 per participant — index card size or similar) - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) - **Confirm mental health referral contact and availability for this week**

Important facilitator note for the entire week: This is the most emotionally intense week in Phase 1. Trauma content can activate participants in ways that are unpredictable. Before starting this week, review the facilitator notes at the end of this document. Know your referral resources. Be prepared to hold space without trying to fix.

SESSION 10: Understanding Trauma

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define trauma using SAMHSA's Three E's framework (Event, Experience, Effect) 2. Explain what ACEs are and how they relate to later life outcomes 3. State the prevalence of trauma among incarcerated populations 4. Distinguish between "trauma as excuse" and "trauma as explanation" 5. Complete an anonymous ACE score activity and reflect on its personal meaning

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Welcome back. Before we check in, I want to set the tone for this entire week.

This week is called Trauma Awareness. We're going to talk about things that some of you have never talked about before — and some of you have talked about but never understood. Childhood experiences. Adversity. Pain that shaped who you became.

Two things are true at the same time: 1. This material is important enough that I won't water it down. 2. Your safety in this room matters more than any lesson plan.

If at any point this week you need to step outside for a minute, you can. No explanation needed. Just step out, take a breath, and come back when you're ready. If something comes up that you need to process beyond what this group can hold, I will help you connect with someone who can support you.

This is FORGE — not therapy. We're going to understand trauma, not treat it. But understanding it is the first step.

*Check-in round: **How are you showing up today? What are you carrying into this room?**"*

Talking piece goes around.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Quick check on last week's homework. **Who continued the emotion tracking log? What patterns did you notice?"***

Allow 3-4 responses. Common patterns people notice: - Same emotions at the same time of day (evenings are often hardest) - Certain people or situations are reliable triggers - The same underlying emotion keeps showing up beneath different situations

"Good. Those patterns aren't random. They connect to your history — to experiences that taught your brain and body to respond in specific ways. That's exactly what we're going to unpack this week."

Instruction: Understanding Trauma (40 minutes)

Part 1: What Trauma Actually Is (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Let's start by getting clear on what trauma actually is — because the word gets used a lot and means different things to different people.

*SAMHSA — the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — defines trauma using three E's: **Event, Experience, and Effect**. It takes all three for something to be trauma."*

Hand out SAMHSA Three E's handout.

Event. *Something happens. It could be a single incident — an assault, an accident, a loss. Or it could be ongoing — years of abuse, neglect, living in a violent environment, poverty, chaos in the home. The event is the thing that happened.*

Experience. *How the person lived through it. Two people can go through the same event and experience it differently. A 5-year-old who witnesses violence experiences it differently than a 25-year-old. A child who has a supportive adult afterward experiences it differently than a child who has no one. The experience includes how frightened you were, how alone you were, how long it lasted, and how much control you had.*

Effect. *The lasting impact. How the event and the experience change you — your brain, your body, your behavior, your relationships, your worldview. The effect is what you carry forward.*

Trauma isn't just what happened. It's what happened, how you lived through it, and what it did to you going forward. All three."

Facilitator:

"Here's something important. Trauma is not about being weak. Trauma is a normal human response to abnormal circumstances. If a child grows up in a home where the adults are violent and unpredictable, that child's brain adapts — it learns to scan for danger constantly, to react fast, to trust no one. Those adaptations make sense in that environment. They're survival strategies.

The problem is that the brain doesn't automatically turn off those adaptations when the environment changes. You leave that home, but your brain is still scanning for danger. You're in a safe situation, but your body is still in survival mode. That's what trauma does — it keeps you responding to the past even when you're living in the present."

Part 2: ACEs — Adverse Childhood Experiences (15 min)

Facilitator:

"In 1998, two researchers — a doctor named Felitti and a epidemiologist named Anda — did a massive study. They surveyed over 17,000 people about 10 specific types of adversity they experienced before the age of 18. They called these Adverse Childhood Experiences — ACEs. Here's the list:

Abuse: 1. Physical abuse 2. Emotional abuse 3. Sexual abuse

Neglect: 4. Physical neglect 5. Emotional neglect

Household Dysfunction: 6. A parent with a substance abuse problem 7. A parent who was incarcerated 8. Witnessing domestic violence 9. A parent with a mental health condition 10. Parental separation or divorce
Each one you experienced counts as 1 point. Your total is your ACE score.

Here's what they found, and this shook the medical world:

The higher the ACE score, the higher the risk for nearly every negative outcome you can name. Heart disease. Cancer. Depression. Substance abuse. Suicide attempts. Incarceration. Relationship problems. Early death.

*Someone with an ACE score of 4 or more is **7 times more likely** to be an alcoholic. **12 times more likely** to attempt suicide. **32 times more likely** to have learning or behavioral problems.*

This isn't opinion. This is science. What happens to you as a child physically changes your brain and body."

Facilitator:

"Now — here's where this connects to every person in this room.

In the general population, about 60% of people have at least 1 ACE. About 12% have 4 or more.

Among incarcerated men, studies show that 75 to 90% have experienced significant trauma. The average ACE score is significantly higher than the general population.

This doesn't mean everyone in here is a victim. It means that if you're in here, there's a high probability that something happened to you before you made the choices that got you here. And understanding that connection — between what happened TO you and what you DID — is critical."

Part 3: Trauma Is Not an Excuse (10 min)

Facilitator:

"I need to say this clearly, because if I don't, someone will use this material the wrong way.

Trauma is not an excuse.

Understanding your trauma does not erase your accountability. 'I had a rough childhood' doesn't undo the harm you caused. 'My father was abusive' doesn't make your choices someone else's fault.

*But here's what trauma IS: **it's an explanation.** It explains how you got here — not to let you off the hook, but to show you the path forward.*

Think of it this way. If you're driving a car and you keep veering to the right, you need to know why. If the alignment is off, you can fix it. But you still caused the damage you caused while the car was pulling right.

The alignment problem explains why you kept veering — it doesn't excuse the damage.

Trauma explains the wiring. It explains why certain situations trigger you, why certain emotions overwhelm you, why certain patterns keep repeating. Once you understand the wiring, you can work with it. You can rewire.

The man who says 'My trauma made me do it' is still in victim stance — still letting his past run his present. The man who says 'My trauma shaped me, but I'm learning to shape myself' — that man is free. Not free from pain. Free from being controlled by it.

That's the difference. And that's what FORGE is building."

Practice/Exercise: Anonymous ACE Score Activity (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"We're going to do an activity now. This is **completely anonymous.** No one will know your individual score — not me, not anyone.*

I'm going to hand out a questionnaire with the 10 ACE categories. All you do is read each one and check 'yes' or 'no' based on whether you experienced it before the age of 18. Then you count your total.

***This paper is yours. You do not turn it in.** When you're done, fold it and put it in your journal. Or tear it up if you want. It's for your awareness, not mine."*

Hand out ACE questionnaires.

"Take about 5 minutes. Read each one carefully. Be honest with yourself. No one is watching."

Give participants time to complete the questionnaire in silence. Facilitator should complete one too — modeling participation.

After 5 minutes:

Facilitator:

"Everyone done? Good. Your score is between 0 and 10. Whatever it is, just hold it for a moment.

Now — I want to do something with the group. **I'm not going to ask anyone to share their individual score.** But I want to get a picture of this room.

I'm going to call out score ranges. If your score falls in that range, raise your hand. You can choose not to participate — that's fine.

Score of 0 — raise your hand.

Score of 1-2 — raise your hand.

Score of 3-4 — raise your hand.

Score of 5 or more — raise your hand."

Look around the room. Let the group see the room.

Facilitator:

"Look around. Look at how many hands went up at 3 or higher. At 5 or higher.

This room is full of men who survived things as children that no child should have to survive. And you're still here. You're still standing. You're in a program designed to make you into someone who helps others.

That doesn't erase the harm you've caused. But it does help explain the road that brought you here. And it tells you something else: **you are not alone in this.** Whatever you experienced, you are not the only man in this room who carries it.

That matters. Because shame lives in secrecy. And healing starts when you realize that the thing you thought made you uniquely broken is actually shared by the men sitting next to you."

Journal reflection (10 min):

"Take 10 minutes right now to write in your journal. The prompt is: '**How has my past shaped my present?**'

You don't have to write about specific events if you're not ready. You can write about patterns — patterns in your relationships, your reactions, your choices. How has what happened to you as a child shown up in who you are as an adult?

This is private. No one reads it but you."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"I want to open the floor for reactions — not to the ACE score specifically, but to the whole concept. **What hits you about this material? What are you thinking or feeling right now?**"*

Allow open discussion. Common responses and how to handle them:

"I never thought of what happened to me as trauma."

"A lot of men don't. When something is all you've ever known — when everyone around you went through the same thing — it just feels normal. But 'normal' and 'healthy' aren't the same thing. What you experienced may have been normal for your environment. That doesn't mean it didn't affect you."

"So you're saying it's not my fault I'm in here?"

"No. I'm saying two things at once. One: what happened to you as a child was not your fault. You didn't choose your parents, your neighborhood, or your circumstances. Two: the choices you made as an adult are your responsibility. Both things are true. Understanding your past doesn't erase your accountability — it gives you a map for change."

"This feels like an excuse. Everybody had it hard."

"You're right that a lot of people had it hard. But 'everybody had it hard' doesn't mean everybody's pain is the same, and it doesn't mean pain doesn't affect you. If I break my arm and you break your leg, we both got hurt. We don't need to compare. We need to heal. Understanding trauma isn't about ranking who had it worse. It's about understanding what shaped you so you can reshape yourself."

"I don't want to think about this."

"That's a valid response. And it might be cognitive indolence — we learned about that in Week 2. Not wanting to think about hard things is one of the most human reactions there is. But the hard things don't go away because we ignore them. They come out sideways — as anger, as addiction, as bad decisions. This week isn't about forcing you to relive your past. It's about understanding how it affects your present."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. **One word that describes how you're feeling right now.** Just one word. No explanation needed."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Heavy session. I know. Here's your homework:

1. **Continue your journal entry on the prompt: 'How has my past shaped my present?'** Write at least a full page. Be honest. This is some of the most important writing you'll do in FORGE.
2. **Continue your emotion tracking log.** Pay attention this week to moments where your reaction seems bigger than the situation. Ask yourself: 'Is this about what just happened, or is this about something older?'
3. **Take care of yourself tonight.** This material can stir things up. Use your regulation techniques — 4-4-4 breathing, grounding. Talk to someone you trust if you need to. Don't sit alone with heavy feelings if they're pulling you under.

Tomorrow we're going to look at how trauma shows up in daily life in this facility — fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. You'll start recognizing these responses everywhere.

See you tomorrow."

Session 10 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- ACE questionnaires ready (anonymous copies)
- SAMHSA Three E's handouts distributed
- Mental health referral contact confirmed and available
- Opening circle completed — tone set for the week with safety language
- Emotion tracking patterns reviewed
- SAMHSA's Three E's taught (Event, Experience, Effect)
- ACEs explained — 10 categories and research findings
- Trauma prevalence in incarcerated populations shared
- "Trauma is not an excuse — it is an explanation" clearly delivered
- Anonymous ACE score activity completed

- Group hand-raise conducted with dignity
- Journal reflection completed (10 min writing)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing round completed (one word)
- Homework assigned (journal continuation + emotion tracking + self-care)
- Safety check: no participant left in visible distress

SESSION 11: Trauma Responses in the Dorm

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Name and describe the four trauma responses: fight, flight, freeze, and fawn 2. Identify how each trauma response looks in a correctional setting 3. Explain why certain dorm situations trigger disproportionate reactions 4. Distinguish between responding (conscious choice) and reacting (automatic trauma response) 5. Recognize trauma responses in themselves and others without judgment

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How did you sleep last night? And how are you sitting with yesterday's material?"

Yesterday was heavy. Some of you may have had a hard night. That's normal. If stuff came up, name it. This room can hold it."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator note: Pay close attention to anyone who seems significantly impacted. If someone says "I didn't sleep" or "I was up thinking all night," acknowledge it. If someone seems distressed beyond normal processing, plan a private check-in after the session.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday we learned that trauma is an Event, an Experience, and an Effect. We talked about ACEs. We talked about how trauma shapes your brain and body.

*One thing I want to reinforce: **understanding your trauma is not about looking backward and staying there.** It's about understanding why you respond the way you do so you can start choosing a different response.*

Today we get very practical. We're going to look at exactly how trauma plays out in the daily reality of this facility."

Instruction: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn in Corrections (40 minutes)

Part 1: The Four Trauma Responses (15 min)

Facilitator:

"When your brain detects a threat — real or perceived — it activates your survival system. This is automatic. You don't choose it. It happens in milliseconds, before your thinking brain has a chance to weigh in.

There are four survival responses. You've probably heard of the first three. The fourth one is less well known but very common.

Fight. *Your brain says: 'The threat is here. Attack it. Overpower it. Destroy it before it destroys you.'*

What it looks like: aggression, hostility, yelling, posturing, violence, intimidation, controlling behavior. The person is oriented toward the threat and moving toward it.

Flight. *Your brain says: 'The threat is here. Run. Get away. Escape.'*

What it looks like: avoidance, withdrawal, changing the subject, leaving the room, staying busy to avoid thinking, substance use, sleeping all day. The person is oriented away from the threat.

Freeze. *Your brain says: 'The threat is here and I can't fight it or flee from it. Go still. Play dead. Disappear.'*

What it looks like: shutting down, going numb, staring blankly, not speaking, inability to make decisions, feeling paralyzed, dissociating — feeling like you're not really there, like you're watching from outside your body.

Fawn. *Your brain says: 'The threat is here. Appease it. Make it happy. If I give it what it wants, it won't hurt me.'*

What it looks like: people-pleasing, agreeing with everything, being overly nice or accommodating, abandoning your own needs to keep someone else calm, saying 'yes' when you mean 'no,' going along with things you know are wrong to avoid conflict."

Facilitator:

"Every one of these is a survival strategy. None of them are weaknesses. They developed because at some point in your life, they kept you alive or kept you safe. The kid who learned to fight back against an abusive parent — that was survival. The kid who learned to freeze and go invisible when the yelling started — that was survival. The kid who learned to please the violent adult to keep the peace — that was survival.

The problem isn't the response. The problem is when the response fires in situations where you're not actually in survival-level danger. And that happens constantly."

Part 2: What These Look Like in the Dorm (15 min)**Facilitator:**

"Let's bring this into the dorm. Because this facility is full of trauma responses — we just don't call them that. We call them 'attitudes' or 'behavior problems' or 'that dude's crazy.' But most of the time, what we're seeing is a survival system that's firing when it doesn't need to.

Let me give you examples."

Fight response in the dorm:

"A CO tells a man to move from his bunk for a count. The man explodes. 'Don't tell me what to do!' He's in the CO's face. Everyone's thinking 'What's wrong with this guy? It's just a count.'

But here's what's happening: that man's brain heard an authority figure giving a command, and it activated a fight response that was wired 20 years ago — by a father, or a foster parent, or a gang leader who used orders as a prelude to violence. His brain isn't responding to the CO. His brain is responding to every authority figure who ever hurt him. The CO is just the trigger."

Flight response in the dorm:

"A man gets a letter from his lawyer with bad news about his case. Instead of talking about it, he sleeps for three days straight. Won't go to chow. Won't come to programming. Just disappears into his bunk. Everyone says 'He's being lazy' or 'He's given up.'

What's actually happening: his system is in flight. The bad news activated a feeling of helplessness so intense that his brain said 'Get away. Escape.' And since he can't physically leave, his brain does the next best thing — it shuts him down. Sleep is flight when you can't run."

Freeze response in the dorm:

"During a confrontation in the common area, a man just stands there. Doesn't speak. Doesn't defend himself. Doesn't move. Other guys start saying 'He's scared' or 'He's soft.'

What's happening: his system froze. His brain detected a threat level that overwhelmed both the fight and flight options — so it went to the last resort. Freeze. This is especially common in men who experienced violence they couldn't escape as children. Their bodies learned that going still was the safest option. It's not cowardice. It's a wired response."

Fawn response in the dorm:

"A man keeps giving away his commissary to someone who's pressuring him. He laughs off the pressure. He says it's no big deal. He's clearly uncomfortable but he keeps accommodating. People see him as weak or as a target.

What's happening: his survival system is fawning. He learned somewhere — probably young — that the way to survive around dangerous people is to give them what they want. Make them happy. Don't resist. He's running a program that was installed when he was a child. In the dorm, it's making him a victim."

Part 3: Why Situations Trigger Disproportionate Reactions (10 min)

Facilitator:

"This is the key to understanding almost every conflict in this facility:

Most disproportionate reactions are not about the present situation. They are about a past wound being triggered by a present moment.

When a man goes from zero to a hundred over someone bumping him in the hallway — that's not about the bump. Something about that moment activated an old survival response. Maybe being bumped felt like disrespect, and disrespect in his childhood meant danger. Maybe the physical contact triggered a body memory. Maybe the other person reminded him of someone who hurt him.

The trigger is in the present. The reaction is from the past.

*This is what we mean by the difference between **responding** and **reacting**.*

Reacting is automatic. It happens before thinking. It's your survival system running the show. It belongs to the past.

Responding is conscious. It comes after the pause. It involves thinking, choosing, and deciding. It belongs to the present.

Every tool we've taught you so far — the Think-Feel-Act cycle, the STOP technique, 4-4-4 breathing, grounding — is designed to create a gap between the trigger and your action. That gap is where you shift from reacting to responding. From past to present. From survival mode to chosen mode.

As FORGE mentors, you'll see this every day. A man who's overreacting to something small. If you can look past the behavior and ask 'What was triggered?' — you'll be able to help him in a way that nobody else can."

Practice/Exercise: Identifying Trauma Responses in Dorm Situations (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're going to work in groups of 3-4 for this exercise. Each group is going to identify 3 common dorm situations that trigger trauma responses.

*For each situation, I want you to discuss: 1. **What's the situation?** Describe it specifically. 2. **What trauma response does it typically trigger?** Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn? 3. **What might be underneath?** What past experience could this be connected to? 4. **What would a conscious response look like** — as opposed to the automatic reaction?*

You have 15 minutes in your groups."

Facilitator circulates. Help groups think beyond the obvious. Push for the "what's underneath" question — that's where the real learning happens.

Share-out (15 min):

Each group presents one of their three situations to the full group.

After each presentation:

"What else could be underneath that? What other past experiences might create that kind of reaction?"

Allow brief group discussion after each. Build a shared understanding that most "behavior problems" are trauma responses.

Common situations groups might identify: - Being told what to do by authority (triggers fight in men with abusive authority figures) - Mail call with no mail (triggers flight/isolation in men with abandonment history) - Sudden loud noise or commotion (triggers freeze in men with exposure to violence) - Being pressured by a group (triggers fawn in men who learned appeasement for survival) - Lockdowns with no information (triggers panic/freeze in men with experiences of helplessness) - Someone standing too close (triggers fight in men with histories of physical/sexual abuse) - Being accused of something you didn't do (triggers fight or flight in men who experienced injustice or false blame as children)

Facilitator (after share-out):

"Look at this list. Look how many everyday situations in this facility can activate a trauma response. Now think about a dorm full of 50-60 men, most of whom have ACE scores of 4 or higher, all of them navigating these triggers every single day. That's the reality of this environment.

And here's the hope: you are learning to see it. When you see it — in yourself and in others — you can respond differently. Instead of matching someone's fight energy, you can recognize it as a survival response and de-escalate. Instead of judging someone who freezes, you can understand what's happening and give them space. That awareness changes everything."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"I want to address something that might be coming up for some of you. **Which trauma response is yours?** Not which one you think is best. Which one is your default — the one your system goes to automatically?"*

Allow open discussion. Many men will identify with fight. Some will be surprised to realize they also fawn or freeze in certain situations.

Facilitator:

"Most people have a primary response and a secondary. And different situations can activate different responses. You might fight with peers but freeze with authority. You might fawn at home but fight in here. The responses aren't fixed — they're contextual.

Here's what matters: **knowing your default gives you a chance to change it.** If you know your system goes to fight, you can intervene earlier. If you know you freeze under confrontation, you can prepare for those moments. Awareness is the first step to choice.

One more thing. **Don't judge your response.** Whatever your brain learned to do, it learned for a reason. Fight isn't better than freeze. Fawn isn't weaker than flight. They're all survival strategies. The goal isn't to eliminate them — they might save your life someday. The goal is to make sure they're not running the show when you're not actually in danger."

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. **Name your primary trauma response — fight, flight, freeze, or fawn — and one situation this week where you saw it activate.**"

Talking piece goes around. Facilitator goes first.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Homework:

1. **Notice one trauma response this week — yours or someone else's.** Journal about it: What happened? What was the response? What do you think might have been triggered from the past?
2. **Practice the distinction between reacting and responding.** At least once before tomorrow, catch yourself in a reaction and deliberately shift to a response. Use your tools — STOP, breathing, grounding. Journal what happened.
3. **Review your thinking reports from the last two weeks.** Look at them with new eyes. Were any of those situations actually trauma responses? Were any of your thinking errors actually your survival system firing?

Tomorrow we close out this week with *Coping and Safety*. We're going to build your personal toolkit for handling all of this — practically, realistically, in ways that actually work in this environment.

See you tomorrow."

Session 11 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Trauma responses reference sheet distributed
- Opening circle completed — check-in on how participants are sitting with the material
- Review of Session 10 concepts
- Four trauma responses taught (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)
- Dorm-specific examples given for each response
- Triggers and disproportionate reactions explained
- Responding vs. reacting distinction made clear
- Small group exercise completed (3 dorm situations with trauma response analysis)
- Group share-out and discussion completed
- Default trauma response discussion held
- Closing round completed (personal primary response + situation)
- Homework assigned (observe trauma response + react vs. respond practice + review thinking reports)

SESSION 12: Coping and Safety

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Distinguish between safe and unsafe coping strategies 2. Create a personal "Safe Coping Card" with 5 specific strategies 3. Explain FORGE's position: trauma-aware, not therapeutic 4. Identify when to refer someone to professional support 5. Articulate a personal safety plan for managing difficult emotions and situations

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. One thing you're grateful for today and one thing you're struggling with. Both."

Talking piece goes around.

Facilitator note: Gratitude paired with honesty. This check-in is designed to ground participants after two intense sessions while keeping them in honest territory.

Review & Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We've covered a lot this week. Tuesday: what trauma is, ACEs, and how your past shapes your present.

Yesterday: fight, flight, freeze, fawn — how your survival system shows up in the dorm.

Did anyone observe a trauma response this week — in yourself or someone else?"

Allow 2-3 responses. Affirm each observation:

"That's exactly the kind of awareness that makes FORGE different. Most people see behavior. You're starting to see what's driving the behavior."

Facilitator:

*"Today we close out this week by getting practical. We know what trauma is. We know how it shows up. Now: **what do you do about it?** How do you cope — in a healthy way — in an environment that doesn't exactly make it easy?"*

Instruction: Safe vs. Unsafe Coping and FORGE's Boundaries (40 minutes)

Part 1: Safe vs. Unsafe Coping (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Everyone copes. Every person in this room has strategies for dealing with stress, pain, and difficult emotions. The question isn't whether you cope — it's how.

*Coping strategies fall into two categories: **safe** and **unsafe**. The difference is simple: **safe coping helps you manage the pain without creating more problems. Unsafe coping manages the pain in the short term but creates bigger problems in the long term.**"*

Hand out Safe vs. Unsafe Coping Strategies sheet.

"Let's look at unsafe coping first — because I want you to recognize what you might already be doing."

Unsafe Coping:

"Substance use. Drugs, alcohol, pruno, whatever's available. It numbs the pain temporarily. It also leads to addiction, health problems, disciplinary action, and more time.

Violence. Using aggression to discharge emotional energy. It feels like release in the moment. It leads to harm — to others and to yourself.

Isolation and shutdown. Withdrawing completely. Not eating. Sleeping all day. Refusing to engage. It feels like protection. It leads to depression and missed opportunities.

Risk-taking. Gambling, debt, breaking rules for the thrill. It creates a distraction from pain. It creates new problems that compound the old ones.

Manipulation and control. Trying to control everyone and everything around you to manage your own anxiety. It gives you an illusion of safety. It destroys relationships and trust.

Self-harm. Hurting yourself to manage overwhelming emotional pain. If this is something you're doing, I need you to tell me — not for punishment, but for help. This is beyond what FORGE can address, and there are people who can help.

Here's the thing about unsafe coping: **it works.** In the short term. That's why people keep doing it. The substance takes the edge off. The fight releases the pressure. The isolation stops the input. They work — until the consequences hit. And the consequences always hit."

"Now — **safe coping.**"

Safe Coping:

Physical activity. Push-ups. Walking the yard. Any movement. Exercise burns off stress hormones — cortisol and adrenaline — naturally. Your body is designed for it.

Breathing and grounding. You already know these. 4-4-4 breathing. 5-4-3-2-1 grounding. They work. Use them.

Journaling. Writing about what you feel. Getting it out of your head and onto paper. You've been doing this for three weeks now. It's a coping strategy.

Talking to someone you trust. Not everyone. Not randomly. But one person — a cohort member, a mentor, someone who can listen without judging.

Prayer or meditation. Whatever your spiritual practice is. Many men in here find grounding through faith. That's real. Use it.

Creative expression. Drawing, writing, poetry, music. If you have an outlet, use it. Creating something is the opposite of destroying something.

Routine and structure. Having a predictable daily routine reduces anxiety. Wake up at the same time. Exercise at the same time. Write at the same time. Structure creates safety for a brain that's used to chaos.

Helping someone else. Service Over Self isn't just a FORGE principle — it's a coping strategy. When you're focused on helping someone, you're not spiraling in your own pain. And you're doing something meaningful.

Naming the emotion. Just saying 'I'm feeling grief right now' or 'This is shame' reduces the intensity. Research calls it 'affect labeling.' Putting a name on the feeling takes some of its power away."

Facilitator:

"Look at both lists. The safe list is available to every person in this room, right now, today. You don't need permission. You don't need a program. You don't need staff approval. Every single one of these is within your control.

The question isn't whether you have options. The question is whether you'll use them."

Part 2: Self-Care in a Correctional Environment (10 min)

Facilitator:

"I want to be real about something. 'Self-care' is a phrase that gets thrown around a lot, and in here, it can sound ridiculous. 'Take a bubble bath.' 'Light some candles.' 'Go to a spa day.' That's not your reality.

Self-care in here is different. It's harder and it's more basic. Let me tell you what self-care actually looks like in this environment:

- *Drinking enough water instead of just coffee and Kool-Aid*
- *Eating at chow even when you don't feel like it*
- *Getting outside when yard is open — even for 10 minutes*
- *Sleeping at night instead of staying up watching TV until 3 AM*
- *Brushing your teeth and keeping yourself clean — not because someone told you to, but because it's an act of self-respect*
- *Reading something that feeds your mind instead of numbing it*
- *Doing your FORGE homework — because working on yourself IS self-care*
- *Saying 'I'm not okay' to one person instead of pretending you're fine*

None of this is glamorous. All of it matters. The man who takes care of himself is better equipped to take care of others. You can't pour from an empty cup — even in here."

Part 3: FORGE Is Trauma-Aware, Not Therapeutic (10 min)

Facilitator:

"I need to draw a very clear line. This is important for you now and critical for when you become mentors.

FORGE is trauma-aware. FORGE is not therapy.

What does that mean?

Trauma-aware means: *We understand that most people in this facility have experienced significant trauma. We know how trauma affects thinking, emotions, and behavior. We create an environment where people can begin to understand their own history. We don't re-traumatize people. We don't force disclosures. We recognize trauma responses and respond with awareness instead of punishment.*

Trauma-aware does NOT mean: *We diagnose anyone. We treat PTSD or other conditions. We do trauma processing therapy. We ask people to relive their worst experiences in detail. We act as counselors, psychologists, or social workers.*

*The line is this: **FORGE helps you understand your trauma. FORGE does not treat your trauma.** If what you're carrying is bigger than what understanding can address — if you're having nightmares, flashbacks, suicidal thoughts, or symptoms that are interfering with your daily life — you need professional support. And there is no weakness in that.*

When you become a mentor, this line becomes even more important. Your mentee may tell you things that need professional help. Your job in that moment is to listen, to validate, and to refer. Not to fix. Not to treat. Not to play therapist. Listen, validate, refer.

*I'm going to say it one more time because it matters: **you are not a therapist. You are a peer mentor with lived experience who understands what these men are going through. That is enormously valuable. But it has limits. Know those limits and respect them.***

"Here are the situations where you always refer:

- *Someone talks about hurting themselves or ending their life*
- *Someone talks about hurting someone else*
- *Someone is experiencing flashbacks or severe dissociation*
- *Someone is in a mental health crisis that's beyond a bad day*
- *Someone discloses ongoing abuse (including sexual abuse in the facility)*

In these situations, you stay with the person. You keep them safe. And you get help. That's your job. That's enough."

Part 4: When to Use What (5 min)

Facilitator:

"Let me put the whole month together in terms of your toolkit:

***When you notice a thinking error:** Use cognitive restructuring — challenge the thought, replace it.*

***When you're escalating emotionally:** Use 4-4-4 breathing or grounding to regulate.*

***When you need to make a decision under pressure:** Use the STOP technique.*

***When anger is covering something deeper:** Name what's underneath. Write about it. Talk to someone.*

***When a trauma response fires:** Recognize it. Pause. Remind yourself: 'This is my survival system. I'm not in danger right now. I have a choice.'*

***When the pain is too much to carry alone:** Use safe coping. Talk to a cohort member. Reach out for professional help if needed.*

You now have more tools than most people who've never been incarcerated. That's not an exaggeration. The average person walking down the street doesn't know what a thinking error is, can't name what they're feeling, and has no de-escalation tools. You do."

Practice/Exercise: Creating Your Personal Safe Coping Card (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Here's today's exercise. You're going to create a **Personal Safe Coping Card**. This is something you keep with you — in your pocket, in your journal, wherever you can reach it when you need it.*

On this card, I want 5 things:"

***1. My top 2 thinking errors** — the ones I fall into most. Write them down so you can catch them.*

***2. My primary trauma response** — fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Know your default.*

***3. My body's early warning signal** — what does your body do when you're escalating? Jaw tightens? Chest gets hot? Stomach drops? Write down YOUR signal.*

***4. My 3 go-to safe coping strategies** — pick 3 from the list, or your own. Things you will actually do. Not aspirational — practical. Things available to you in this facility right now.*

***5. My person** — one person you can talk to when things get heavy. A cohort member, a mentor, a chaplain, anyone. Someone who will listen without judging. Write their name.*

This is your personal safety plan in wallet-sized form. When you're at Stage 2 on the escalation curve and climbing, you pull this out. You look at it. You use it."

Give participants 15 minutes to create their cards.

Facilitator circulates. Help anyone who's stuck: - "What coping strategy did you use this week that actually worked?" - "Who in this room do you trust enough to talk to when things get hard?" - "What's the first thing your body does when you start escalating? That's your signal."

Share-out (15 min):

Facilitator:

"I want to go around the room. Share one thing from your card — any section. Just one thing."

Allow each person to share one element. This normalizes the cards and builds mutual awareness.

Facilitator (after share-out):

"Keep this card. It might look simple. It is simple. That's the point. In the middle of a crisis, simple is what works. You're not going to pull out a textbook. You're going to pull out this card. And it's going to remind you who you are and what you know."

Debrief & Discussion (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me pull all four weeks together. Because you've been on a journey, and I want you to see the map.

***Week 1** — you committed. You said 'I'm in.' You learned what FORGE is and what it asks of you. You learned about Service Over Self.*

***Week 2** — you learned that your thinking controls your behavior. You identified your thinking errors. You learned to challenge them and replace them with better thoughts.*

***Week 3** — you learned to understand your emotions. You learned to regulate them instead of being controlled by them. You went beneath the anger and named what was really there.*

***Week 4** — this week — you learned about trauma. You understood how your past shapes your present. You learned to recognize survival responses. And today, you built a personal toolkit for coping safely.*

In four weeks, you've gone from walking in the door to having a full set of tools for understanding yourself — your thinking, your emotions, your history, and your responses. That's the foundation. That's Phase 1's 'Know Yourself' in action.

We're one-third of the way through Phase 1. There's a lot more to come — communication, conflict resolution, accountability, empathy, problem-solving. But the hardest part — looking at yourself honestly — that's what you just did. Everything from here builds on this foundation."

Open the floor:

"What's different about you now compared to four weeks ago? Not what you know — what's different about how you see yourself, how you move through the day, how you handle what comes at you?"

Allow 4-5 responses. Don't force it if people need time to reflect. The changes may be subtle and hard to articulate — that's okay.

Checkout & Assignment (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence: 'One thing I'm taking from this week that I will carry with me is...'"

Talking piece goes around. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Homework for next Tuesday:

- 1. Carry your Safe Coping Card with you. Use it at least once before Tuesday. Journal what happened.*
- 2. Practice one new coping strategy — something from the safe list that you haven't tried before. Push yourself slightly outside your comfort zone. Journal the result.*
- 3. Continue your emotion tracking log and thinking reports. By now, these should be becoming habits. If they're not, recommit. The logs and reports are the evidence of your growth — and you'll need them for your Phase 1 portfolio.*
- 4. Write a reflection: 'What I understand now about myself that I didn't understand a month ago.' At least half a page.*

Next week we move into Active Listening and Communication. We're shifting from internal work to relational work — how you interact with the people around you. You'll be surprised how much your communication changes when you understand your own thinking, emotions, and trauma responses.

This was a hard week. I'm proud of this group. What you did this week — facing your own pain with honesty and courage — that's not common anywhere. Certainly not in here. Hold onto that.

Take care of each other this weekend. Service Over Self.

See you Tuesday."

Session 12 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Safe vs. Unsafe Coping handout distributed
- Blank Safe Coping Card templates distributed
- Opening circle completed — gratitude + struggle check-in
- Trauma response homework reviewed
- Safe vs. unsafe coping strategies taught with specific examples
- Self-care in correctional environment discussed realistically
- FORGE trauma-aware vs. therapeutic distinction clearly delivered
- Referral situations listed and explained
- Month's toolkit summarized (thinking errors → emotions → trauma → coping)
- Personal Safe Coping Cards created by all participants
- Share-out on Safe Coping Cards completed
- Four-week summary delivered
- Closing round completed
- Homework assigned (carry card + new coping strategy + tracking + reflection)
- Safety check: no participant left in visible distress

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 4

What to Watch For

Trauma activation: This is the most emotionally intense week in the entire Phase 1 curriculum. Specific risks:

- The ACE activity in Session 10 may be the first time someone has ever counted how many adverse experiences they had. A high score can be validating (explaining a lifetime of struggle) or devastating (confronting the full scope of what happened). Watch faces during the activity and during the hand-raise.
- Session 11 (trauma responses) may cause participants to relive specific moments, especially when connecting past events to current reactions. Watch for dissociation — a blank stare, loss of eye contact, seeming "checked out." If you see this, gently ground the person: "Hey, [name]. Come back to the room. You're here. You're safe. Take a breath."
- Session 12 is designed to be stabilizing — it moves from understanding to action. But some participants may still be processing Sessions 10 and 11. Be patient.

The participant who can't stop talking about their trauma: Once the door opens, some men will want to share everything — in detail, repeatedly, to anyone who will listen. This is understandable but requires management. Redirect gently: "I hear you. That's important. And right now I want to make sure everyone in the group has space. Let's talk more after the session." Then follow through — actually have that conversation.

The participant who shuts down completely: Some men will go silent after the ACE activity or the trauma response discussion. They might seem fine but are actually in freeze. Don't force participation. A quiet check-in after the session — "That was heavy material. How are you sitting with it?" — can make the difference between a man who processes and a man who walls off.

Peer support emerging: Watch for men checking on each other between sessions. This is the cohort container working. Acknowledge it when you see it: "I noticed you checking in on [name] after yesterday's session. That's exactly what Service Over Self looks like."

Common Week 4 Challenges

"You're making excuses for criminals."

This can come from participants themselves. Address it head-on: "Nobody in this room is making excuses. Understanding why you did what you did is not the same as excusing it. You can hold two truths at the same time: 'I experienced real harm as a child' AND 'I caused real harm as an adult.' Both are true. Neither cancels the other. FORGE asks you to be honest about both."

"I don't have any trauma — I had a normal childhood."

"Maybe you did. And if so, your ACE score will be low and this week will help you understand other people better. But sometimes what we call 'normal' is just what we got used to. A kid who watched his parents fight every night might call that normal. A kid who got hit with a belt for talking back might call that discipline. Whether you experienced trauma is for you to determine — not me. Just be honest with yourself."

"So now what? I know I have trauma — what do I do about it?"

"That's the right question. And the answer has two parts. Part one: keep using the tools you're learning here — understanding your thinking, regulating your emotions, recognizing your responses, and using safe coping. These tools directly address the effects of trauma. Part two: if your trauma is severe — if you're having nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, or symptoms that won't quit — consider talking to mental health services. There's no shame in it. Just like a broken bone needs a doctor, a deeply wounded mind needs professional care. FORGE teaches you to understand trauma. A professional can help you heal it."

"I don't trust mental health staff here."

This is often legitimate. Many participants have had negative experiences with institutional mental health services. Acknowledge it: "I hear you. Not every mental health worker is good at their job, and not every experience with them has been helpful. But the option is there, and if you find the right person, it can make a real difference. In the meantime, everything you're learning in FORGE is building your capacity to manage what you're carrying. You're not alone in this."

A participant who is activated beyond what the group can hold:

If someone is in genuine crisis — severe emotional distress, dissociative episode, disclosure of active self-harm or suicidal ideation — act immediately. Stay calm. Stay with the person. Ask the Senior Mentor or a trusted participant to continue the session. Take the individual aside. Use grounding techniques. Assess safety. Contact mental health services if needed. After the crisis is managed, follow up with the individual within 24 hours and continue checking in.

A Note on Facilitator Self-Care

This week will affect you too. If you have your own trauma history — and most facilitators who do this work do — the material may activate your own responses. That doesn't make you unfit to facilitate. It makes you human. But you need to take care of yourself: - Process the sessions with a co-facilitator, supervisor, or trusted peer after each one - Use the same regulation techniques you're teaching - Know your own limits — if you're too activated to hold space, it's okay to lean on the Senior Mentor or ask for support - Do not carry the weight of every participant's story by yourself. You cannot pour from an empty cup

Preparation for Week 5

- Review the Thinking for a Change (T4C) curriculum sections on active listening
- Prepare paired listening exercise materials (Session 13)
- Review the four communication styles: aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, assertive — prepare clear examples from dorm life
- Prepare "I" statement vs. "You" statement exercise materials
- Review the SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact) feedback model for Session 15
- Prepare triad feedback practice scenarios
- Shift your facilitation energy: Week 5 moves from internal work to relational skills. The tone should feel lighter — still serious, but more interactive and practice-oriented. The heaviest internal work is behind them. Now they learn to connect with others using what they've learned about themselves.

Weeks 5–8



Developing Skills

Week 5: Active Listening and Communication

Week 5 Overview

Purpose: Shift from internal work (thinking, emotions, trauma) to interpersonal skill-building. This week teaches participants how to truly listen, how to communicate without creating conflict, and how to give and receive honest feedback. These are foundational skills for everything that follows — conflict resolution, mediation, mentoring. A man who can't listen can't lead. A man who can't communicate clearly will create problems he's trying to solve.

Sessions This Week: - Session 13 (Tuesday): Active Listening - Session 14 (Wednesday): Communication Styles - Session 15 (Thursday): Giving and Receiving Feedback

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Handout: "5 Components of Active Listening" (1 per participant — or write on board) - Handout: "Communication Styles Grid" (1 per participant — or write on board) - Handout: "SBI Feedback Model" (1 per participant — or write on board) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) - Scenario cards for exercises (facilitator can read aloud if cards aren't available)

Connection to Previous Weeks: Weeks 2-4 built self-awareness — how your thinking works, how your emotions work, how your past shapes your present. This week, we turn outward. The question shifts from "What's happening inside me?" to "How do I connect with the person in front of me?"

SESSION 13: Active Listening

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 13 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Name and describe the 5 components of active listening 2. Identify at least 3 common barriers to listening 3. Distinguish between hearing and listening 4. Demonstrate active listening in a paired exercise 5. Recognize when they are not listening and self-correct

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. Two questions: **How are you doing today — honestly?** And think about the last conversation you had before walking in here. Were you really listening, or were you just waiting to talk?"*

Send the talking piece around. No crosstalk.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Interesting. Most of us, if we're honest, spend more time in conversations planning what we're going to say next than actually hearing what the other person is saying. Today we're going to fix that."

Review and Homework Check (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last week we wrapped up trauma awareness. Some of you wrote about recognizing trauma responses — yours or someone else's. Without sharing anything too personal, who noticed something this week that connected back to what we learned? A reaction that was bigger than the situation called for? A moment where you recognized fight-or-flight kicking in?"

Allow 2-3 people to share briefly.

"Good. That awareness is exactly what we've been building. Now we're going to take that same awareness and point it at how we communicate with other people. Starting with the most underrated skill there is: listening."

Instruction: The Difference Between Hearing and Listening (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me ask you something. How many of you have been in a conversation where the other person was clearly not listening? Maybe they were looking around the room. Maybe they cut you off mid-sentence. Maybe they jumped straight to giving advice before you even finished talking. How did that feel?"

Let 2-3 people respond.

"Now flip it. How many of you have done that to someone else? Be honest."

Pause. Let people acknowledge it.

*"Here's the distinction: **Hearing is passive. Listening is active.** Hearing happens automatically — sound hits your ears and your brain processes it. You can't stop yourself from hearing unless you plug your ears.*

Listening is a choice. It takes effort. It takes discipline. And most people are terrible at it — not because they're bad people, but because no one ever taught them how to do it.

In this environment, listening is even harder. You've trained yourself to stay alert, to watch your back, to never fully relax. That survival mode makes real listening almost impossible, because your brain is always scanning for threats instead of focusing on the person in front of you.

Today, we're going to learn a different way."

Instruction: The 5 Components of Active Listening (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Active listening has five components. Think of them as five skills you practice together. None of them is complicated. All of them are hard — because they go against your habits."

Write or display the 5 components:

1. ATTENDING

"Attending means giving your full physical presence to the person speaking. This is the foundation — everything else builds on it.

What does attending look like? - Face the person. Square your body toward them. - Make eye contact — not a stare-down, but enough to show you're present. - Put down whatever you're doing. No fidgeting, no looking around. - Lean in slightly. Open posture — arms uncrossed. - Nod occasionally to show you're tracking.

What does poor attending look like? Looking at the TV while someone talks to you. Glancing at the door. Playing with something in your hands. Turning your body away. These are signals that say 'you don't matter enough for my full attention.'

In a dorm, attending is powerful because it's rare. When someone in this environment gives you their full attention, you notice. It means something."

2. REFLECTING

"Reflecting means saying back what you heard — not word for word, but the essence of it. It shows the speaker that you actually received their message.

Examples: - Someone says: 'I'm tired of people disrespecting me in here. Every day it's something.' - A reflection: 'It sounds like you're feeling worn down by constant disrespect.'

- Someone says: 'My daughter won't answer my calls anymore. I don't know what I did.'*
- A reflection: 'You're hurt that she's not picking up, and you're not sure why.'*

Reflecting is not parroting. Don't just repeat their exact words back to them — that feels mechanical. Capture the meaning. Capture the feeling underneath.

The phrase 'What I'm hearing is...' is your best friend here. Use it."

3. CLARIFYING

"Clarifying means asking questions to make sure you understand correctly. It keeps you from making assumptions — and assumptions are where most conflicts start.

Clarifying sounds like: - 'When you say he disrespected you, what did he actually say or do?' - 'Help me understand — are you upset about what happened, or about how he handled it after?' - 'Can you say more about that? I want to make sure I'm getting the full picture.'

Clarifying is not interrogating. You're not a detective. You're not trying to catch someone in a lie. You're trying to understand. Your tone matters as much as your words."

4. SUMMARIZING

"Summarizing means pulling together what someone has said — especially after they've been talking for a while — and packaging it up so they can hear it back.

Summarizing sounds like: - 'So let me make sure I've got this right. You're dealing with tension with your cellie over the TV schedule, you've tried to talk about it twice and he shut you down, and now you're frustrated because you don't know what else to do. Is that right?'

That last part — 'Is that right?' — is critical. It gives the person a chance to correct you. Sometimes when people hear their situation summarized back, they realize something they didn't see before.

Summarizing also shows tremendous respect. It tells someone: "What you said mattered enough for me to organize it and give it back to you clearly."

5. VALIDATING

"Validating means acknowledging someone's experience or feelings as real and understandable — even if you don't agree with their conclusions or their behavior.

This is the one most people skip, and it's the one that matters most.

Validating sounds like: - 'I can see why you'd feel that way.' - 'That makes sense, given what you've been dealing with.' - 'Anyone in your position would be frustrated.'

Validating does NOT mean: - 'You're right and the other person is wrong.' - 'What you did was okay.' - 'I would have done the same thing.'

You can validate someone's feelings without endorsing their actions. 'I understand why you're angry — I would be too. But swinging on him would have made everything worse.' That's validation plus accountability. That's what a mentor does.

In this environment, most people have never had their feelings validated. They've been told to shut up, toughen up, man up. When you validate someone, you're sometimes the first person who's ever said 'what you feel is real and it matters.' That changes people."

Pause. Check for understanding.

"Questions on any of the five? Attending, reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, validating. Which one do you think will be hardest for you?"

Allow 3-4 responses.

Instruction: Barriers to Listening (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Before we practice, let's talk about what gets in the way. There are barriers to listening that trip up everyone — even people who know better."

Walk through each barrier:

"1. Planning your response. This is the big one. While the other person is talking, you're already rehearsing what you're going to say. You're not listening — you're preparing. Your mouth is closed but your brain has already moved on.

2. Judging. You decide within the first 10 seconds whether the person is right or wrong, smart or stupid, worth your time or not. Once you've judged, you stop listening because you think you already know the answer.

3. Assumptions. You think you know what they're going to say, so you stop actually hearing what they do say. 'I've heard this before' is the most dangerous thought a listener can have.

4. Problem-solving too early. Someone starts telling you about a problem and you immediately jump to 'Here's what you should do.' Most of the time, people don't want your solution — they want to feel heard first. Advice without listening is just noise.

5. Emotional reactivity. Something the person says triggers you — it reminds you of your own situation, or it makes you angry, or it's about someone you know. Your own emotions take over and you stop tracking what they're saying.

6. Distractions. The TV. Other conversations. Movement in the dorm. Someone walking by. Your own hunger or fatigue. Physical environment matters, and in a dorm, distractions are constant.

7. Power dynamics. If you think you're above someone — older, been down longer, higher status — you may unconsciously decide their words aren't worth your full attention. This is poison for a mentor."

"Here's the honest truth: every single one of us defaults to at least two or three of these. The goal isn't perfection. The goal is awareness. When you catch yourself planning your response instead of listening — just notice it and come back."

Exercise: Paired Active Listening (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Time to practice. This is the most important exercise we'll do today, so take it seriously.

Pair up. Decide who's Partner A and who's Partner B.

Round 1 (8 minutes total): *Partner A: You're going to talk for 3 minutes about something that matters to you. It can be anything — something you're dealing with right now, something you've been thinking about, a goal you have, a frustration. The only rule is that it has to be real. Don't just fill time. Say something that matters.*

Partner B: You listen. That's it. No interrupting. No advice. No 'I know what you mean.' Your job is to attend, reflect, clarify, summarize, and validate. Use the skills.

After Partner A finishes speaking, Partner B will: 1. Reflect back what you heard — 'What I heard you say is...' 2. Ask one clarifying question 3. Summarize the key points 4. Validate — 'I can understand why...'

Then Partner A gives feedback: Did you feel heard? What did your partner do well? What could they improve?

Then switch roles. Same process.

Ready? Partner A, go."

Facilitator times 3 minutes for speaking, then signals Partner B to reflect/clarify/summarize/validate (2 minutes for that), then 1 minute for feedback. Total: ~6-7 minutes per round.

Switch roles for Round 2.

Facilitator circulates during the exercise. Listen for: - Partners who interrupt (gently redirect) - Partners who jump to advice (remind them: reflect first) - Partners who give surface-level reflections (push for depth: "Can you go deeper than that? What was the feeling behind what they said?")

Debrief (8 minutes):

Facilitator:

"Come back together. Let's talk about that. How was it being the listener?"

Allow 3-4 responses.

"How was it being the speaker — having someone actually listen to you like that?"

Allow 3-4 responses.

"What was the hardest part?"

Allow responses.

Facilitator:

"Most of you are going to say the same things: it was hard not to interrupt, it was hard not to give advice, it felt awkward to reflect back what you heard. That's normal. You're building a new muscle. The first time is always clumsy. But here's what I want you to notice — how did it feel when someone really listened to you? When someone looked you in the eye, didn't interrupt, and then showed you they actually understood? That feeling — that's what you're going to be able to give to every person you interact with. That's power. Not the kind of power that comes from intimidation. The kind that comes from making someone feel seen."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence: 'The barrier to listening I need to work on most is...'"

Send the talking piece around.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Practice active listening in at least 2 real conversations today and tonight. It can be anyone — your cellie, someone at chow, anyone. Use the 5 components. See what happens. 2. Journal about it. What did you do differently? How did the other person respond? What was hard? Tomorrow we're going to look at how you talk — because listening is half the equation. The other half is how you express yourself. See you tomorrow."

Session 13 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed
- Homework from Week 4 reviewed
- Hearing vs. listening distinction made
- 5 components taught: attending, reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, validating

- Each component explained with concrete examples
- 7 barriers to listening covered
- Paired active listening exercise completed (both rounds)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (2 real conversations + journal)

SESSION 14: Communication Styles

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 14 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Identify and describe 4 communication styles: aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, and assertive 2. Recognize their own default communication style 3. Construct "I" statements to replace "You" statements 4. Explain why assertive communication is the most effective style for mentors 5. Rewrite aggressive or passive statements into assertive ones

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. How did your active listening practice go since yesterday? What happened when you tried it?"

Send the talking piece. Listen for who practiced and who didn't. Listen for breakthroughs — someone will likely report that a conversation went differently than expected.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Yesterday was about how you receive communication — listening. Today is about how you send it. Because even the best listener in the world can destroy a conversation with how they respond."

Instruction: The 4 Communication Styles (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Every one of us has a default way of communicating — especially under stress. Most people never think about it. They just react. Today, we're going to name four styles and figure out which one is yours."

Style 1: Aggressive

"Aggressive communication is about domination. The goal — whether you realize it or not — is to win. To control. To shut the other person down.

What it sounds like: - 'You better back off before something happens.' - 'I don't care what you think. This is how it's going to be.' - 'Shut up and listen for once.' - Raised voice. Hard eye contact. Invading someone's space.

What it looks like in the body: - Leaning forward aggressively. Finger pointing. Jaw clenched. Chest puffed out.

Where it comes from: - Usually fear. Fear of being disrespected. Fear of losing control. Fear of looking weak. Most aggressive communication is armor, not strength.

What it gets you: - Short-term compliance. People do what you want in the moment because they're afraid. Long-term? Resentment, isolation, enemies, and escalation. Every aggressive conversation is a deposit in a bank account that eventually explodes."

Style 2: Passive

"Passive communication is about disappearing. The goal is to avoid conflict at any cost — even the cost of your own needs, dignity, or safety.

What it sounds like: - 'Whatever you want is fine.' - 'I don't care.' (When you clearly do.) - 'It doesn't matter.' (When it clearly does.) - Silence when you should speak up.

What it looks like: - Looking down. Mumbling. Shrinking physically. Saying yes when you mean no.

Where it comes from: - Usually a history of being punished for speaking up. Some of you learned as children that having a voice got you hurt. So you stopped using it.

What it gets you: - You avoid the immediate conflict, but your needs never get met. Resentment builds. And eventually, the passive person explodes — because you can only swallow your anger for so long. That explosion usually looks aggressive, which confuses everyone because 'he seemed fine.'"

Style 3: Passive-Aggressive

"Passive-aggressive communication is the most toxic of the four because it hides aggression behind a mask of politeness or compliance.

What it sounds like: - 'Sure, I'll do it.' (And then you don't. Or you do it badly on purpose.) - 'I'm not mad.' (Said through clenched teeth while slamming a locker.) - 'Must be nice to have it so easy.' (A jab disguised as a comment.) - Sarcasm that has real edge to it. - The silent treatment. Deliberate exclusion. Spreading rumors.

Where it comes from: - It's what happens when you feel angry but don't feel safe expressing it directly. So you express it sideways. Under the surface.

What it gets you: - Confusion and distrust. People can feel that something is off, but they can't pin it down. It poisons relationships slowly. In a dorm, passive-aggressive behavior is one of the biggest sources of tension — because it never gets resolved. It just festers."

Style 4: Assertive

"Assertive communication is what FORGE teaches. It's the only style that respects both you and the other person at the same time.

What it sounds like: - 'I need to talk to you about something. When you played your radio past midnight, I couldn't sleep. I need us to figure out a solution.' - 'I disagree with that, and here's why.' - 'I'm not okay with that. Here's what I need.' - 'I hear what you're saying. I see it differently.'

What it looks like: - Calm, direct eye contact. Open posture. Steady voice — not loud, not soft. Standing your ground without puffing up.

Where it comes from: - Self-respect plus other-respect. You believe your needs matter AND the other person's needs matter. You're not trying to win. You're trying to resolve.

What it gets you: - Respect. Not the fear-based respect that comes from aggression — real respect. People trust assertive communicators because they know where they stand. An assertive person says what they mean, means what they say, and doesn't play games.

Here's the hard truth: assertive communication takes the most courage of all four styles. Aggression is easy — you just react. Passivity is easy — you just shut down. Passive-aggression is easy — you attack from cover. Assertiveness requires you to be honest, vulnerable, and direct all at the same time. Most people have never been taught how."

Pause for reflection.

"Think about your default. When you're under stress — when someone disrespects you, when you're frustrated, when you're in conflict — which style do you default to? Be honest with yourself. You might use different styles in different situations. Most people do. But there's usually a home base."

Allow 30 seconds of silence.

"Raise your hand if your default is aggressive."

Pause. Count.

"Passive?"

"Passive-aggressive?"

"Assertive?"

"If you said assertive, I'm going to push back on you a little. Most people are not naturally assertive. If you're already assertive in every situation, you probably don't need this program. What's more likely is that you're assertive in low-stakes situations and something else in high-stakes ones. That's what we're working on — being assertive when it matters most."

Instruction: "I" Statements vs. "You" Statements (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"The single most practical skill I can teach you today is the difference between 'I' statements and 'You' statements. This is the engine of assertive communication.

'You' statements attack. They put the other person on the defensive. They assign blame. They escalate.

'I' statements own. They take responsibility for your own experience. They describe impact without attacking character. They de-escalate.

Here's the formula for an 'I' statement:

'I feel [emotion] when [specific behavior] because [impact on me].'

Let me show you the difference."

Write these examples where everyone can see, or read them slowly:

Situation: Your cellie keeps leaving the cell a mess.

'You' statement: 'You're a slob. You never clean up after yourself. I'm sick of living in your filth.'

'I' statement: 'I feel frustrated when the cell doesn't get cleaned up, because I need to live in a space I can feel decent about.'

Situation: Someone borrowed your book and didn't return it.

'You' statement: 'You stole my book. You're always taking people's stuff.'

'I' statement: 'I need my book back. When it didn't come back when we agreed, I felt disrespected.'

Situation: A friend told someone else something you shared in confidence.

'You' statement: 'You're a snitch. I can't trust you with anything.'

'I' statement: 'I feel betrayed that what I told you got shared. I need to know I can trust you if I'm going to confide in you.'

"Notice what changes. The 'You' statements attack character — 'you're a slob,' 'you're a snitch.' The 'I' statements describe behavior and impact — 'when this happened, I felt this, because it affects me this way.'

Character attacks trigger defensiveness every single time. Nobody hears anything after 'you're a...!' Their brain is already building a counterattack.

'I' statements give people room to hear you without feeling attacked. They're not magic — someone can still get defensive. But you've given them a chance to respond instead of react."

"'I' statements also take guts, because they require you to be vulnerable. Saying 'I feel frustrated' or 'I felt disrespected' is harder than saying 'You're an idiot.' Vulnerability feels risky. But it works."

Exercise: Rewriting Statements (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's practice. I'm going to give you 5 aggressive or blaming statements — things you might hear or say in this environment. Your job is to rewrite each one as an assertive 'I' statement. Use the formula: 'I feel ___ when ___ because ___.'"

Read each statement. Give 2 minutes per statement for participants to write their rewrites. Then discuss.

1. "You're always running your mouth about me behind my back."
2. "You think you're better than everybody because you're in some program."
3. "You never help clean up. You just sit there like a king."
4. "You cut in line and you know it. Don't play dumb."
5. "You told the CO about the phone. I know it was you."

After participants write, go through each one:

"Who wants to share their rewrite of number 1?"

Call on 2-3 people per statement. Coach as needed: - "Good, but can you name the specific feeling? 'I feel disrespected' is better than 'I don't like it.'" - "Watch out — 'I feel like you're always talking about me' is a disguised 'you' statement. Stick to actual emotions: frustrated, hurt, disrespected, anxious." - "Solid. Notice how different that lands when you hear it? Same issue, completely different energy."

Facilitator (after the exercise):

"Here's something I want you to notice. Rewriting these on paper is relatively easy. Doing it in real time, when your blood pressure is up and someone is in your face — that's the challenge. That's why we practice. The more you rehearse assertive language in low-stress situations, the more available it becomes in high-stress ones.

One more thing: 'I' statements are not weakness. Some of you are thinking, 'If I say I feel frustrated instead of getting loud, people will think I'm soft.' Try it and see. The man who stays calm and says 'Here's what I need' while everyone else is losing control — that man has the room. Every time."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Name your default communication style — be honest — and one situation this week where you want to try being assertive instead."

Send the talking piece around.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Use 'I' statements in at least 3 conversations today and tonight. They don't have to be conflicts — you can practice in everyday moments. 'I appreciate when you...' is an 'I' statement too. 2. Journal about which communication style you default to and where it came from. When did you first learn to communicate that way? What were you modeling?

Tomorrow, we're going to tackle something that trips people up even more than communication style: how to give feedback honestly without destroying the relationship, and how to receive it without getting defensive. See you tomorrow."

Session 14 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
 - Active listening homework reviewed
 - 4 communication styles taught with examples (aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, assertive)
 - Self-assessment of default style conducted
 - "I" statement formula taught
 - Contrast between "I" and "You" statements demonstrated with examples
 - Rewriting exercise completed (5 statements)
 - Coaching provided on quality of rewrites
 - Closing circle completed
 - Homework assigned (3 "I" statements in conversation + journal on default style)
-

SESSION 15: Giving and Receiving Feedback

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 15 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain why feedback is a form of service, not an attack 2. Use the SBI model (Situation-Behavior-Impact) to deliver clear, respectful feedback 3. Receive feedback without becoming defensive 4. Distinguish between feedback on behavior and judgment of character 5. Demonstrate giving and receiving SBI feedback in a triad exercise

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. Did you use any 'I' statements since yesterday? What happened?"

Send the talking piece. Listen for who practiced. Celebrate attempts, even clumsy ones.

Review and Bridge (5 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This week we've covered listening and communication styles. Today we put them together in one of the most important skills you'll need as a FORGE mentor — and honestly, as a human being: how to tell someone the truth in a way they can actually hear, and how to hear the truth from someone else without shutting down. Feedback. Most people are terrible at it. They either avoid it entirely — say nothing and let the problem grow — or they deliver it like a weapon. Neither one works."

Instruction: Feedback as Service (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me reframe feedback for you, because most of us have a bad relationship with it.

Think about it. Where have you received feedback in your life? From judges. Parole boards. COs. Teachers who didn't believe in you. Maybe parents who only pointed out what you did wrong. For most of us, 'feedback' means 'someone telling me I'm not good enough.'

No wonder we get defensive. We've been trained to hear feedback as an attack.

*Here's how FORGE sees it: **Feedback is a service.** When someone cares enough about you to tell you the truth — even when the truth is uncomfortable — that's an act of respect. It means they think you're capable of growth. It means they haven't written you off.*

The person who says nothing when you're headed in the wrong direction? That person doesn't care about you. They're protecting their own comfort, not your growth.

The person who tells you, clearly and respectfully, 'Here's what I'm seeing, and here's how it's landing' — that person is investing in you.

As FORGE mentors, giving honest feedback will be one of your primary responsibilities. Your mentees will do things that need correcting. Your fellow cohort members will have blind spots. If you can't give feedback with skill, you'll either avoid hard conversations — which means you're not leading — or you'll deliver truth so harshly that people shut down and stop hearing you.

There's a better way."

Instruction: The SBI Model (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"The SBI model gives you a structure for delivering feedback that's specific, fair, and hard to argue with. SBI stands for **Situation, Behavior, Impact.**"*

Write or display the model:

S — Situation: When and where did it happen?

"Ground the feedback in a specific moment. Not 'you always' or 'you never' — a specific time and place.

Example: 'Yesterday during the circle process...'

Why this matters: Specificity prevents the other person from dismissing your feedback as a general complaint.

'You always interrupt' is easy to deny. 'Yesterday during the circle, when Marcus was sharing about his daughter' — that's something concrete."

B — Behavior: What did the person actually do? Observable actions only.

"Describe what you saw or heard — not what you think it meant, not what you assume their intention was.

Just the behavior.

Example: '...you started talking before he finished his sentence and changed the subject to your situation.'

Why this matters: Behavior is objective. 'You were rude' is a judgment — the person will argue with it. 'You started talking before he finished' is a fact — it's much harder to deny. Stay on the behavior. Don't interpret motives."

I — Impact: What was the effect? On you, on others, on the situation.

"Describe the real consequence of the behavior. What did it do?"

Example: '...Marcus went quiet after that and didn't share again for the rest of the session. And I noticed two other guys looked uncomfortable.'

Why this matters: Impact is where the learning happens. Most people don't know the effect of their behavior. They're not trying to hurt anyone — they just don't see it. When you show them the impact, you give them a reason to change."

Put it all together:

"Full SBI: 'Yesterday during the circle process, when Marcus was sharing about his daughter, you started talking before he finished and shifted the conversation to your situation. After that, Marcus went quiet and didn't share again for the rest of the session. I noticed a few other guys looked uncomfortable too.'

Notice what's NOT in that statement: - No name-calling - No 'you always' or 'you never' - No assumption about intent ('you obviously don't care about other people') - No character judgment ('you're selfish')

It's just: here's when, here's what I saw, and here's what happened as a result. Clean. Specific. Respectful. Hard to argue with."

Another example from dorm life:

"SBI: 'This morning when we were cleaning the common area, you sat on your bunk and didn't participate even though it was your turn on the rotation. The other guys who were cleaning noticed, and I heard two of them talking about it afterward. It's creating resentment.'

Compare that to: 'You're lazy and you never do your part.' Same issue. Completely different delivery. Completely different result."

Pause.

"Questions on SBI? Situation. Behavior. Impact. Three pieces. Every time."

Instruction: Receiving Feedback Without Defensiveness (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Giving feedback is hard. Receiving it might be even harder.

When someone gives you feedback — even good, respectful, SBI feedback — your body is going to react. Your chest tightens. Your jaw clenches. Your brain starts building a defense: 'That's not what happened,' 'They don't understand,' 'Who are they to tell me anything?'

That's your ego's immune system kicking in. It's trying to protect your self-image. The problem is, your ego's immune system attacks the truth the same way it attacks an insult. It can't tell the difference.

Here's how to receive feedback like a man who's serious about growth:"

Step 1: Listen fully. Don't interrupt.

"Let them finish. Don't start defending yourself mid-sentence. Remember everything you learned about active listening? Use it now. This is where it matters most."

Step 2: Breathe. Buy yourself 3 seconds.

"Before you respond, take a breath. Those 3 seconds are the difference between reacting and responding. Use the regulation techniques from Week 3."

Step 3: Reflect it back.

"'So what you're saying is...' Make sure you understood correctly. This also shows the person you were listening."

Step 4: Look for the truth — even a grain of it.

"Even if the feedback feels unfair, there's usually something true in it. Find that piece and acknowledge it. 'You're right — I did cut Marcus off.' You don't have to agree with everything, but find the part you can own."

Step 5: Say thank you.

"This is the hardest part. Say 'Thank you for telling me that' or 'I appreciate you being straight with me.' Even if it stings. Especially if it stings. Because when you thank someone for honest feedback, you've just made it safe for people to tell you the truth. And a man who people are afraid to be honest with is a man who stops growing."

Step 6: Don't retaliate later.

"This has to be said, because in this environment, retaliation for honesty is common. Someone gives you feedback in a session, and then you give them the cold shoulder in the dorm. Or you wait for your chance to hit back with some 'feedback' of your own. That kills trust. Dead. If you want people to be honest with you, you have to make it safe."

Pause.

"I'll be straight with you — this is one of the hardest skills in the entire program. Not because it's complicated, but because it goes against every instinct you've developed. Most of you have survived by never looking vulnerable, never admitting fault, never letting someone see that their words affected you. Receiving feedback well is an act of courage. Real courage. Not the kind you see in a fight. The kind most people never develop."

Exercise: SBI Feedback Triads (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Time to practice. Get into groups of three. In each round, you'll have three roles:

The Giver: *You deliver SBI feedback. Use a real situation — something you've actually observed about the person you're giving feedback to. It can be small. It doesn't have to be negative — you can give positive SBI feedback too. 'In last Tuesday's session, when [behavior], the impact was [positive impact].' Positive feedback helps people see what to do MORE of.*

The Receiver: *You practice receiving feedback using the steps we just covered. Listen fully. Breathe. Reflect back. Find the truth. Say thank you.*

The Observer: *You watch both people and provide coaching afterward. Did the giver use clean SBI? Did they slip into judgment or 'you always'? Did the receiver listen without interrupting? Did they get defensive? Did they find the truth in it?*

Each round takes about 7 minutes: - 2 minutes: Giver delivers SBI feedback - 2 minutes: Receiver responds (reflect back, acknowledge, thank) - 3 minutes: Observer provides coaching to both

Then rotate roles. Everyone gives, receives, and observes.

One more thing: this is practice. Be genuine but be kind. Don't use this as a chance to unload something you've been holding against someone. Start with something manageable. You're learning the technique, not settling scores."

Run three rounds. Facilitator circulates, listens, coaches.

Common issues to watch for and correct: - Giver says "You always..." — redirect to specific situation - Giver attacks character instead of describing behavior — "Was that a behavior or a judgment?" - Receiver interrupts — "Hold on. Let them finish." - Receiver gets visibly defensive — "Take a breath. Remember the steps." - Observer doesn't give honest coaching — "Your job is to help them get better, not to be nice."

Debrief (8 minutes):

Facilitator:

"Come back together. What was that like? Which role was hardest — giving, receiving, or observing?"

Allow discussion.

"What surprised you?"

"Here's what I want you to take away from this: the SBI model works because it separates the person from the behavior. You're not telling someone who they are. You're telling them what they did and what it caused.

That's the difference between feedback that builds people up and feedback that tears them down.

As mentors, you're going to give feedback constantly. To mentees. To cohort members. Even to me. If you can do it with this kind of skill and respect, people will actually hear you. And hearing is the first step to changing."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Final round for the week. Name one thing you learned this week about communication that you didn't know — or didn't practice — before."

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"This week we covered listening, communication styles, and feedback. Three skills that sound basic and are anything but. The gap between knowing these things and doing them is where the real work lives.

Homework for next week: 1. Give one piece of genuine SBI feedback to someone before Tuesday. It can be positive or constructive. Write about it in your journal — what you said, how they responded, how it felt. 2. Practice active listening and 'I' statements every day. Make it a habit, not a technique. 3. Journal reflection: 'What's the hardest truth someone could tell me right now, and how would I handle it?'

Next week, we go deep on conflict resolution. You've been building the skills — listening, emotional regulation, communication. Now we put them together and learn how to walk into a conflict and walk out with a resolution. It's going to be intense. Be ready.

Good work this week. See you Tuesday."

Session 15 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- "I" statement homework reviewed
- Feedback reframed as service
- SBI model taught with examples (Situation, Behavior, Impact)
- Receiving feedback steps covered (listen, breathe, reflect, find truth, thank, don't retaliate)
- Triad exercise completed (all three rounds — giver, receiver, observer)
- Facilitator circulated and coached during exercise
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (1 real SBI feedback + daily practice + journal reflection)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 5

What to Watch For

Listening habits in the room: Pay attention to how participants listen to EACH OTHER during sessions — not just during the exercise. Do they interrupt? Do they check out when someone else is talking? Do they wait for the talking piece or talk over it? What you observe in the room is real-time data on where each person is. Reference it when appropriate: "I noticed something just now that connects to today's lesson..."

Default communication styles emerging: By Session 14, you'll start to see participants' natural styles clearly. Some will be obviously aggressive communicators. Some will be quiet (passive or just introverted — don't confuse the two). Some will use humor to deflect (often passive-aggressive). Note who defaults to what — this information matters for conflict resolution in Week 6 and for mentor development in Phase 2.

Defensiveness around feedback: Session 15 will activate people. Some men have never received respectful, direct feedback. Some have only received criticism disguised as feedback. Watch for: - Men who shut down physically (arms crossed, eyes down, one-word answers) - Men who get agitated or argumentative - Men who deflect with humor - Men who turn it into a counter-attack

All of these are data, not problems. Name what you see without judgment: "I notice your arms just crossed. What's happening for you right now?"

The "soft" concern: Communication skills work sometimes triggers the "this is soft" response, especially "I" statements. If it comes up, address it:

"Let me ask you something. Who's more in control — the man who's yelling and making threats, or the man who looks the other person in the eye and calmly says exactly what he needs? Assertive communication isn't soft. It's disciplined. It's what happens when you're strong enough to not need aggression."

Common Week 5 Challenges

"I don't need to learn to listen — I listen fine." Response: "Maybe you do. But let me ask — when's the last time someone told you they felt truly heard by you? Not that you gave good advice. Not that you had the right answer. That they felt heard. If you can't point to a specific moment, there might be room to grow."

"I statements sound fake." This is common. Response: "They sound fake because they're new. Anything new feels awkward. The first time you shot a basketball, it felt weird too. 'I' statements sound authentic when they come from an authentic place. If you're genuinely frustrated, saying 'I'm frustrated' isn't fake — it's honest. What's fake is hiding behind aggression and pretending you're not hurt underneath."

"What if someone gives me 'feedback' that's really just disrespect?" Good question. Response: "Real feedback is specific and it's about behavior. If someone says 'You're a [slur],' that's not feedback — that's an attack. You don't owe anyone a calm response to abuse. SBI is for people who are genuinely trying to help you. Part of the skill is learning to tell the difference."

Participants who dominate the paired exercises: Some men will talk through the entire 3 minutes without leaving space. Others will give surface-level content. Coach both: "Go deeper — this is practice for real conversations, not small talk" and "Let your partner have the floor — your job right now is to receive, not to fill silence."

Preparation for Week 6

- Review the FORGE 5-step conflict resolution model from the handbook thoroughly — you need to teach it at a deeper level than the handbook covers
- Prepare the "heat scale" scenarios (10 situations rated 1-10 for intensity)
- Practice de-escalation body language yourself — you need to model it
- Review red lines: weapons, threats, gang dynamics, suicidal statements
- Have mediation ground rules ready to distribute or display
- Consider recruiting a Senior Mentor to play a role in the de-escalation and mediation exercises — having a skilled partner makes these sessions much stronger

Week 6: Conflict Resolution Deep Dive

Week 6 Overview

Purpose: Take the FORGE conflict resolution model from concept to capability. Participants have been building skills for five weeks — cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, active listening, assertive communication. This week, they put it all together. By the end of Week 6, every participant should be able to assess a conflict's intensity, de-escalate a heated situation using specific techniques, and mediate a dispute between two other people. This is where theory becomes practice.

Sessions This Week: - Session 16 (Tuesday): The FORGE Conflict Resolution Model (Expanded) - Session 17 (Wednesday): De-escalation Techniques - Session 18 (Thursday): Mediation Skills

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - FORGE Handbooks (participants should have these — reference the conflict resolution section) - Handout or board display: "The Heat Scale" (1-10 rating chart) - Handout or board display: "FORGE 5-Step Conflict Resolution Model" - Handout or board display: "De-escalation Checklist" - Handout or board display: "Mediation Ground Rules" - 10 scenario cards for heat scale exercise (facilitator can read aloud if cards aren't available) - Space for standing role-play exercises — move chairs to the sides if needed

Connection to Previous Weeks: Week 2 gave them thinking tools. Week 3 gave them emotional regulation. Week 4 gave them trauma awareness. Week 5 gave them listening and communication skills. This week integrates everything. Conflict resolution is not a separate skill — it's the application of every skill they've learned so far, under pressure.

SESSION 16: The FORGE Conflict Resolution Model (Expanded)

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 16 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Recite and explain the 5 steps of the FORGE Conflict Resolution Model 2. Apply specific techniques within each step 3. Use the "heat scale" to rate a conflict's intensity from 1-10 4. Match their response approach to the level of heat 5. Rate and discuss appropriate responses to 10 realistic scenarios

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. Think about the last conflict you witnessed or were part of — how was it handled? Scale of 1-10, how well did it go?"

Send the talking piece. Note what participants describe — this gives you real material to reference later.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Most conflicts in this environment are handled badly. That's not an insult — it's a fact. Most people don't have tools. They have reactions. This week, you get tools."

Review and Bridge (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Open your handbooks to the conflict resolution section. You've seen this before. The 5-step model. But today we're going deeper than the handbook goes. We're going to break each step apart, add specific techniques to each one, and then practice applying the whole thing to real situations.

Before we do that — let me connect this to everything you've learned so far.

Week 2: Your thinking drives your behavior. In a conflict, your thinking errors will scream at you. Closed thinking: 'I'm right, they're wrong.' Power thrust: 'I'll make them stop.' Victim stance: 'They started it.' If you can't catch those in real time, you'll escalate every conflict you walk into.

Week 3: Your emotions will flood you. The escalation curve goes from calm to agitated to flooded. If you're flooded, you can't think. If you can't think, you can't resolve anything. Regulation comes first.

Week 5: If you can't listen, you can't understand what the conflict is actually about. And if you communicate aggressively, you'll pour gasoline on every fire you're trying to put out.

This week is where it all comes together."

Instruction: The 5-Step Model — Deep Dive (35 minutes)

Facilitator:

"You know the 5 steps. Let's go deeper."

STEP 1: PAUSE & POSTURE

"This is the most important step because it determines everything that follows. If you skip this step, nothing else works.

Pause means: do not react. Whatever your first impulse is — suppress it. Don't speak. Don't move forward. Don't change your facial expression. Buy yourself 3-5 seconds.

This is where the 4-4-4 breathing technique from Week 3 earns its keep. Four seconds in. Four seconds hold. Four seconds out. You can do this without anyone noticing.

Posture means: arrange your body to communicate safety, not threat. This is deliberate, not natural. - Shoulders down and relaxed (not raised and tense) - Hands visible (not in pockets, not behind your back, not balled into fists) - Open palms — the oldest signal in human history that says 'I'm not armed, I'm not a threat' - Slight angle — don't stand directly face-to-face. Turn your body 15-20 degrees to the side. Direct face-to-face position is confrontational. An angle is conversational. - Maintain comfortable distance — at least arm's length. Closer than that triggers threat response.

Here's the thing about posture: it's not just for the other person. It actually changes YOUR brain chemistry. When you relax your shoulders and open your hands, your nervous system gets the signal that you're not in danger. Your heart rate drops. Your thinking clears. You're hacking your own stress response through body positioning.

If you're mediating — if you're the third party walking into someone else's conflict — Pause & Posture is how you enter the space. Don't rush in. Walk in calm. Your energy sets the tone."

STEP 2: NAME THE HEAT

"Before you do anything else, acknowledge the emotional temperature. Don't pretend it's not hot. Don't jump straight to problem-solving. Name what's happening.

'I can see this is heated.' 'I can tell you're both frustrated right now.' 'This clearly matters to both of you.'

Why does this work? Because when someone is escalated, the first thing they need is to feel seen. If you walk into a conflict and start asking 'What happened?' without acknowledging that two people are about to come out of their skin, they feel like you're ignoring their reality. They'll either ignore you or escalate on you.

Naming the heat also gives people permission to be honest about their emotional state. In this environment, admitting you're angry is risky. Admitting you're hurt is riskier. When you say 'I can tell this is intense,' you're creating space for the truth to come out.

What you DON'T do: - Don't say 'Calm down.' Those two words have never in human history made anyone calm down. They make people angrier because they feel dismissed. - Don't say 'It's not that serious.' You don't get to decide what's serious to someone else. - Don't say 'You need to relax.' Same energy as 'calm down.'

What you DO say: - 'I can see this matters to you. I want to understand.' - 'You've got every right to be frustrated. Let's figure this out.' - 'I'm not here to dismiss what you're feeling. I'm here to help.'"

STEP 3: FACTS > STORIES

"Once you've paused and acknowledged the heat, you need to separate what actually happened from the stories people are telling themselves about what happened.

Here's what I mean. Two guys are in a conflict. One says, 'He disrespected me in front of everybody.' That's a story. The fact might be: 'He made a comment about my shoes during chow.' The story — 'he disrespected me in front of everybody' — is an interpretation layered with emotion, ego, and assumption.

Your job is to get to the facts.

The technique: give each person 60 seconds to tell their side. Uninterrupted. Ground rules: - No insults - No name-calling - Tell me what happened — what was said, what was done — not what you think they meant by it

'I want to hear both sides. [Name], you go first. Tell me what happened — just the facts. What was said, what was done. Sixty seconds. [Other name], your turn is next, and you'll get the same time. Right now, your job is to listen.'

After each person speaks, reflect back the facts — not the interpretations: 'So what happened is: you were at chow, he made a comment about your shoes, and that felt disrespectful to you.'

This does something powerful: it strips the conflict down to its actual components. Half the time, when you lay out the facts cleanly, both parties realize the situation is smaller than they thought it was. The stories made it bigger."

STEP 4: NEEDS & OPTIONS

"Once you have the facts, shift the conversation from what happened to what each person needs.

'What do you actually need here? Not what you want to happen to him — what do you need for this to be resolved?'

This question changes everything. It moves people from positions ('He needs to apologize' or 'He needs to leave me alone') to interests (respect, safety, fairness).

Common needs underneath dorm conflicts: - Respect: 'I need to not feel disrespected.' - Safety: 'I need to feel safe in my own space.' - Fairness: 'I need things to be fair.' - Space: 'I need my boundaries respected.' - Acknowledgment: 'I need him to see that what he did affected me.'

Once needs are on the table, generate options together: 'Okay, so you need respect, and you need acknowledgment. Let's talk about what that could look like. What are 2-3 things that would resolve this for both of you?'

Push for at least 2-3 options. Don't accept the first one. The first option is usually positional ('He apologizes'). The second and third options are usually more creative and more durable."

STEP 5: AGREEMENT & CHECK-BACK

"Once both parties agree on a solution, make it concrete: - Who does what? - By when? - What happens if it doesn't hold?"

Don't leave it vague. 'We're cool' is not an agreement. It's a handshake over an unresolved wound.

'So here's what we've agreed: [specific terms]. Does that work for both of you? Good. I'm going to check back with both of you tomorrow to see how it's going.'

The check-back is essential. Most dorm conflicts 'resolved' without a check-back resurface within 48 hours.

The follow-up tells both parties: this matters, someone is paying attention, and the agreement has weight.

If the agreement falls apart at check-back — that's not failure. It's information. Go back to Step 3 and find what was missed."

Instruction: The Heat Scale (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Not every conflict is the same intensity, and your response should match the heat level. We use a 1-10 scale."

Write or display the Heat Scale:

1-3: LOW HEAT — Annoyances and minor friction - Examples: TV too loud, someone borrowed your stuff without asking, a rude comment - Response: Direct, calm conversation between the parties. Usually resolves with a simple "I" statement. A mentor might not even need to be involved — the individuals should handle it themselves. - Key skill: Assertive communication

4-6: MEDIUM HEAT — Real conflict, escalating emotions - Examples: Ongoing roommate tensions, disrespect that's becoming a pattern, property disputes, broken agreements - Response: The full 5-step model. A mentor may need to step in to mediate. Both parties need to be heard. This is where most dorm conflicts live. - Key skills: Active listening, "I" statements, mediation

7-8: HIGH HEAT — Serious tension, potential for violence - Examples: Direct threats, physical posturing, crowd gathering, retaliation being planned - Response: Immediate de-escalation. Priority is preventing violence. Separation first, resolution later. Use the de-escalation techniques from Session 17. Consider whether this needs to be referred. - Key skills: De-escalation, body language, tactical empathy

9-10: RED LINE — Imminent danger or beyond mentor scope - Examples: Weapons present or mentioned, active assault, suicidal statements, gang-directed violence, sexual assault - Response: Do not attempt to resolve. Ensure your own safety. Refer to staff immediately. Your job is not to be a hero — your job is to prevent tragedy and get help. - Key skill: Knowing your limits

Facilitator:

"Here's the mistake people make: they treat every conflict like it's a 7 or 8, or they treat a 7 or 8 like it's a 3. Both are dangerous. Overreacting to a low-heat situation makes you look controlling. Underreacting to a high-heat situation can get someone hurt.

Matching your response to the actual heat level — that's judgment. That's what separates a trained mentor from someone who just means well."

Exercise: Rating the Heat (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I'm going to read 10 scenarios. For each one, I want you to rate it on the heat scale — 1 to 10 — and tell me how you'd respond. Write your rating down first, then we'll discuss. No shouting out — think before you speak."

Read each scenario. Allow 30 seconds to write, then discuss.

Scenario 1: "Your neighbor's radio is louder than it should be after lights-out. It's happened twice this week."

Expected rating: 2-3. Handle it yourself with a direct, respectful conversation.

Scenario 2: "Two men are arguing at the card table. One accuses the other of cheating. Voices are raised but there's no physical posturing yet."

Expected rating: 4-5. Monitor. May need to step in if it escalates. 5-step model if you do.

Scenario 3: "A man finds out someone has been telling people on the yard that he 'snitched' to a CO. He tells you he's going to 'handle it tonight.'"

Expected rating: 7-8. This could become violent. De-escalate immediately. May need to refer depending on how specific the threat is.

Scenario 4: "Two cellmates aren't speaking to each other. The tension has been building for a week. Others in the dorm are starting to pick sides."

Expected rating: 5-6. Needs mediation before it escalates further. The fact that others are picking sides makes this urgent.

Scenario 5: "Someone makes a sarcastic comment about another man's family during a group conversation. The other man stiffens up but says nothing."

Expected rating: 3-4. Worth a check-in with the man who went silent. He may be processing or planning. The silence is more concerning than an argument would be.

Scenario 6: "You see two men from different parts of the facility standing chest-to-chest in the common area. A crowd is forming."

Expected rating: 7-8. Immediate de-escalation needed. Physical posturing plus a crowd is a volatile combination.

Scenario 7: "A man tells you he heard that someone in another dorm has 'put a green light' on him."

Expected rating: 9-10. Red line. This involves potential organized violence. Refer to staff. Do not attempt to mediate gang-directed threats.

Scenario 8: "Someone borrowed your pen last week and hasn't returned it. You've asked twice."

Expected rating: 1-2. Handle it directly. Not worth more than a simple assertive request.

Scenario 9: "Two FORGE participants are in a heated argument about who's not pulling their weight on a group project. Both are raising their voices."

Expected rating: 4-5. This is within the FORGE community and needs to be resolved using program standards. Good opportunity to model the 5-step process.

Scenario 10: "A man approaches you, visibly shaking, and says someone threatened to stab him if he doesn't pay a debt by tomorrow."

Expected rating: 9-10. Red line. Weapon mentioned, specific threat, specific timeline. This needs to go to staff. Keep the man safe in the immediate term.

Debrief (5 minutes):

Facilitator:

"Where did you disagree with each other on ratings? That's where the interesting conversations are. Reasonable people can disagree on whether something is a 5 or a 6. But if you're rating a weapon threat as a 4, or rating a pen dispute as an 8 — you need to recalibrate. The heat scale is a thinking tool. Use it. Before you respond to a conflict, ask yourself: what's the actual number here? Then match your response to the number, not to your emotional reaction."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Which step of the 5-step model do you think will be hardest for you personally, and why?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for tomorrow: 1. Memorize the 5 steps. You should be able to recite them without looking: Pause & Posture, Name the Heat, Facts > Stories, Needs & Options, Agreement & Check-Back. 2. Journal about a past conflict that you handled poorly. Walk through it again using the 5-step model. What would you have done differently at each step?

Tomorrow we go hands-on. De-escalation techniques — body language, tone, tactical empathy, and knowing when to step back. You'll be on your feet. Come ready to move."

Session 16 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Review and bridge to previous weeks' skills
- 5-step model taught in depth (Pause & Posture, Name the Heat, Facts > Stories, Needs & Options, Agreement & Check-Back)
- Specific techniques within each step explained with examples
- Heat scale introduced and explained (1-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-10 ranges)
- 10 scenarios rated and discussed
- Disagreements on ratings explored productively
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (memorize 5 steps + journal on past conflict)

SESSION 17: De-escalation Techniques

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 17 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Demonstrate de-escalation body language (stance, hands, distance, eye contact) 2. Adjust tone and pace to lower the emotional temperature 3. Use tactical empathy to acknowledge without agreeing 4. Redirect a conversation from positions to interests 5. Identify red-line situations and explain when to step back and refer

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Quick check-in. Recite the 5 steps of the FORGE conflict resolution model. I'm going around the room and I want to hear them. No handbooks."

Go around the circle. Each person recites the 5 steps. If someone stumbles, the person next to them helps. By the end of the round, everyone should have it.

"Good. Today we're going to focus on what happens when the heat is at 7 or 8. When someone is escalated. When violence is on the table but hasn't happened yet. This is the moment that separates a trained mentor from a bystander."

Instruction: De-escalation — Why It Works (5 minutes)

Facilitator:

"De-escalation is not about convincing an angry person that they shouldn't be angry. It doesn't work that way. You can't argue someone out of an emotional state. Logic doesn't reach a flooded brain.

De-escalation works by changing the environment — your body, your voice, your energy — so that the other person's nervous system starts to downregulate. You're not controlling them. You're giving their brain different inputs than the ones fueling the escalation.

Think about it like this: when someone is escalated, their amygdala is in charge. The thinking brain has gone offline. Everything looks like a threat. If your body language, your tone, and your words communicate 'I'm not a threat, I see you, I'm here to help' — their brain starts to get the signal that this isn't a combat situation.

Their heart rate drops. Their vision widens. The thinking brain starts to come back online.

That's the science. Here's the practice."

Instruction: Body Language in De-escalation (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Your body speaks louder than your words. When someone is escalated, they're reading your body before they process a single word you say. If your body says 'fight,' they'll fight. If your body says 'safe,' they have a chance to come down.

Stand up. I'm going to walk you through de-escalation posture."

Have everyone stand. Demonstrate each element.

Stance: *"Feet shoulder-width apart. Weight balanced. Not leaning forward — that's aggressive. Not leaning back — that looks scared. Balanced. Grounded. Turn your body slightly to the side — 15-20 degrees. Never stand directly squared up. Square is confrontational. The angle says 'conversation,' not 'confrontation.' Try it."*

Participants practice the angled stance.

Hands: *"Hands visible at all times. Down at your sides, palms slightly forward. Or raised gently to about chest level, palms out — the universal 'I come in peace' gesture. Never: hands in pockets (you're hiding something), arms crossed (you're closed off), fists clenched (you're ready to fight), pointing (you're accusing). Watch."*

Demonstrate each wrong way, then the right way. Have participants practice.

Distance: "Maintain at least arm's length. If someone is escalated, give them MORE space, not less. Crowding someone who's already activated is like cornering a trapped animal — they'll come at you.

If they move toward you, step back calmly. Don't hold your ground like you're proving something. Creating space is not retreating — it's strategic. It gives them room to think and it keeps you safe."

Eye contact: "Steady but not hard. You're looking at them to show you're present and paying attention — not staring them down. If someone is highly escalated, you can soften your gaze slightly. Look at the bridge of their nose instead of directly in their eyes. It reads as eye contact without the intensity.

If they break eye contact, don't chase it. Let them look away. Sometimes people need to look away to regulate."

Facial expression: "Neutral to warm. Not blank — blank looks like you don't care. Not smiling — that looks like you're not taking it seriously. Slight warmth. Concern. The face of someone who gives a damn but isn't scared."

Instruction: Tone and Pace (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Sit back down. Let's talk about your voice, because your voice is a de-escalation instrument.

When someone is escalated, everything speeds up — their speech, their heartbeat, their breathing. If you match their speed and volume, you join the escalation. If you deliberately go slower and softer, you pull them in your direction.

This is called **spacing down**.

Volume: Drop your voice below theirs. Not to a whisper — that's weird. But noticeably lower. If they're at a 7 in volume, you're at a 4. Human brains unconsciously mirror the volume around them. If you go lower, they usually follow.

Speed: Slow your speech by about 30%. Put... pauses... between... your sentences. When you slow down, their brain has to slow down to track you. It's like downshifting a car.

Pitch: Lower your pitch. High-pitched voices communicate stress and urgency. A deeper, steady tone communicates calm and authority. You're not doing a bass voice — you're just settling into the lower range of your natural register.

Let me demonstrate."

Demonstrate two versions of the same statement:

Version 1 (fast, loud, high): "Hey, you need to stop right now, this isn't going anywhere good, you need to think about what you're doing!"

Version 2 (slow, low, steady): "Hey... I hear you. I can see this is real for you. Let's talk about it."

"Same intent. Completely different energy. Which one would reach you if you were heated?"

Instruction: Tactical Empathy (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Tactical empathy is a term from crisis negotiation. It means: showing someone that you understand their feelings and perspective — even when you don't agree with what they're doing.

This is not about being soft. Hostage negotiators use tactical empathy. They're not agreeing with the hostage-taker. They're saying 'I understand why you feel that way' so the person feels heard enough to start talking instead of acting.

In your world, tactical empathy sounds like this:"

Situation: A man is furious because he says his cellie stole from him. He's pacing, fists clenched.

Bad response: 'Calm down, man. It's probably not that serious.' (This dismisses his feelings. He'll escalate.)

Bad response: 'Yeah, he probably did steal it. That's messed up.' (This takes sides and validates potential retaliation.)

Tactical empathy: 'If someone stole from you, I understand why you're angry. That's your property. That matters. I want to help you figure this out without making things worse for yourself.'

Notice what happened: - You validated his feeling: 'I understand why you're angry.' - You validated his concern: 'That's your property. That matters.' - You didn't take sides on the facts: 'If someone stole' — not 'he definitely stole.' - You shifted toward resolution: 'I want to help you figure this out.' - You introduced consequence awareness: 'without making things worse for yourself.'"

Another example: A man is angry because a CO disrespected him in front of the dorm.

Tactical empathy: 'Being talked to like that in front of people — yeah, I get it. That eats at you. Anybody would feel some type of way about that. Let me ask you something though — what's the move that protects you here? Not what feels good in the moment, but what actually protects your situation.'

You acknowledged his pain. You validated it. Then you redirected toward his self-interest. That last part — 'what protects your situation' — is powerful because it engages his thinking brain. He has to actually consider consequences instead of just reacting."

Facilitator:

"The key phrases to memorize: - 'I can see why you'd feel that way.' - 'That makes sense.' - 'Anybody in your shoes would be frustrated.' - 'I hear you. Let me make sure I understand.' - 'What do you need right now?'

These phrases buy time, build rapport, and lower heat. Use them until they're second nature."

Instruction: The Redirect (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"The redirect is what you use when someone is stuck in a loop — repeating the same grievance, escalating themselves, spiraling. They keep going back to the same point: 'He disrespected me. He disrespected me. He disrespected me.'

Looping happens because the person doesn't feel heard. So the first move is always to validate: 'I hear you. He said something that crossed a line. I get that.'

But if they keep looping after validation, you redirect. You shift the conversation from the problem to the solution. From what happened to what happens next.

Redirect phrases: - 'I hear you on what happened. Now help me understand — what would resolution look like for you?' - 'If you could wave a magic wand and fix this, what would that look like?' - 'What outcome are you looking for here?' - 'What's the best-case scenario you'd accept?'

The redirect works because it gives the person a new job. Instead of replaying the offense, they're now thinking about what they want. That's a completely different cognitive process. It pulls them out of the emotional loop and into problem-solving mode.

One warning: don't redirect too early. If you try to redirect before someone feels heard, they'll feel dismissed and escalate. Validate first. Redirect second."

Instruction: Red Lines (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There are situations where your job as a mentor is NOT to resolve the conflict. Your job is to step back and refer. We talked about these on the heat scale — 9s and 10s. Let's be specific about what they are."

Red Line 1: Weapons *"If a weapon is mentioned, seen, or suspected — this is beyond your scope. You are not law enforcement. You are not security. A mentor with good intentions and a sharp object pointed at him is just a target."*

What you do: Remove yourself from immediate danger. Do not attempt to disarm or negotiate. Report to staff. If someone tells you they have a weapon for 'protection,' that's still a red line. 'I hear you, and I understand you feel you need it. But I can't know about a weapon and not act on it. That's the agreement I made when I joined FORGE. Let's figure out a way to address your safety that doesn't put everyone at risk.'"

Red Line 2: Direct threats of serious violence *"Not 'I'm frustrated' or 'I could punch something.' Those are expressions of emotion. A red line is: 'I'm going to hurt him. Tonight.' Specific target. Specific intent. Specific timeline. If you hear that, you need to involve staff."*

Red Line 3: Gang-directed conflict *"Gang dynamics operate on rules that FORGE does not have the authority or ability to override. If a conflict is gang-related, attempting to mediate puts you in danger and may make the situation worse. Recognize it. Step back. Refer."*

Red Line 4: Suicidal or self-harm statements *"If someone tells you they're thinking about hurting themselves or ending their life, this is a mental health crisis. You stay present. You listen. You do NOT leave them alone. And you get help. This is not a mentoring conversation — this is a safety situation."*

Red Line 5: Sexual assault or coercion *"If you become aware that someone is being sexually assaulted or coerced, this requires immediate staff involvement. Do not attempt to confront the perpetrator."*

Facilitator:

"Knowing your limits is not weakness. It's wisdom. A mentor who thinks he can handle everything is a mentor who's going to get himself or someone else hurt. The bravest thing you can do in a red-line situation is swallow your pride and get help."

If any of this feels unclear — if you're not sure whether something crosses a red line — err on the side of referring. It's better to refer unnecessarily than to not refer when someone is in danger."

Exercise: Standing De-escalation Practice (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"On your feet. We're going to practice. Pair up.

Round 1: Body language only. No words. *Partner A: You're the escalated person. You're angry. Show it with your body — tense posture, hard eyes, invading space. Don't touch anyone, but make it real. Partner B: You're the de-escalator. Use body language only to communicate calm. Stance, hands, distance, eye contact, facial expression. See if you can shift your partner's energy without saying a word. Go for 2 minutes. Then switch."*

Run Round 1. Facilitator circulates and coaches.

Round 2: Add voice. *"Same setup, but now Partner B can speak. Use the tone and pace techniques: lower, slower, steady. Use tactical empathy phrases. Don't try to solve anything — just bring the temperature down. Partner A, you can respond. Stay in character — you're heated. Don't make it easy, but don't be impossible either. If your partner is doing it right, let yourself come down gradually. Three minutes. Then switch."*

Run Round 2. Facilitator circulates and coaches.

Round 3: Full scenario. *"I'm going to give you a scenario. Partner A is the escalated person. Partner B uses everything — posture, tone, tactical empathy, redirect. Partner A, play it real. Partner B, work the steps. Scenario: Partner A just found out someone has been talking about his family on the yard. He's furious and says he's going to go find the person right now. Partner B walks up and sees his energy."*

Run Round 3. Five minutes. Then debrief.

Debrief (5 minutes):

"What worked? What didn't? What happened in your body when your partner started using de-escalation on you? Did you feel the shift?"

Allow 3-4 people to share.

"That shift you felt — when someone's calm energy started to change your energy — that's what you're going to give to every heated situation you walk into. It's not magic. It's skill. And it gets better with practice."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What's one thing from today's session that you want to make sure you remember when it matters?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Practice your de-escalation posture tonight. Stand in front of a mirror if you can. Check your stance, your hands, your expression. Get comfortable in that body position so it becomes automatic. 2. Journal: Write about a time you were escalated and someone — or something — brought you down. What did they do? What worked? If you can't think of a person, what did you do yourself that helped? Tomorrow we learn mediation — how to step into someone else's conflict as a neutral third party. That's the hardest skill of the week. Rest up."

Session 17 Checklist

- Opening circle completed — 5-step model recitation check
- De-escalation science explained (amygdala, nervous system)
- Body language taught and practiced (stance, hands, distance, eye contact, face)
- Tone and pace techniques taught with demonstration
- Tactical empathy explained with examples
- Key phrases provided and discussed
- The redirect explained with examples
- Red lines covered clearly (weapons, violence threats, gang dynamics, self-harm, sexual assault)
- Standing practice completed (3 rounds — body only, body+voice, full scenario)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (posture practice + journal on being de-escalated)

SESSION 18: Mediation Skills

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 18 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain what a neutral third party means and what it does not mean 2. Distinguish between mediating and taking sides 3. Set and enforce ground rules for a mediation 4. Manage a mediation when both parties are escalated 5. Conduct a basic triad mediation from beginning to end

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. What did you notice about your own body language since yesterday? Did you catch yourself using de-escalation posture or catch yourself doing the opposite?"

Send the talking piece.

"Today's the day you put it all together. You've learned to listen. You've learned to communicate assertively. You've learned the 5-step model. You've practiced de-escalation. Now we add the hardest piece: stepping into someone ELSE'S conflict as a neutral third party. Mediation."

Instruction: The Neutral Third Party (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's define what 'neutral' means and what it doesn't mean.

Neutral means: - You don't have a stake in the outcome - You don't decide who's right and who's wrong - You don't impose a solution - You treat both parties with equal respect and equal air time - Your goal is resolution, not judgment

Neutral does NOT mean: - You don't care - You have no opinion - You tolerate abuse or threats during the mediation - You pretend both sides are equally valid when one person is clearly doing something harmful - You stay 'neutral' on Code of Conduct violations

Here's where it gets tricky. Sometimes one person IS more in the wrong than the other. As a mediator, you can see it clearly. The temptation is to take the side of the person who's right and tell the other person they need to fix it. But the moment you take sides, you lose your power as a mediator. The person you sided against stops trusting you. The mediation is over.

Instead, your job is to guide the conversation so that the truth becomes visible to both parties. Ask the right questions. Reflect what you're hearing. Summarize. When one person's position doesn't hold up to facts, it usually becomes clear to everyone in the room — including the person holding it — without you having to announce it.

That's the art. You're not the judge. You're the mirror."

"There's one exception. If someone violates a ground rule during the mediation — threatens, insults, intimidates — you're not neutral about that. You enforce the rules. 'We agreed: no insults. If that happens again, we pause the conversation.' That's not taking sides. That's maintaining the container."

Instruction: Mediation vs. Taking Sides (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"One of the biggest risks for a mediator — especially in this environment — is triangulation. Triangulation is when two people in conflict each come to you separately, and each one tries to get you on their side. If you let that happen, you're no longer a mediator — you're a weapon.

How to avoid triangulation:

If Person A comes to you and says 'I need you to talk to Person B about what he did' — don't go to Person B as Person A's advocate. Instead:

'I hear that you're frustrated with B. If you want, I can help the two of you have a conversation about it. But I won't go to him on your behalf — that puts me in the middle in a way that doesn't help either of you. Let's set up a time where all three of us sit down.'

If Person B then comes to you separately — same thing:

'A came to me about the same issue. I'm not taking sides. What I'd like to do is bring both of you together so we can work through it. Are you willing to do that?'

This is hard because people will pressure you. 'Just tell him...' 'Can you just say something to her...' The answer is always: 'I'll help you both, but I won't be a messenger. Let's have the conversation together.'

Triangulation destroys trust. Once people realize you can be used as a weapon, everyone stops trusting you — including the person who asked you to take sides."

Instruction: Setting Ground Rules (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Before a mediation begins, you set ground rules. Non-negotiable. Both parties agree before a single word about the conflict is spoken.

Here are the standard FORGE mediation ground rules:"

*"1. **One person speaks at a time.** When it's not your turn, you listen. If you interrupt, I'll stop you.*

*1. **No insults, no name-calling, no threats.** Describe what happened and how it affected you. Attack the problem, not the person.*

*2. **Speak for yourself.** 'I felt...' not 'Everyone thinks you...' Don't bring other people into it unless they were directly involved.*

*3. **Be honest.** If we're going to solve this, it starts with the truth. Both of you.*

*4. **Stay until we're done or we agree to pause.** Don't walk out in the middle. If you need a break, say so, and we'll take one. But don't storm off — that just leaves the wound open.*

*5. **What's said here stays here.** This is a private conversation. It doesn't become dorm gossip."*

Facilitator:

"How you set these rules matters. You don't hand out a list. You look both people in the eye and say:

'Before we start, I need both of you to agree to some ground rules. These aren't optional — they're what make this work. Can I go through them?'

Then state each one and get verbal agreement: 'Can you commit to that? Both of you?'

If someone won't agree to the ground rules — the mediation doesn't happen. It's that simple. You can't mediate without a container."

Instruction: Managing Two Escalated Parties (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"The hardest mediation scenario is when both people are heated. Not just annoyed — heated. Both feel wronged. Both are activated. Both are looking at you like 'You better fix this.'

Here's how to handle it."

Step 1: Separate first, mediate second.

"If both parties are at a 7 or above on the heat scale, don't start the mediation. Their thinking brains are offline. Nothing productive will happen.

'I can see you're both upset, and I want to help work this out. But right now, I think we all need a few minutes before we can have a real conversation. Let's take 10 minutes — I'll come find both of you and we'll sit down.'

Separation gives both people time to regulate. Use that time productively — check on each person individually, use tactical empathy, let them vent to you briefly. But do NOT start the mediation one-on-one — that becomes triangulation."

Step 2: When you sit down together, acknowledge the heat.

"I know you're both still feeling this. That's because it matters. I'm not going to pretend it doesn't. But here's what I need from both of you: give this process a chance. If we can get through the next 20 minutes with honesty and respect, there's a good chance we can resolve this. Are you willing to try?"

That question — 'Are you willing to try?' — is powerful. It gives them agency. They're choosing to participate, not being forced. That small sense of control helps people regulate."

Step 3: Go to the person who's MORE escalated first.

"Counter-intuitive, but effective. The person with more heat needs to go first, because they're the bigger risk. If you make them wait while the other person talks, they'll be boiling over internally and won't hear anything.

'I want to hear from both of you. [Name of more escalated person], tell me what happened from your perspective. Remember the ground rules — no insults, just what happened and how it affected you.'

Let them speak. Reflect and summarize. Then turn to the other person: 'Now I need to hear your side. Same rules.'"

Step 4: Find the overlap.

"After both sides have spoken, find the common ground — even if it's small:

'Here's what I'm hearing from both of you. You both feel disrespected. You both want this resolved. You just see what happened differently. Let's start with what you agree on and work from there.'

The overlap is the foundation for resolution. Build on it."

Step 5: If it stalls, take a break.

"If the conversation goes in circles or re-escalates, call a pause. It's not failure.

'I think we've made some progress, but we're starting to go in circles. Let's take a break and come back to this at [specific time]. Both of you think about what resolution would look like for you. I'll check in with both of you before we meet again.'

Breaks are strategic. They give people time to process, consult their better judgment, and calm down. Many conflicts are resolved between mediation sessions, not during them."

Exercise: Triad Mediation Practice (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Get into groups of three. Each group needs a mediator and two parties in conflict. Here's your scenario:

Scenario: *The Shared Space* *Person A and Person B share a common area in the dorm. Person A likes to work out in the space in the early morning. Person B says the noise wakes him up and he's asked Person A to stop multiple times. Person A says the space is for everyone and he has a right to use it. Last night, Person B moved Person A's workout stuff out of the area without asking. Person A found it and they got into a loud argument that woke up the whole dorm. Other people are now mad at both of them.*

Both parties are at about a 5-6 on the heat scale. Nobody's about to swing, but they're frustrated, and this has been building for weeks.

Mediator: Run the full mediation. Set ground rules. Hear both sides. Find the overlap. Guide toward a resolution. Agree on a specific solution and plan a check-back.

Parties: Play it real. Don't make it too easy, but don't be impossible either. You want a solution — you just can't see one right now.

You have 10 minutes. Go."

Run the exercise. Facilitator moves between groups, observing and noting strong moments and coaching opportunities.

After 10 minutes, rotate roles. New scenario:

Scenario: *The Rumor* *Person A heard from someone else that Person B has been telling people on the yard that Person A isn't trustworthy. Person A confronted Person B about it. Person B says it was taken out of context — he was telling someone else about a situation, not attacking Person A's character. Person A doesn't believe him. The tension has been building for three days, and mutual friends are starting to feel uncomfortable.*

Both parties are at about a 6 on the heat scale.

10 minutes. Then rotate one more time with a third scenario:

Scenario: *The Debt* *Person A lent Person B two books of stamps three weeks ago with an agreement that Person B would pay back when his commissary came in. Commissary came and went. Person B hasn't paid. Person A is saying Person B is dishonest. Person B says he had unexpected expenses and planned to pay next week. Person A says 'that's what you said last week.'*

Heat scale: 5. But trust is broken, and this is about more than stamps — it's about integrity.

Debrief (8 minutes):

Facilitator:

"Mediators — what was hardest about staying neutral?"

Allow responses.

"Parties — what did your mediator do that actually helped you? What didn't work?"

Allow responses.

"What did you notice about how it felt to have someone guide the conversation instead of it being a free-for-all?"

Facilitator:

"Mediation is a craft. You're not going to master it in one session. But here's what I want you to take away: the structure works. Ground rules. Hearing both sides. Finding the overlap. Moving toward a specific agreement. Check-back. Every time you follow that process, you give a conflict the best chance of resolution. And here's the deeper truth: when you mediate, you're not just solving one problem. You're teaching both parties that conflicts can be resolved without violence, without retaliation, without grudges. You're changing the culture one conversation at a time. That's what a FORGE mentor does."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Final round for the week. Complete this sentence: 'The most important thing I learned about conflict this week is...'"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for next week: 1. Write a reflection in your journal: What is the hardest part of staying neutral for you personally? Where does your bias show up? 2. Practice the 5-step model mentally. When you see a conflict this week — even a small one — walk through the steps in your head. What would you do at each step? 3. Review your journal entries from the past 5 weeks. Next week we shift gears. We move from skills to character — accountability and integrity. That's a different kind of challenge. It's not about what you can do. It's about who you are.

Good work this week. This was hard material and you showed up for it. See you Tuesday."

Session 18 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Neutral third party defined (what it means and doesn't mean)
- Triangulation explained and prevention strategies given
- Mediation ground rules taught (6 rules)
- Process for setting and enforcing ground rules modeled
- Managing two escalated parties covered (5-step process)
- Triad mediation exercise completed (3 rounds with role rotation)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (neutrality reflection + mental practice + journal review)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 6

What to Watch For

Escalation in exercises: Role-play can get real fast. Some participants will tap into actual frustrations during the exercises. That's okay — it makes the practice more authentic. But monitor closely. If you see someone losing the "play" aspect and getting genuinely activated, pause the exercise: "Let's stop here for a second. I want to check in. Are you still in the exercise, or is this hitting something real? Both are okay — I just want to make sure we're taking care of you."

Natural mediators vs. natural escalators: You'll identify both this week. Some participants will show a natural gift for staying calm and finding resolution. Others will struggle to stay neutral and will default to taking sides or getting involved in the conflict's energy. Both need coaching. The natural mediators need to be pushed on their weak spots (they often avoid hard truths to keep the peace). The natural escalators need patient skill-building, not criticism.

Physical safety during standing exercises: When participants practice de-escalation standing up, ensure no one actually makes physical contact. Set the rule clearly: "No touching. No grabbing. This is about voice and body language, not physical intervention. If someone touches you, step back and say 'We don't do that here.'"

Red line resistance: Some participants will resist the idea that there are situations they can't handle. This often comes from a place of genuine care — they don't want to "abandon" someone by referring. Address it: "Referring is not abandoning. Referring is getting someone the help they actually need instead of the help you wish you could give. If your friend was having a heart attack, you wouldn't try to perform surgery — you'd call for help. Same principle."

Common Week 6 Challenges

"The 5-step model is too structured for real life." Response: "You're right that real conflict doesn't pause while you go through steps on a checklist. But that's not how the model works. The model lives in your head. You internalize the steps so they become instinct. In the moment, you're not thinking 'Step 3: Facts greater than Stories.' You're thinking 'I need to understand what actually happened before I can help.' The model gives your instincts a structure to follow."

"Staying neutral is impossible when one person is clearly wrong." Response: "Your job isn't to pretend both sides are equal. Your job is to guide the conversation so the truth becomes visible to both people. If one person is clearly in the wrong, the facts will show that — you don't have to announce it. When you take sides, you lose the person who needs to hear the truth most. They stop listening to you because you've become the other person's advocate."

"What if de-escalation doesn't work?" Response: "Sometimes it doesn't. Some people are beyond the reach of de-escalation in the moment — they're too flooded, too committed to their course of action, or they have decided violence is happening regardless. If your best de-escalation effort isn't working — leave. Get help. You cannot de-escalate someone who has already decided. Your safety matters. FORGE needs you whole."

Participants who are too aggressive in role-play: Some men will enjoy playing the escalated person a little too much. If the role-play stops being productive and starts being about domination, redirect: "Remember — the goal of this exercise is to practice de-escalation, not to prove you can't be de-escalated. If you make it impossible for your partner to practice, nobody learns anything."

Preparation for Week 7

- Review the MRT (Moral Reconciliation Therapy) framework for accountability content — this informs Session 19
- Prepare the accountability spectrum visual (denial → minimization → blame-shifting → partial ownership → full accountability)
- Prepare the 4 ethical dilemma scenarios for Session 20 — make them relevant to prison life, not abstract philosophy
- Read through the impact awareness letter instructions carefully — Session 21 involves heavy emotional work
- Consider whether a Senior Mentor is available to share their own accountability journey as a model in Session 19. Personal testimony from someone who's done the work is more powerful than any lecture.
- Have extra tissues and water available for Session 21. The impact awareness letter can be emotionally activating.
- Review each participant's engagement level over the past 6 weeks. Week 7 asks for deep honesty — participants who haven't built trust with the group may struggle. Consider individual check-ins before Tuesday with anyone you're concerned about.

Week 7: Accountability and Integrity

Week 7 Overview

Purpose: Move from skills to character. The first six weeks gave participants tools — cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, communication, conflict resolution. This week asks a harder question: Who are you, really? Accountability and integrity are not skills you learn. They're choices you make — repeatedly, especially when no one is watching. By the end of this week, every participant should have looked honestly at where they fall on the accountability spectrum, confronted the difference between who they want to be and who they've actually been, and begun the difficult work of acknowledging the full impact of their actions.

Sessions This Week: - Session 19 (Tuesday): Personal Accountability - Session 20 (Wednesday): Integrity Under Pressure - Session 21 (Thursday): Making Amends and Moving Forward

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Handout or board display: "The Accountability Spectrum" (denial → full ownership) - Handout or board display: "The 4 Tests of Integrity" - Ethical dilemma scenario cards (4 scenarios — facilitator can read aloud) - Impact awareness letter instructions (1 per participant — or write on board) - Extra pens and paper for Session 21 (some participants may need fresh pages) - Water and tissues available for Session 21 (this session can be emotionally intense)

Connection to Previous Weeks: Weeks 2-6 built self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Week 7 builds character. A man with skills but no integrity is dangerous — he knows how to manipulate. A man with integrity but no skills is limited — he means well but can't execute. FORGE develops both. This week is about the integrity side.

Important Note for Facilitators: This is the most emotionally demanding week so far. Session 21 in particular — the impact awareness letter — can surface deep pain, grief, shame, and remorse. Be prepared for emotional responses. Review the "Common Challenges" section at the end of this document before the week begins.

SESSION 19: Personal Accountability

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 19 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define personal accountability and distinguish it from self-punishment 2. Identify the 5 levels of the accountability spectrum 3. Honestly assess where they currently fall on the spectrum 4. Explain the difference between guilt and shame and why it matters 5. Write an accountability statement about a past harm without excuses or minimization

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. Be honest: On a scale of 1 to 10, how accountable are you — really — for the choices that brought you to this place? Don't give me the answer you think I want. Give me the honest number."

Send the talking piece. Don't comment on individual answers. Just listen and note where people are.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you for that. Some of you said high numbers. Some said lower ones. The honest answer is the right answer — wherever you are is where we start.

This week is different from everything we've done so far. We've spent six weeks building skills. This week, we're looking at character. And the foundation of character is accountability."

Instruction: What Accountability Is and Isn't (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me start by telling you what accountability is NOT, because most people have a distorted relationship with it.

Accountability is NOT self-punishment. *It's not beating yourself up. It's not 'I'm a terrible person and I deserve everything bad that happens to me.' That's shame wearing a costume. It doesn't help anyone — not you, not the people you've harmed.*

Accountability is NOT a performance. *It's not saying 'I take full responsibility' in front of a parole board because you know that's what they want to hear, while privately thinking the system is rigged and you got a raw deal. Words without belief are just noise.*

Accountability is NOT an exchange. *'I admitted what I did, so now I should get something for it.' That's not accountability — that's a transaction. Real accountability doesn't come with a receipt.*

Accountability is NOT selective. *'I take responsibility for the assault, but the stuff that led up to it wasn't my fault.' Accountability means owning your part — ALL of your part. Not just the pieces you're comfortable with."*

Pause.

"So what IS accountability?"

Accountability is the honest acknowledgment that your choices created harm — to yourself, to others, and to your community — combined with a genuine commitment to behave differently.

That's it. Two parts: honest acknowledgment and genuine commitment. Most people get stuck on the first part. Some people can acknowledge the harm but never actually change. Both pieces matter.

*Here's the part nobody tells you: **accountability is liberation.** I know that sounds wrong. How can owning the worst things you've done make you feel free? Because as long as you're denying, minimizing, or blaming, you're carrying the weight of a lie. The lie takes energy to maintain. It distorts how you see yourself and how you see the world. When you finally put it down — when you say 'I did that, it caused real harm, and I'm choosing a different path' — the weight lifts. Not the consequences. The weight.*

You'll still be here. Your time doesn't change. But YOU change. And that changes everything else."

Instruction: The Accountability Spectrum (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Accountability isn't a switch you flip from off to on. It's a spectrum. Most people move along it over time. Let me show you the five levels."

Write or display the spectrum:

Level 1: DENIAL "I didn't do it.' 'It wasn't me.' 'They've got the wrong guy.'

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge that the event even happened, or that you were involved. Some denial is about legal strategy — you were told not to admit anything. But when denial becomes your internal reality — when you've convinced yourself that you genuinely didn't do what you did — that's a problem. You can't change something you won't admit exists.

How it sounds in the dorm: 'I shouldn't even be in here.' 'The system set me up.' 'My lawyer screwed me.' Sometimes these things are partially true. The system IS broken. Lawyers DO fail. But if those statements are your entire story — if there's no room for 'and I also made choices that put me here' — you're in denial."

Level 2: MINIMIZATION "It wasn't that serious.' 'Nobody really got hurt.' 'It was just...'

Minimization acknowledges that something happened but shrinks it. It makes the harm smaller than it was. 'I just sold a little weed.' 'We just got into a fight.' 'She was fine afterward.' The word 'just' is the biggest red flag in the English language when it comes to accountability. It's a verbal eraser.

Minimization protects the ego. If the harm was small, then you're not really a person who did something terrible. You're a person who made a small mistake. The problem is, the people who were harmed don't experience it as small."

Level 3: BLAME-SHIFTING "He started it.' 'She made me do it.' 'I had no choice.' 'If he hadn't done X, I wouldn't have done Y.'

Blame-shifting acknowledges the event and even acknowledges harm, but assigns the cause to someone else. 'He disrespected me, so I had to...' No. He disrespected you. That's a fact. What you did in response — that was your choice. He didn't reach inside your brain and move your fist. You decided. Owning the decision is the hardest part, because the moment you own it, you can't hide behind the other person anymore.

In this environment, blame-shifting is a survival strategy. If everything is someone else's fault, then you don't have to face yourself. But you also can't change."

Level 4: PARTIAL OWNERSHIP "I messed up, but...' 'I take responsibility for my part, but he...'

Partial ownership is progress. The person acknowledges their role. But the 'but' takes some of it back. Every word after 'but' erases what came before it. 'I'm sorry, but you made me angry.' That's not an apology. That's a disguised accusation.

Partial ownership is the place where most people get stuck. It's comfortable. You've admitted enough to feel good about yourself without having to fully face what you've done. It looks like accountability on the surface. Underneath, it's still protecting the ego."

Level 5: FULL ACCOUNTABILITY "I did this. It caused this harm. There is no excuse. I am committed to being different.'

Full accountability has no 'but.' No conditions. No qualifiers. It doesn't mean the other person was an angel. It doesn't mean the system is fair. It doesn't mean your circumstances didn't matter. It means you take ownership of YOUR CHOICES within those circumstances.

'I grew up in violence, I was addicted, I had no support — AND I chose to rob that man. Both things are true. My background explains how I got there. It doesn't excuse what I did. I caused harm. I own that.'

Full accountability is the hardest thing in this program. It's also the most transformative. The men who reach Level 5 — who can say it, mean it, and live it — are the men who become the strongest mentors. Because they've faced themselves completely, and they're still standing."

Pause. Let it sink in.

Facilitator:

"I want you to be honest with yourself right now. Where are you on this spectrum? Not where you want to be. Not where you think you should be. Where you actually are.

Take a minute. Write down the number — 1 through 5 — in your journal. Nobody has to share. This is between you and the page."

One minute of silence while participants write.

"Wherever you are is where you start. There's no judgment in this room for being at a 2 or a 3. There's only judgment if you stay there and pretend it's a 5. Growth means movement. Not perfection."

Instruction: Guilt vs. Shame (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There's a reason people get stuck on the accountability spectrum. And that reason has a name: shame.

Let me explain the difference between guilt and shame, because understanding this distinction might be the most important thing you learn today.

Guilt says: 'I did something bad.' Shame says: 'I am bad.'

Read those again. They look similar. They feel similar. But they are fundamentally different, and they lead to opposite outcomes.

Guilt is about behavior. 'I did something bad.' The focus is on the action. The action is separate from who you are. You did something that caused harm. That action can be owned, repaired, and changed. Guilt is painful — it should be. But guilt motivates change, because it says 'I did something that doesn't align with who I want to be, and I can do differently.'

Shame is about identity. 'I am bad.' The focus is on the self. The harm isn't something you did — it's who you are. If you're a bad person, there's nothing to fix, because you can't fix what you ARE. Shame doesn't motivate change. It motivates hiding, numbing, self-destruction, or more harm. A man drowning in shame doesn't think 'I should do better.' He thinks 'I'm worthless, so it doesn't matter what I do.'

Most of you have been soaking in shame for years. Maybe since childhood. Messages from parents, schools, the system, society: 'You're no good. You'll never change. You're a criminal. You're a lost cause.' Some of you have internalized those messages so deeply that you can't separate what you DID from who you ARE.

FORGE asks you to make that separation. Not to let yourself off the hook — the opposite. When you separate your actions from your identity, you can hold yourself accountable for the actions without destroying yourself in the process. You can say 'I did terrible things' AND 'I am a human being capable of change.' Both are true. Holding both truths at the same time is the foundation of real accountability."

"Here's a practical test. When accountability work makes you feel determined — 'I need to be different' — that's guilt doing its job. When accountability work makes you feel worthless — 'What's the point, I'm garbage' — that's shame taking over. If you hit the shame wall, say something. To your cohort, to the facilitator, to your journal. Don't sit in it alone. Shame thrives in isolation. It dies in the light."

Exercise: The Accountability Statement (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's the exercise. You're going to write an accountability statement. Not about everything. About one specific harm you've caused.

It can be the crime that brought you here. It can be something you did to a family member. It can be something you did to someone in this facility. Pick a harm you know you're responsible for.

The rules for your accountability statement:

- 1. **Name what you did.** Specifically. Not 'I made some bad choices.' What did you actually do?*
- 2. **Name the harm it caused.** Who was affected? How? Be specific.*
- 3. **No excuses. No qualifiers. No 'but.'** Your circumstances are real, but this is not the place for them. This is about ownership.*
- 4. **No shame spiraling.** This is not 'I'm a terrible person.' This is 'I did this, and this is what it caused.'*
- 5. **End with commitment.** What are you committed to doing differently?*

The format is: - 'I [specific action].' - 'This caused [specific harm to specific people].' - 'I take full responsibility for this choice.' - 'I am committed to [specific change].'

You have 12 minutes. This is private — you will not be asked to share unless you choose to. Write honestly."

12 minutes of silent writing. Facilitator sits quietly. Don't pace the room — give people space.

After writing, optional sharing (8 minutes):

Facilitator:

"If anyone is willing to share their accountability statement with the group, the floor is open. This takes enormous courage. There's no pressure. But if someone shares, here's how we respond: we listen. No judgment. No commentary. No 'it's okay.' It's not okay — that's the point. We just witness."

If someone shares, the group listens in silence. After they finish:

"Thank you. What you just did — standing in the truth without hiding — is the hardest thing in this program. The group sees you."

If no one shares, that's okay:

"That's fine. This work is yours. You don't owe it to anyone. But I'd encourage you to share it with someone you trust before the end of the program. Accountability that stays inside your head is half-finished. It becomes real when it leaves your mouth."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What is one area of your life where you're still at Level 2 or 3 on the accountability spectrum — still minimizing or blame-shifting? Be honest. If you're not sure, say so."

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Identify one area of your life where you're still in denial or minimization. Write about it in your journal. Don't try to fix it yet — just see it clearly. 2. Re-read your accountability statement. Does it hold up? Is there a 'but' hiding in it? If so, rewrite it without the qualifier.

Tomorrow we talk about integrity — what it means to live in alignment with the person you say you want to be. It's going to push you. That's the point. See you tomorrow."

Session 19 Checklist

- Opening circle completed (self-rating on accountability 1-10)
- Accountability defined — what it is and what it isn't
- Accountability spectrum taught (5 levels: denial → full accountability)
- Each level explained with concrete examples from prison/dorm context
- Participants privately rated themselves on the spectrum
- Guilt vs. shame distinction taught thoroughly
- Practical test for guilt vs. shame given
- Accountability statement exercise completed (12 min writing)
- Optional sharing facilitated with appropriate guidelines
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (identify an area of minimization + refine accountability statement)



SESSION 20: Integrity Under Pressure

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 20 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define integrity as alignment between values, words, and actions 2. Apply the 4 tests of integrity to their own decisions 3. Explain how pressure reveals character rather than creating it 4. Analyze ethical dilemmas and articulate their reasoning 5. Identify specific areas where their integrity is tested in daily life

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. Did you look at where you're still minimizing or blame-shifting, like we talked about yesterday? What did you find?"

Send the talking piece. This round may be heavy — yesterday's session opened things up. Hold space.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you for going there. Yesterday was about looking backward — facing what you've done. Today is about looking forward — who you're choosing to be. The word for that is integrity."

Instruction: Defining Integrity (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Integrity is one of those words people throw around without ever defining it. So let's define it.

Integrity is the alignment between your values, your words, and your actions.

Three things. They have to match.

Your values are what you say matters to you. Respect. Honesty. Family. Service. Your words are what you tell people you'll do. Your promises. Your commitments. Your actions are what you actually do. Every day. When nobody's watching.

When those three things line up — when what you value, what you say, and what you do are the same thing — that's integrity.

When they don't line up — when you say you value honesty but you lie when it's convenient, when you promise to show up but you don't, when you talk about respect but you disrespect people when you're angry — that gap is where trust dies.

Integrity is not about being perfect. It's about being consistent. The man who admits he messed up and works to repair it has more integrity than the man who never makes a mistake but takes no risks.

Here's the thing about integrity in this environment: it's tested constantly. Every day, you face moments where the easy path and the right path are different. Every day, you have opportunities to cut corners, to go along with something you know is wrong, to stay silent when you should speak up. The pressure in here is relentless. And pressure doesn't build character — it reveals it."

Facilitator:

*"Let me say that again because it matters: **Pressure doesn't build character. It reveals character.** The person you are under pressure — when you're scared, when you're angry, when no one is watching — that's who you really are. Everything else is a performance.*

FORGE isn't interested in your performance. We're interested in who you are when it costs you something to do the right thing."

Instruction: The 4 Tests of Integrity (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I'm going to give you four questions — four tests. When you're facing a decision and you're not sure if the choice you're about to make has integrity, run it through these four tests. If it fails even one, reconsider."

Write or display the 4 tests:

TEST 1: THE MIRROR TEST "Can you look yourself in the eye after this choice?"

Tonight, when you're lying in your bunk, will you be able to live with what you did? Not what other people think about it. What YOU think about it. Deep down.

This test cuts through social pressure. It doesn't matter if everyone in the dorm thinks it was the right move. If you can't look yourself in the eye, your conscience is telling you something.

Some of you have spent years avoiding the mirror — not literally, but avoiding honest self-reflection because what you'd see is painful. The mirror test asks you to look anyway."

TEST 2: THE PUBLIC TEST "Would you do this if everyone was watching?"

If this decision was broadcast on a screen in front of the whole facility — staff, inmates, everyone — would you still make it? If your behavior would change with an audience, that tells you something about the behavior.

This test catches the stuff we do in the dark. The things we justify when we think no one is looking. In reality, someone is always watching — and even when they're not, you're watching yourself."

TEST 3: THE CHILD TEST "Would you want your child to see this? Would you want your child to do this?"

This is the one that hits hardest. Many of you have children. Some of you have children who already look up to you despite everything. If your son or daughter could see every choice you make — not just the ones you tell them about in letters and phone calls, but every choice — would you be the example you want to set?

And if you don't have children — imagine a young person who looks up to you. A nephew. A younger brother. A mentee. Someone who will model their behavior on yours. Is this the behavior you'd want them to copy?"

TEST 4: THE LEGACY TEST "Is this the man you want to be remembered as?"

Someday — whether it's in this facility or out there — people will describe who you were. Your family will tell stories about you. The people in this program will remember you. What do you want them to say?

'He talked a good game but never followed through.' 'He was strong on the outside but made excuses when it counted.' Or: 'He changed. He did the hard work. He became someone worth respecting.'

The legacy test isn't about ego or reputation. It's about purpose. Every decision you make is building or destroying the man you're becoming. The legacy test asks you to zoom out and see the bigger picture."

Pause.

"Four tests. Mirror. Public. Child. Legacy. None of them are about what other people think of you. All of them are about who you actually are. Keep them in your pocket. When you face a hard choice — and you will, today, tomorrow, every day — run the tests."

Exercise: Ethical Dilemma Scenarios (40 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now we apply the tests. I'm going to give you four ethical dilemmas. These are situations that have no easy answer. The point is not to find the 'right' answer — the point is to develop your reasoning, test your values, and hear how other men think through hard choices.

Break into four groups. Each group gets one scenario. You have 8 minutes to discuss as a group: 1. What would you do? 2. Run it through the 4 tests. 3. What's at stake? 4. Is there a choice that has integrity even if it has a cost?

Then each group presents to the room. Other groups can push back, ask questions, challenge."

Scenario 1: The Favor

"Your best friend in the facility asks you to hold something for him overnight. He says it's personal items he doesn't want confiscated during a shakedown he heard is coming. You trust him. He's never lied to you. But you don't know exactly what's in the bag, and you didn't look.

Do you hold it? What if it turns out to be contraband? What if refusing damages a friendship that matters to you?"

Scenario 2: The Witness

"You see a FORGE participant — someone in your cohort — take food from another man's commissary. The victim doesn't know who did it. The FORGE participant sees you watching and says, 'Don't say anything, man. He owes me anyway.'

What do you do? Do you confront the cohort member? Do you tell the victim? Do you bring it up in the FORGE space? Do you stay quiet?"

Scenario 3: The Test

"A group of men you're cool with invites you to participate in something that isn't violent but violates facility rules — maybe a gambling ring, maybe a hustle. They say it's harmless and everyone does it. If you say no, they'll question your loyalty and possibly exclude you from the group. These are men who have your back.

Do you participate? How do you decline without making enemies? Can you maintain integrity and maintain the relationship?"

Scenario 4: The Truth

"You're up for a program that could help your case — a transfer, a job assignment, a recommendation. In the interview, you're asked about an incident from your past. You were involved, but it was never documented. No one would know if you lied. Telling the truth might cost you the opportunity.

Do you lie? Is the opportunity worth your integrity? What happens inside you if you lie and get what you want?"

Groups discuss (8 minutes). Facilitator circulates, listens, asks probing questions to deepen the discussion.

Group presentations (20 minutes — 5 minutes per group): Each group presents: - The dilemma - Their reasoning - What the 4 tests revealed - Their conclusion

After each presentation, open it to the full group for 2-3 minutes of discussion.

Facilitator (after all presentations):

"Notice something: these dilemmas don't have clean answers. In real life, integrity often costs you something — a friendship, an opportunity, comfort, belonging. That's why it's called integrity UNDER PRESSURE. The pressure is the cost. The question is whether you're willing to pay it.

Nobody in this room is going to get it right every time. But here's the difference between a man who has integrity and a man who doesn't: the man with integrity makes the hard choice more often than not. And when he fails, he acknowledges it, learns from it, and recommits. That's the accountability spectrum from yesterday. It all connects."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Which of the 4 tests hits you hardest, and why?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Journal about the ethical dilemma that was hardest for you. Walk through your thinking. Where did you get stuck? What did the tests reveal? 2. Between now and tomorrow, notice one moment where your integrity is tested. It doesn't have to be dramatic — it can be a small moment. Notice it. Write about what you did and whether it passed the tests.

Tomorrow is the heaviest session of the week. We're going to talk about the people your choices have affected. The ripple effect of harm. And you're going to begin writing an impact awareness letter — not for anyone to read but you. It's going to ask for honesty you may not have given yourself permission to have yet.

Come ready. And come knowing this: the fact that this work is hard is the evidence that you're doing it right. See you tomorrow."

Session 20 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Homework from Session 19 reviewed
- Integrity defined (alignment of values, words, actions)
- "Pressure reveals character" concept taught
- 4 tests of integrity taught (mirror, public, child, legacy)
- Each test explored with depth and personal relevance
- Ethical dilemma scenarios distributed (4 scenarios)
- Small group discussions conducted (8 minutes)
- Group presentations completed with full-group pushback/discussion
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal on dilemma + integrity moment observation)

SESSION 21: Making Amends and Moving Forward

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 21 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain restorative accountability and how it differs from punitive accountability 2. Map the ripple effect of harm — primary victims, secondary victims, community impact 3. Distinguish between an apology and genuine amends 4. Begin drafting an impact awareness letter 5. Articulate how accountability connects to purpose and forward movement

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you feeling coming into today? One word."

Send the talking piece. Keep it brief. Note who seems heavy, withdrawn, or agitated — this session is emotionally demanding and some participants may already be activated from yesterday's homework.

Facilitator (after the round):

"I'm going to be straight with you. Today is the hardest session so far. We're going to look at the impact of your choices on other people — people you may not have allowed yourself to think about in a long time. This is not punishment. This is not about making you feel bad. This is about becoming the kind of man who can face the full truth of his life and still choose to move forward. That's the difference between regret that destroys you and accountability that transforms you."

Instruction: Restorative Accountability (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Most of you have experienced only one kind of accountability your entire lives: punitive accountability. Someone does something wrong, and they get punished. You break a rule, you go to the hole. You commit a crime, you go to prison. The focus is on the offender and the punishment. The person who was harmed? Often an afterthought.

Restorative accountability is different. It asks three questions that punitive accountability never asks:

- 1. **Who was harmed?** — Not 'what rule was broken,' but who actually suffered?*
- 2. **What do they need?** — Not 'what does the offender deserve,' but what does the harmed person need to heal?*
- 3. **Whose obligation is it to meet those needs?** — And how can the person who caused harm contribute to that healing?*

Restorative accountability doesn't replace consequences. You're still here. Your sentence is still real. But it adds a dimension that punishment alone never provides: understanding. When you truly understand the harm you've caused — when you feel it, not just know it intellectually — something shifts inside you. Accountability stops being something done TO you and becomes something you carry WITH you. It becomes purpose.

The men I've seen go through this process — really go through it, not perform it — come out different. Not lighter. Not absolved. Different. They carry the weight of what they've done, but they carry it like a responsibility, not like a death sentence. They say: 'I caused this harm. I can't undo it. But I can spend the rest of my life making sure it means something — that I became someone better because of what I now understand.'"

Instruction: The Ripple Effect (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"When you throw a stone into water, it doesn't just make a splash. It creates ripples that spread outward — wider and wider — affecting water that was perfectly still before the stone hit. Your choices work the same way. The harm doesn't stop with the person directly in front of you. It ripples out."

Primary Victims *"The person or people directly harmed by your actions. The person you robbed. The person you assaulted. The person you sold drugs to. The person you cheated. The person you abused.*

These are the faces most of us try not to see. Because seeing them means feeling the full weight of what we did. But they're real people. They had a life before you entered it. They have a life after — but it's a life shaped by what you did."

Secondary Victims *"The people connected to your primary victims. Their family. Their children. Their parents. Their friends.*

The woman you robbed — she has a daughter who saw her come home shaking. That daughter is now afraid of strangers. The man you assaulted — he has a wife who no longer feels safe. A brother who wants revenge. A mother who cries.

Secondary victims are real. They carry harm they didn't choose and didn't cause."

Your Own Family *"This is the ripple that hits closest to home. Your children growing up without a father. Your mother aging while you're gone. Your partner holding everything together alone. Your brothers and sisters carrying your name into rooms where it's been tainted.*

Your family didn't commit your crime. But they're serving time too. Different kind of time. In some ways, harder time — because they're out there, visible, answering questions, making excuses, explaining to your kids where Daddy is."

Community Impact *"The neighborhood that became a little less safe because of what you and people like you did. The store that closed because of too many robberies. The park kids don't play in anymore. The fear that keeps people locked in their homes at night. The distrust between neighbors. The property values that dropped. The tax dollars spent on your prosecution, your incarceration, your supervision.*

None of this is said to crush you. It's said because it's true. And you cannot become a man of integrity without facing the truth — all of it."

Pause. The room will be heavy. Let it be heavy.

Facilitator:

"Take a breath. This is hard to hear. If you're feeling something right now — sadness, shame, anger, numbness — that's a normal response. Don't fight it. Don't shove it down. Let it be there.

Remember what we talked about yesterday and the day before: guilt says 'I did something harmful.' Shame says 'I am worthless.' The ripple effect can push you toward shame if you let it. Don't let it. You did cause harm. You are also here, doing the hardest work of your life. Both things are true."

Instruction: Amends vs. Apology (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There's a difference between an apology and making amends, and it matters.

*An **apology** is words. 'I'm sorry.' It has its place. But an apology alone, without change, is just a sound. How many times have you said 'I'm sorry' and then done the same thing again? How many times has someone said it to you and you knew it meant nothing?*

***Making amends** is action. It's living differently. It's demonstrating through your behavior — over time — that you understand the harm and you're committed to a different path.*

For some of you, direct amends — talking to the person you harmed, apologizing face-to-face, making restitution — may never be possible. The person may have moved on. They may not want to hear from you. They may have passed away. You may never leave this facility.

That doesn't let you off the hook. It changes the form of amends, not the obligation.

***Living amends** means: you can't undo the harm, but you can ensure that the rest of your life stands in contrast to the harm you caused. Every act of service. Every conflict you de-escalate. Every young man you mentor away from the path you took. Every day you choose integrity under pressure. That's amends. Not because it erases the past — it doesn't. Because it means the past doesn't get the last word."*

Exercise: The Impact Awareness Letter (35 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This is the central exercise of this week — and one of the most important assignments in the entire program. You are going to begin writing an impact awareness letter. This letter is not sent. It's not for a parole board. It's not for your victim. It's for you. Its purpose is to force you to see — fully see — the ripple effect of your actions.

Here's the format:"

Write or display the instructions:

The Impact Awareness Letter

Part 1: What I Did Describe what you did — the action, the crime, the harm — in clear, specific terms. No minimizing. No legal language. Plain truth. "I [did this] to [this person]."

Part 2: The Impact on My Primary Victim(s) Write to them — not as a letter you'll send, but as an exercise in empathy. What did your actions do to their life? Their sense of safety? Their trust? Their body? Their mind? What did they lose? What changed for them? If you don't know the specific details, imagine them honestly. Don't make it better than it was.

Part 3: The Ripple — Who Else Was Affected? Map the ripple. Their family. Their community. Your family. Your community. Name each person or group and describe the impact.

Part 4: What I Understand Now That I Didn't Then What do you see now that you couldn't or wouldn't see at the time? What has changed in your understanding?

Part 5: Who I Am Becoming Not who you wish you were. Who you are actively working to become. What does living amends look like for you? What will you do with the rest of your life that stands in contrast to the harm you caused?

Facilitator:

"You have 20 minutes to begin this letter. You will NOT finish it today — this is a draft. You'll have the rest of the week to complete it as homework. But I need you to start now, while the truth is close to the surface.

A few important things:

This will be emotional. Some of you may cry. Some of you may feel angry. Some of you may go numb. All of those responses are okay. If you need to stop writing and just breathe, do that. If you need to step away from the circle for a minute, do that. If you need to talk to me or a cohort member after, do that.

What you should NOT do is write something performative. Don't write what you think I want to read. Don't write a version that makes you look better than you were. The only person this letter needs to be honest with is you.

Start writing."

20 minutes of silent writing. Facilitator sits quietly in the circle. If someone is visibly struggling, a brief hand on the shoulder or a glass of water is appropriate. Don't interrupt the writing unless someone is in distress.

After 20 minutes:

Facilitator:

"Stop writing. Take a breath. Look up.

What you just did — whatever you managed to get on paper — takes more courage than most people show in a lifetime. This is real work. This is the work that changes men.

I'm not going to ask anyone to share today. This letter is yours. You'll have until next Tuesday to complete it. Take your time. Let it be messy. Let it be honest.

When it's done, you'll have a document that represents the truth of your life — the harm you caused and the man you're becoming. You'll keep it in your portfolio. In 6 months, you'll read it again and see how much you've grown."

Closing Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Final round for the week. This one's important. Take a moment before you speak.

Complete this sentence: 'This week, I learned that accountability means...'"

Send the talking piece. Give people time. This round will be deeper than usual.

Facilitator (closing):

"I want to say something to this group. What you did this week — looking at where you fall on the accountability spectrum, facing the integrity tests, starting the impact awareness letter — this is the work that most people avoid for their entire lives. Not just people in prison. People everywhere. Most human beings never sit with the full weight of the harm they've caused. You did. That doesn't make you good. It makes you courageous. And courage is the foundation that everything else is built on.

Homework for next week: 1. Complete the impact awareness letter. All five parts. Take your time. Be thorough. Be honest. 2. Journal reflection: 'What is one thing I can do this week — one specific act — that represents living amends?' 3. Read ahead in your handbook on empathy and perspective-taking. Next week we shift from looking inward to looking outward — at the people around us and how to truly see them.

This was a hard week. You showed up for it. That matters.

Service Over Self. See you Tuesday."

Session 21 Checklist

- Opening circle completed (one-word check-in)
- Restorative accountability explained and contrasted with punitive accountability
- Three questions of restorative accountability taught
- Ripple effect taught (primary victims, secondary victims, family, community)
- Emotional responses monitored and supported
- Amends vs. apology distinction made
- Living amends concept introduced
- Impact awareness letter instructions given (5 parts)
- Writing exercise completed (20 minutes minimum)
- No forced sharing — voluntary only
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (complete letter + living amends journal + handbook reading)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 7

What to Watch For

Emotional activation: This week will activate people. Session 19 asks participants to locate themselves on the accountability spectrum — some will realize they've been in denial for years. Session 21's impact awareness letter can surface grief, shame, and deep remorse. Watch for: - **Withdrawal:** A participant who goes quiet and checked out may be flooding internally. Check in individually after the session. - **Anger:** Some participants will get angry — at themselves, at you for making them face this, at the system. Anger is often a cover for pain. Acknowledge it: "I can see this is stirring something up. That makes sense. Do you want to talk about it, or do you need some space?" - **Performative accountability:** Some participants will write accountability statements that sound good but lack genuine emotion. They've learned the words. The words are empty. Don't call this out publicly — address it individually: "I read your statement and I noticed something. The words are right, but I want to check in with you. Are you feeling this, or are you writing what you think I want to see? Both are okay — I just want to know where you really are." - **Shame spiral:** If a participant starts spiraling — "I'm a monster," "I can't be forgiven," "What's the point" — intervene. This is the guilt-to-shame crossover. Redirect: "You're going from 'I did something harmful' to 'I am bad.' Those are different. Can you come back to the specific action and stay there? You're not a monster. You're a human being who did monstrous things. The difference matters."

Participants with life sentences or very long sentences: The accountability and amends work hits differently for men who may never leave prison. "Living amends" and "becoming a different man" can feel hollow when release is not on the horizon. Address this directly if it comes up: "Living amends doesn't require release. The man who mentors a younger person in here, who prevents a fight, who teaches someone to read, who runs a circle that keeps a dorm peaceful — that man is making amends every single day. Your impact isn't measured by your address. It's measured by your actions."

Group safety: The trust built over the first 6 weeks is tested this week. If someone shares something deeply personal — especially in the impact awareness letter — the group's response will either deepen trust or destroy it. Brief the group before any sharing: "If someone shares something painful, our job is to witness. Not to fix. Not to comfort with cliches. Not to judge. Just to witness. And what they share stays in this room."

Common Week 7 Challenges

"I've already been held accountable — I'm in prison." Response: "Prison is the state's response to your actions. It's a consequence. Accountability is YOUR response. They're different things. Plenty of people serve 20 years and never become accountable. They just become bitter. Accountability is an internal process. It's about understanding, owning, and changing. Prison doesn't make that happen. You do."

"My victim isn't innocent either." This comes up often, especially in cases where the victim and the offender had a complicated relationship. Response: "Maybe your victim isn't perfect. Most people aren't. But your accountability isn't conditional on their perfection. You're not owning THEIR choices. You're owning YOURS. Whether they were an angel or a mess, your actions are still your actions. When you make accountability conditional — 'I'll be accountable when they are' — you've just handed your growth to someone else."

"I can't write to my victim because I don't know what happened to them." Response: "The letter isn't for them — it's for you. You don't have to know exactly what happened to imagine the impact honestly. You know what you did. You can imagine the fear, the pain, the violation, the aftermath. If your imagination is uncomfortable — good. That discomfort is empathy developing."

"This feels like the program is trying to break us down." Response: "I understand why it feels that way. Let me be clear about the intent: this isn't about breaking you down. It's about helping you see clearly. Most of us have survived by NOT looking at the full impact of our choices. That numbness protected us. But numbness isn't strength — it's avoidance. What we're doing this week is building the capacity to hold the truth and still stand up. That's real strength."

Participants who refuse to write the impact awareness letter: Don't force it. You cannot mandate genuine accountability. Say: "I hear you. You're not ready, and I'm not going to make you do something you're not ready for. But I want you to think about why you're not ready. Is it because the exercise is unfair? Or because it asks you to face something you've been avoiding? When you're ready, the exercise will be here. I'll check in with you next week."

Preparation for Week 8

- Review empathy development content — Week 8 shifts from self-focused work to other-focused work
- Prepare perspective-taking scenarios (multiple viewpoints: harmed person, person who caused harm, bystander, family member)
- Plan the "silent observation" exercise — identify a common area participants can observe for 15 minutes safely
- Review each participant's trajectory over the first 7 weeks. By this point, you should have a clear picture of each person's growth areas, strengths, and readiness for the deeper work ahead.

- Follow up individually with any participant who was significantly activated during the impact awareness letter exercise. Don't let someone sit in pain alone for a week.
- Consider scheduling brief individual check-ins (5-10 minutes each) with every participant before Week 8 begins. Seven weeks in, a personal touch reinforces that FORGE sees each man as an individual, not just a member of a cohort.

Week 8: Social Skills and Perspective-Taking

Week 8 Overview

Purpose: Move from internal work to interpersonal skill. Weeks 1-7 focused on understanding yourself — your thinking, your emotions, your trauma, your communication habits, your accountability. Week 8 turns the lens outward: How do you understand other people? How do you read a room? How do you build relationships that make you stronger instead of pulling you backward? These are the skills that separate someone who has done personal work from someone who can actually live it out with other people.

Sessions This Week: - Session 22 (Tuesday): Empathy Development - Session 23 (Wednesday): Reading the Room - Session 24 (Thursday): Building Pro-Social Relationships

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Scenario cards for Session 22 perspective-taking exercise (prepare 4 scenarios on index cards or paper — see Session 22 for details) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) - Relationship mapping worksheet for Session 24 (a blank sheet with concentric circles works — see Session 24)

SESSION 22: Empathy Development

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define and distinguish between cognitive, emotional, and compassionate empathy 2. Explain why empathy is a skill that can be developed, not a fixed personality trait 3. View a single scenario from at least four different perspectives 4. Identify how lack of empathy has contributed to harm in their own lives 5. Practice perspective-taking as a deliberate skill

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. Two things: **How are you doing today — honestly? And what's one interaction you had this week where you tried to see something from the other person's point of view?***

If you can't think of one, say that. That's useful information too."

Send the talking piece around. Note who engages meaningfully and who struggles to identify a perspective-taking moment — that tells you where they are with this material.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last week we closed with accountability — making amends, writing impact awareness letters, understanding the ripple effect of harm. Some of you wrote things last week that were hard to put on paper. That took courage.

Here's the bridge between last week and this week: accountability requires empathy. You can't fully own the harm you've caused until you can see it through the eyes of the people you harmed. That's what this week is about — learning to see through someone else's eyes. Not as a soft skill. As a survival skill. As a leadership skill. As the thing that separates a man who just does his time from a man who changes how he moves through the world."

Quick check (3 min): "Anyone have a thought or question that's been sitting with them from last week's work on amends? Something that's still bothering you or that clicked since then?"

Allow 2-3 responses. Acknowledge without extended discussion.

Instruction: Three Types of Empathy (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's start with a question. What does empathy mean? Not the dictionary definition — what does it mean to you?"

Let 3-4 people respond. You'll likely hear things like "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" or "feeling what they feel." Build on whatever they offer.

Facilitator:

"Most people think empathy is one thing. It's actually three different skills, and they work at different levels."

Cognitive Empathy — Understanding what someone thinks:

"Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand what's going on in someone else's head. Not agreeing with them — understanding them. Seeing the logic of their position even when you think they're wrong.

Example: Your bunkmate is angry because he got written up for something he didn't do. You don't have to agree that the write-up was wrong. Cognitive empathy means you can understand WHY he's angry — he feels falsely accused, powerless, disrespected. You get the logic of his reaction even if you would have handled it differently.

This is the empathy that makes you a better problem-solver, a better mediator, and eventually a better mentor. You can't resolve a conflict if you don't understand what both sides actually think."

Emotional Empathy — Feeling what someone feels:

"Emotional empathy goes deeper. It's when you actually feel something of what the other person is feeling. Not just understanding their anger — feeling a version of it yourself. When someone tells you they just found out their mother died and your chest gets tight — that's emotional empathy.

This one is tricky. Too little emotional empathy and you come across as cold, mechanical. People don't trust someone who understands their pain but clearly doesn't feel any of it. Too much emotional empathy and you drown in other people's emotions. You can't help someone if you're falling apart right next to them.

The goal isn't to shut this off or turn it all the way up. The goal is awareness — knowing when you're feeling someone else's emotions, and being able to stay grounded while you do."

Compassionate Empathy — Being moved to help:

"The third level is compassionate empathy. This is where understanding and feeling lead to action. You see someone struggling. You understand what they're going through. You feel something about it. And then you do something — not out of pity, not to look good, but because you recognize their humanity and you choose to respond.

*This is Service Over Self in action. Compassionate empathy is the engine of everything FORGE is building. Here's the key point: **empathy is not a personality trait.** You're not born with it or without it. It's a skill. Like any skill, it can be developed through practice. Some of you had empathy trained out of you — by your environment, by trauma, by survival. That doesn't mean it's gone. It means it needs rebuilding."*

Pause. Let it land.

"Let me ask you something directly: Where has a lack of empathy cost you? Don't answer out loud yet — just think about it. Think about a time when you couldn't see what someone else was going through, or didn't care, and it led to a bad outcome. For you or for them."

Silent reflection (1 minute).

"Now — where has empathy, even a small amount of it, saved you? A moment when you paused, saw the other person as a human being, and it changed what you did next?"

Open discussion (5 min). Let 3-4 people share. Don't push — these can be heavy reflections.

Facilitator (transitioning):

"Most of the harm in this world — most of the harm in this building — happens because someone temporarily stopped seeing another person as fully human. They became an obstacle. A target. A means to an end.

Empathy is the thing that prevents that. It's the thing that says, 'This person in front of me has a story, has people who love them, has fears and hopes — just like me.'

That doesn't mean you become a pushover. It means you deal with people as people. That's the standard."

Practice Exercise: Perspective-Taking — Four Viewpoints (40 minutes)

Purpose: Practice seeing a single situation through multiple sets of eyes. This is the core empathy-building exercise.

Preparation: Before the session, prepare 4 scenario cards. Each scenario describes a situation in a correctional environment. Participants will examine each scenario from four perspectives: the person who caused harm, the person who was harmed, a bystander, and a family member.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do an exercise that will stretch your thinking. I'm going to give each group a scenario. Your job is to get inside the heads of four different people in that situation and answer three questions from each person's perspective:

- 1. What is this person thinking?*
- 2. What is this person feeling?*
- 3. What does this person need?*

The four perspectives are: the person who caused the harm, the person who was harmed, a bystander who witnessed it, and a family member of one of the people involved.

This is not about right and wrong. It's about seeing the full picture. The ability to do this — to step outside your own viewpoint and genuinely understand someone else's — is one of the most powerful skills you will ever develop."

Scenario 1: A man steals another man's commissary items while he's at a visit. When the victim confronts him, the thief denies it. Witnesses saw it happen but say nothing.

Scenario 2: A newer resident accidentally disrespects someone with status in the dorm — sits in his chair, changes the channel without asking. The man with status responds by threatening the newer resident loudly in front of everyone.

Scenario 3: A man who has been in FORGE for three months gets into a heated argument with a CO and curses at him in front of the dorm. He gets written up and sent to the hole for 10 days.

Scenario 4: A man finds out his wife is leaving him through a letter. He goes quiet for three days — stops eating, stops talking to anyone. His bunkmate tells other guys to leave him alone because "he just needs space."

Process:

1. Break into 4 groups. Assign one scenario to each group. (8 min)
2. Each group discusses and writes down thoughts/feelings/needs from all four perspectives. (12 min)
3. Each group presents their scenario and all four perspectives to the full group. (12 min — 3 min per group)
4. Full group debrief. (8 min)

Facilitator circulates during small group work. Push groups to go deeper: - "You said the bystander is thinking 'it's not my business.' What else? What's underneath that?" - "You've got the victim's anger. What's under the anger? What's he really feeling?" - "What about the family member who hears about this on the phone? What does that conversation sound like?"

Debrief questions:

Facilitator:

"Which perspective was hardest to get into? Why?"

Let several people respond. Common answers: the person who caused the harm (because they don't want to relate to that person) or the family member (because it's painful to think about the ripple effects).

"Did seeing the situation from all four angles change how you would respond to it? How?"

"Here's the thing about perspective-taking: it doesn't mean everyone is right. In some of those scenarios, someone clearly did wrong. But understanding WHY they did it — what they were thinking and feeling — that's what lets you respond effectively instead of just reacting.

A mentor who can see all four perspectives in a conflict is a mentor who can actually help. A man who can only see his own perspective is a man who will keep making the same mistakes."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence: 'The person in my life I most need to understand better is __, and one thing I've never considered about their perspective is __.'"

You don't have to name the person by name if you don't want to. Just the relationship — 'my son,' 'my cellmate,' 'my victim.'"

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

*"Homework for tomorrow. Tonight, I want you to journal on this question: **Think about someone you've harmed — anyone, any time in your life. Write half a page from their perspective. Not your perspective on what happened. Theirs. What were they thinking? What were they feeling? What did they need that they didn't get from you?**"*

This will be uncomfortable. That's how you know it's working. See you Wednesday."

Session 22 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Talking piece placed
- Scenario cards prepared (4 scenarios)
- Opening circle completed
- Review of Week 7 connection to empathy
- Three types of empathy taught (cognitive, emotional, compassionate)
- Discussion on where lack of empathy has cost participants
- Perspective-taking exercise completed (4 groups, 4 viewpoints each)
- Debrief discussion — which perspective was hardest
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal from the perspective of someone you've harmed)

SESSION 23: Reading the Room

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define social awareness and explain why it matters for mentors 2. Identify at least 5 nonverbal cues and what they communicate 3. Describe how group dynamics and power structures operate in a dorm 4. Recognize how their own presence and energy affects a room 5. Practice deliberate observation of social dynamics

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today, and did you do the homework — writing from the perspective of someone you've harmed? If you did it, one word on how it felt. If you didn't, just say that."

Send the talking piece. Track who completed the journal assignment. For those who describe it as difficult or painful, acknowledge that directly:

"If it was hard, you probably did it right."

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday we talked about empathy — understanding what other people think, feel, and need. Today we're going to build on that with a specific application: reading the room.

Let me ask you something. When you walk into the dayroom, how long does it take you to know something is wrong? Be honest."

Let 2-3 people respond. Most will say they know immediately — seconds.

"Exactly. Most of you walk into a space and within 10 seconds you've already assessed the temperature. You know when something is off. You know when there's tension. You know who's angry, who's nervous, who's about to make a move. You've been doing this your entire life — probably since childhood.

That skill — that radar — is called social awareness. You already have it. What we're going to do today is make it conscious. Because when you can name what you're picking up on, you can respond to it with intention instead of just reacting on instinct."

Instruction: Social Awareness and Nonverbal Cues (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Research tells us that 55% or more of communication is nonverbal. That means more than half of what people are telling you has nothing to do with their words. It's their body, their face, their tone, their posture, their distance. In an environment like this, where people don't always say what they mean — or can't — reading nonverbal cues isn't optional. It's essential."

Key nonverbal cues to read:

"Let's go through the big ones.

Eye contact. *Someone who holds eye contact is engaged — or challenging you. Someone who avoids eye contact may be uncomfortable, ashamed, afraid, or hiding something. Context matters. In a conversation, dropped eye contact when you ask a direct question usually means something.*

Posture. *Closed posture — arms crossed, shoulders turned away, body angled toward the exit — means someone is guarded or wants to leave. Open posture — facing you, arms uncrossed, leaning in slightly — means they're present. Watch for posture shifts. Someone who was open and then crosses their arms? Something just changed.*

Hands. *Clenched fists, fidgeting, hands in pockets, hands behind the back. In a conflict situation, always watch the hands. As mentors, you keep your hands visible — that's de-escalation 101. But you also watch other people's hands for signals about their state.*

Proximity. *How close someone stands tells you something. Getting closer can mean trust or aggression — you have to read the context. Someone who backs up is creating distance, either physically or emotionally. A group that tightens its circle is closing ranks.*

Facial micro-expressions. *A flash of anger, a tightened jaw, a brief look of contempt, a flicker of fear. These happen fast — fractions of a second. Most people miss them. Start paying attention.*

Tone and pace. *Someone who speaks faster is usually agitated or anxious. Someone who gets very quiet and slow may be either controlled or about to explode. A change in someone's normal speech pattern is a signal.*

Breathing. *Shallow, rapid breathing means stress. Someone who takes a deep breath and holds it is bracing for something. This is one most people never consciously notice — start noticing."*

Discussion (5 min):

"Think about the dorm. Think about the last time you read a situation correctly — you picked up on something nonverbal that told you what was really going on. What did you notice?"

Let 3-4 people share examples. Validate their existing awareness and push them to name specifically what cue they picked up on.

Instruction: Group Dynamics and Power Structures (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Reading individuals is one thing. Reading a room — understanding the dynamics of a group — is another level.

Every group of people has structure, whether it's official or not. In a dorm, there's no org chart on the wall. But everyone knows who has influence, who makes decisions, who the enforcers are, who the connectors are, who the loners are. That structure shapes everything — how conflicts play out, who gets tested, who gets protected, what behavior is acceptable.

As a future mentor, you need to be able to read group dynamics the way you read an individual. Here's what to pay attention to."

Key dynamics:

***"Who do people look at when a decision needs to be made?"** That person has influence, regardless of whether they have any official role. In a meeting, in a disagreement, in a moment of uncertainty — watch where eyes go. That's the real leader.*

***Who talks and who listens?** In any group, some people dominate airtime. Some people barely speak. The quiet ones are not necessarily disengaged — they may be observing, processing, or feeling unsafe. A mentor's job is to notice who's not being heard.*

***Who sits with whom?** Seating and proximity reveal alliances, cliques, and exclusion. If someone sits alone consistently, that tells you something. If a group always clusters together and others keep their distance, that tells you something too.*

***What happens when someone breaks a norm?** Every group has unwritten rules. Someone plays music too loud. Someone takes someone's seat. Someone shows vulnerability. Watch the response — that's where you see the group's real values.*

***Where is the tension?** Not every room has active conflict. But most rooms have tension points — unresolved issues, competing interests, underlying resentments. A skilled mentor can feel where the fault lines are before anything breaks."*

Facilitator:

"Here's why this matters for FORGE: when you're deployed as a mentor in a dorm, your first job isn't to fix anything. Your first job is to read the room. Understand the dynamics. Know who the players are. Know where the tension lives. Know what's spoken and what's unspoken. If you try to intervene without understanding the landscape, you'll make things worse."

Instruction: How Your Presence Affects Others (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now let's flip the lens. We've been talking about reading other people. Let's talk about what other people read when they look at you.

Every person in this room brings energy into a space. You walk into the dayroom and you change the room — whether you know it or not. The question is: what do you change it to?

Some men walk into a room and people relax. The energy gets lighter. People feel safer. Other men walk into a room and people tense up. Conversations go quiet. People watch their words.

Which one are you? Be honest with yourself."

Pause. Let them sit with it.

"A FORGE mentor needs to be the first kind. Not because you're soft — because you're safe. People need to be able to come to you. If your energy says 'don't approach me,' you're useless as a mentor.

This is not about personality. It's about choices. The way you carry yourself, the expression on your face, how you greet people, whether you make eye contact, whether you acknowledge people or walk past them — these are all choices. And they communicate something about who you are before you ever open your mouth.

Your body language speaks before you do. Make sure it's saying what you want it to say."

Quick go-around (5 min):

"Real quick — no talking piece, just popcorn. What energy do you bring into a room? And is it the energy you want to bring?"

Let several people respond honestly. This should be a moment of self-awareness, not performance.

Practice Exercise: Silent Observation (30 minutes)

Purpose: Develop the habit of deliberate, conscious observation of social dynamics.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do something different now. This exercise is about watching — really watching — what's happening in a social space. Here's the setup:

I'm going to split you into two groups. Group A is going to have a discussion in the center of the room. I'll give you a topic. Just talk naturally — argue, agree, joke, whatever comes up. Group B is going to sit around the outside and observe. You're not participating in the conversation. You're watching.

Group B, here's what you're looking for:"

Write or read the observation checklist:

"1. Who spoke the most? Who spoke the least? Who didn't speak at all? 2. Who did people look at when they wanted agreement or support? 3. What nonverbal cues did you notice — posture shifts, facial expressions, gestures? 4. Was there a moment when the group's energy shifted? What caused it? 5. Was anyone excluded — intentionally or unintentionally? 6. What was the overall mood of the group? Did it change?"

Round 1 (8 min): Group A discusses in the center. Topic: "What's the most important quality in a leader?" Group B observes silently.

Debrief Round 1 (5 min): Group B shares what they observed. Group A responds — "That's accurate" or "I didn't realize I was doing that."

Facilitator:

"This is what it looks like to read a room with intention. You noticed things in 8 minutes of watching that most people miss in months of living together."

Round 2 (8 min): Switch. Group B discusses in the center. Topic: "What's the hardest thing about being honest in here?" Group A observes.

Debrief Round 2 (5 min): Same process.

Full group debrief (4 min):

Facilitator:

"What did you learn from watching that you wouldn't have learned from participating?"

Here's the takeaway: as a mentor, you need to develop a dual awareness. You're in the conversation AND you're observing it at the same time. You're participating AND you're reading the room. That's a skill. It takes practice. Start practicing it now — in every room you're in."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Name one thing you observed about the group today — during the exercise or during the whole session — that you wouldn't have noticed two months ago."

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for tomorrow: Tonight and tomorrow, I want you to do a 15-minute silent observation in a common area — dayroom, chow hall, wherever you can sit and watch. Don't interact. Just observe. In your journal, answer the same six questions we used in today's exercise. Who spoke? Who listened? What nonverbal cues did you catch? Where was the tension? What was the mood? How did it shift?

You're training your eyes the way a musician trains their ears. The more you practice seeing, the more you'll see. Tomorrow we talk about how to use all of this — empathy, awareness, observation — to build relationships that actually make your life better. See you Thursday."

Session 23 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with homework check
- Connection made between empathy (Session 22) and social awareness
- Nonverbal cues taught (eye contact, posture, hands, proximity, micro-expressions, tone, breathing)
- Group dynamics instruction (influence, voice, seating, norms, tension)
- Discussion on how personal presence affects a room
- Silent observation exercise completed (both rounds with debriefs)
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (15-minute silent observation in common area + journal)

SESSION 24: Building Pro-Social Relationships

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Distinguish between healthy (pro-social) and toxic relationships using specific criteria 2. Define personal boundaries and explain why they are essential, not optional 3. Describe the FORGE brotherhood model — support without enabling 4. Hold someone accountable without destroying the relationship 5. Map their current relationships and identify which support growth and which don't

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. How are you doing today? And what did you notice during your silent observation homework? Share one thing you saw that stuck with you."

Send the talking piece. Listen for whether participants are developing sharper observation skills. Highlight specific, concrete observations:

"Good — you noticed that when one man raised his voice, three people physically shifted away from him. That's reading the room."

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This week we've built a progression. Tuesday: empathy — understanding what other people think and feel. Wednesday: reading the room — observing social dynamics and recognizing your own impact. Today: applying all of that to the thing that matters most in your daily life — your relationships.

Let me start with a hard truth. If you look at what got most of us here — to this facility, to this situation — relationships were a factor. The people we surrounded ourselves with. The people we were loyal to. The people we tried to impress. The people who encouraged our worst instincts.

And if you look at what's going to determine whether we stay on a different path — when we get out, or even right now in here — relationships are going to be the biggest factor. The right people will hold you up. The wrong people will pull you back down. Learning to tell the difference — and having the courage to act on what you know — is one of the most important things you'll ever do."

Instruction: Healthy vs. Toxic Relationships (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's get clear on what makes a relationship healthy or toxic. I'm not just talking about romantic relationships — I'm talking about every relationship. Your cellmate. Your crew. Your family. Your FORGE brothers. Anyone you spend time and energy with."

Healthy relationships — characteristics:

"A healthy relationship has these qualities:

Mutual respect. Both people treat each other with dignity, even during disagreements. Neither person controls the other. Neither person tears the other down to feel bigger.

Honesty. You can be real with this person without fear of being used or mocked. They tell you the truth even when it's uncomfortable — and you do the same for them.

Support for growth. This person wants you to get better. When you're working on yourself, they encourage it. They don't mock your efforts or try to keep you where you were.

Accountability. This person calls you out when you're wrong — not to humiliate you, but because they care enough not to let you slide. And you can do the same for them without the relationship breaking.

Boundaries. Both people understand where one person ends and the other begins. You don't owe each other everything. You can say no. You can have limits.

Safety. You feel safe — not just physically, but emotionally. You don't have to perform. You don't have to watch your back. You can be vulnerable."

Toxic relationships — characteristics:

"A toxic relationship has some or all of these:

Control. One person dictates what the other does, thinks, or feels. It might be overt — threats, demands. Or it might be subtle — guilt trips, manipulation, 'if you really cared about me you would...'

One-way loyalty. You're expected to be loyal, but the other person operates by different rules. They take but don't give. They expect support but don't provide it.

Enabling. This person supports your worst behavior. They cover for you. They don't challenge you. They make it easy to stay the same. That might feel good in the moment, but it's poison.

Keeping score. Everything is transactional. Favors are debts. Help comes with strings attached. Nothing is given freely.

Drama and instability. The relationship is a rollercoaster — intense highs, destructive lows. You never know which version of this person you're going to get.

Discouragement of growth. When you try to change, this person resists. They mock your efforts. They say things like 'you think you're better than me now?' or 'this program has changed you — and not in a good way.' They need you to stay the same so the dynamic doesn't change."

Pause.

Facilitator:

"Here's the uncomfortable part. Some of you — maybe most of you — have people in your life right now who fit the toxic description. People you're loyal to. People you care about. People you've known for years. And I'm not going to stand here and tell you to cut them off tomorrow. That's not realistic, and it's not always the right answer.

But I am going to tell you this: you need to be honest with yourself about which category your relationships fall into. Because a man who is trying to change while surrounded by people who benefit from him staying the same is fighting with one hand tied behind his back."

Discussion (5 min):

"Without naming names — what are the signs you've learned to recognize that tell you a relationship is pulling you backward? What are the warning signals?"

Let 3-4 people share.

Instruction: Boundaries (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Boundaries. This is a word that gets misused and misunderstood, so let's be clear about what it actually means.

A boundary is a line you draw that defines what you will and won't accept — from others and from yourself. It's not a wall. It's not a weapon. It's a statement of self-respect that also respects the other person.

In here, boundaries are complicated. The environment pushes against them constantly. People ask you for things. People test you. People expect you to prove loyalty by crossing your own limits. And the culture often says that having boundaries is a sign of weakness — that a real one doesn't say no.

That's backwards. Having boundaries is strength. Knowing where your lines are and holding them — especially when there's pressure to cross them — that's composure. That's integrity. That's exactly what a FORGE mentor has to model."

Types of boundaries:

Physical boundaries. Your personal space, your property, your body. 'Don't touch my stuff' is a boundary. It's not disrespect — it's a line.

Emotional boundaries. What you're willing to listen to, absorb, or be responsible for. You can care about someone without carrying their emotional weight. 'I hear you, but I can't take that on right now' is a boundary.

Behavioral boundaries. What behavior you'll accept around you. 'I'm not going to be around that conversation' is a boundary. Walking away from something that violates your values is a boundary.

Time and energy boundaries. You have finite resources. Saying 'I can talk to you about this tomorrow, but not right now' is a boundary. You are not obligated to be available to everyone at all times.

Relational boundaries. What role you play in someone's life — and what role they play in yours. 'I'm your mentor, not your errand runner' is a boundary. 'I care about you, but I'm not going to lie for you' is a boundary."

Facilitator:

"Here's what makes boundaries hard in this environment: setting a boundary can feel like you're disrespecting someone or breaking loyalty. It's not. A boundary, delivered with respect, is one of the most honest things you can do in a relationship. It says: 'I value this relationship enough to be straight with you about what I can and can't do.'

As mentors, you will need boundaries constantly. Mentees will test them. They'll ask you to do things outside your role. They'll want you to take sides. They'll want you to carry their problems. If you can't hold boundaries, you'll burn out in a month — or worse, you'll cross a line that costs you your position and your credibility."

Instruction: The FORGE Brotherhood and Accountability (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about what FORGE relationships are supposed to look like. We call it brotherhood — but not in the way that word usually gets used in here.

Brotherhood in the streets or in the dorm usually means unconditional loyalty. 'I've got your back no matter what.' That sounds good. But think about where that leads. 'No matter what' means you're riding with someone even when they're wrong. You're co-signing their bad decisions. You're putting yourself at risk for their mistakes. That's not brotherhood — that's a pact to stay stuck together.

FORGE brotherhood is different. It means: **I care about you enough to tell you the truth. I support your growth, not your comfort. I have your back — which means I won't let you destroy yourself without saying something.**

That's harder than blind loyalty. It takes more courage. And it leads somewhere better."

Holding accountable without destroying the relationship:

"This is a skill you're going to need as a mentor, and it's one of the hardest things in human relationships: telling someone a truth they don't want to hear without making them your enemy.

Here's how you do it.

Step 1: Lead with care. Before you say the hard thing, make it clear that you're saying it because you care, not because you're judging. 'I'm saying this because I respect you and I want to see you succeed' is not a script — it has to be genuine. If you don't actually care about the person, don't give the feedback. It'll come across as an attack.

Step 2: Be specific. Don't say 'you're messing up.' Say 'I noticed you've missed three sessions and you've been spending time with [people who pull you backward]. I'm concerned about where that's heading.' Specific and observable. Not assumptions about their character.

Step 3: Ask before you tell. Instead of lecturing, ask a question. 'What's going on with you?' 'How are you feeling about the program?' 'Where do you see this leading?' Give them room to reflect before you deliver your take.

Step 4: Own your perspective. Use 'I' language. 'I'm worried about you.' 'I've seen this pattern before and it concerns me.' Not 'you're being an idiot' — which is judgment, not accountability.

Step 5: Respect their choice. After you've said what you need to say, let them decide what to do with it. You can hold someone accountable and still respect their autonomy. You don't control them. You've done your part by being honest.

Step 6: Stay in the relationship. Here's the key — accountability is not rejection. After the hard conversation, you don't ice the person out. You stay present. You let them know the relationship didn't break because you told the truth. That's what separates accountability from punishment."

Facilitator:

"In FORGE, we call people in — we don't call them out. Calling out is public, shaming, about showing everyone that YOU have standards. Calling in is private, caring, about showing the person that YOU see them and believe they can do better. The goal is never to humiliate. The goal is to help."

Practice Exercise: Relationship Mapping (25 minutes)

Purpose: Participants honestly assess their current relationships and identify which support their growth and which work against it.

Facilitator:

"Get out your journals. We're going to do an exercise that requires real honesty — and this stays in your journal. I'm not going to ask you to share anything you're not comfortable sharing.

Draw three concentric circles — like a target. The center circle is you. The first ring around you is your inner circle — the people closest to you. The outer ring is people who are in your life but at more distance.

Now — write names. Put people where they actually are, not where you wish they were. Family, friends, cellmates, people in this program, people in the dorm, people from before you came in.

Once you've placed everyone, I want you to put a mark next to each name:

*A **plus sign (+)** next to people who support your growth — who challenge you, encourage you, hold you accountable, and want to see you succeed.*

*A **minus sign (-)** next to people who work against your growth — who enable your worst habits, discourage your efforts, pull you toward old patterns, or whose presence makes it harder for you to be the man you're trying to become.*

*A **question mark (?)** next to people you're not sure about — the relationship could go either way depending on choices that haven't been made yet.*

Be honest. No one is looking at your page."

Individual work (10 min). Facilitator is quiet during this. Let them work.

Pair share (8 min):

*"Find a partner — someone you trust. Share what you're comfortable sharing. The question to discuss: **What did you notice about the balance? Are there more plus signs or minus signs? What does that tell you about the environment you've built around yourself?**"*

Full group debrief (7 min):

Facilitator:

"You don't need to share names or specifics. But I want to hear: what did you learn from looking at this map?"

Let 3-4 people share.

"Here's what I want you to take from this. You have more control over this map than you think. You can't always remove people — especially in here, where you don't choose who you live with. But you can choose how much access and influence someone has. You can choose to spend more time with the plus signs and less with the minus signs. You can choose to set boundaries with people who pull you backward. You can choose to invest in relationships that make you stronger.

And here's the FORGE piece: every man in this circle should be a plus sign for every other man in this circle. That's the commitment. Not blind loyalty. Not 'I've got your back no matter what.' The commitment is: I will support your growth, I will tell you the truth, and I will hold you accountable — because that's what real brothers do."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. This week we covered empathy, social awareness, and relationships. Here's today's closing question:

Name one relationship in your life — in here or out there — that you commit to strengthening this week through intentional service, honesty, or boundary-setting. What specifically will you do?"

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for this weekend — two things:

- 1. **Strengthen one pro-social relationship this week through intentional action.** Whatever you just committed to — do it. Write about it in your journal.*
- 2. **Review your relationship map.** Identify one person in the minus column and write about what a healthy boundary with that person would look like. You don't have to act on it yet — just get clear on what the boundary would be.*

Next week we move into problem solving and decision making — how to think clearly when things get complicated, how to make decisions under pressure, and how to think about consequences before they happen. That's Weeks 9. The work keeps building. See you Tuesday."

Session 24 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
 - Opening circle completed with observation homework check
 - Week 8 progression reviewed (empathy → awareness → relationships)
 - Healthy vs. toxic relationship characteristics taught
 - Boundaries defined and types explained
 - FORGE brotherhood model explained (support without enabling)
 - Accountability without destruction — 6 steps taught
 - Calling in vs. calling out distinction made
 - Relationship mapping exercise completed (individual + pair share + debrief)
 - Closing circle completed
 - Homework assigned (strengthen one relationship + write about one boundary)
-

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 8

What to Watch For

Empathy resistance: Some participants will resist the empathy material — especially writing from the perspective of someone they've harmed. This is normal and often indicates that the exercise is hitting exactly where it needs to. Don't force it, but don't let them skip it either. If someone says "I can't do that," respond with: "I hear you. Try. Even two sentences. You might surprise yourself."

Performative empathy vs. real empathy: Watch for participants who talk a good game about empathy but don't actually demonstrate it in the room. The man who gives a great answer about perspective-taking but then dismisses another participant's comment five minutes later — that's a coaching moment. Don't call it out publicly in Week 8. Note it and address it individually.

Relationship map reactions: The relationship mapping exercise can surface grief, anger, and anxiety. Some men will realize they have very few plus signs. Some will confront the fact that their closest relationships are the most toxic. Be prepared for emotional responses. Normalize them: "This exercise is designed to show you what is, not to make you feel bad about it. Now that you see it, you can change it."

Group dynamics shifting: By Week 8, the cohort has been together for nearly two months. Cliques have formed. Some relationships have deepened. Some tensions may have developed. Use the social awareness material as an opportunity to name dynamics you're seeing in the cohort itself — not to embarrass anyone, but to demonstrate that reading the room includes reading THIS room.

Common Week 8 Challenges

"Empathy is weakness." If this comes up: "Tell me about a time someone understood what you were going through — really understood it. How did that feel? Did it make them weak? Empathy isn't agreement and it isn't submission. It's intelligence. You can understand someone completely and still hold a firm line."

"I already know how to read people." True — many participants are highly skilled at reading people for survival. The difference: "You've been reading people to protect yourself. Now you're learning to read people to help them. Same skill, different purpose."

"My people are my people — I'm not going to turn on them." This usually comes up during the relationship mapping or boundaries discussion. Response: "Nobody's asking you to turn on anyone. Setting a

boundary isn't betrayal. Telling someone the truth isn't disloyalty. The question isn't whether you're loyal — it's whether your loyalty is helping both of you grow or keeping both of you stuck."

Difficulty writing from a victim's perspective. Some participants will struggle genuinely with the homework of writing from the perspective of someone they've harmed. This is often because the reality is painful. Others may struggle because they've been in victim stance themselves and haven't fully separated their own pain from the pain they've caused. Don't push too hard on this in one week — it's a muscle that develops over time.

Preparation for Week 9

- Review the 6-step problem-solving model (T4C-based) — be prepared to teach it step-by-step with prison-specific examples
- Prepare decision-making scenarios for Session 26 (pressure situations common in correctional settings)
- Review the 10-10-10 rule and pre-decision concepts
- Prepare "ripple effect" mapping materials for Session 27 (large paper or whiteboard if available)
- Have real-world examples ready of consequential thinking — both good decisions and bad ones

Weeks 9–12



Integration & Assessment

Week 9: Problem Solving and Decision Making

Week 9 Overview

Purpose: Give participants a structured, repeatable method for solving problems and making decisions — especially under pressure. Most of the worst decisions in a person's life happen in a few seconds: someone reacts instead of thinking, acts on impulse instead of evaluating consequences, and lives with the fallout for years. This week teaches participants to slow down, think clearly, and choose intentionally. These are not abstract skills — they are the skills that prevent the next fight, the next write-up, the next regret.

Sessions This Week: - Session 25 (Tuesday): Problem-Solving Framework - Session 26 (Wednesday): Decision Making Under Pressure - Session 27 (Thursday): Consequential Thinking

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) — especially useful for Session 27 ripple effect mapping - Problem-solving worksheet (6-step model template — can be hand-drawn if no copies available) - Scenario cards for Session 26 pressure decision exercises (prepare 5-6 scenarios — see Session 26)

SESSION 25: Problem-Solving Framework

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Name and explain all 6 steps of the FORGE problem-solving model 2. Identify common problem-solving traps (impulsivity, tunnel vision, either/or thinking) 3. Apply the 6-step model to a realistic problem 4. Distinguish between reacting to a problem and solving a problem 5. Generate at least 3 options for any given problem before choosing one

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. How are you doing today? And how did the relationship homework go — did you do something intentional to strengthen a pro-social relationship this week? Tell us what you did, or tell us you didn't get to it."

Send the talking piece. Acknowledge efforts. If someone strengthened a relationship through service or honesty, highlight it as exactly what FORGE builds toward.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last week was about other people — empathy, reading the room, relationships. This week is about your brain. Specifically, about how you solve problems and make decisions.

Let me start with a question. Think about the worst decision you've ever made — you don't have to share what it was. Just think about it. Now: how much time elapsed between the problem appearing and you acting on it? Seconds? Minutes? Hours?

For most of us, the worst decisions happened fast. Somebody said something. Somebody did something. An opportunity appeared. And we acted before we thought. The problem wasn't that we didn't know better — it's that we didn't slow down long enough to access what we knew.

This week is about building a system for slowing down. Not so you become paralyzed or passive. So you become deliberate. The most effective men in any environment — in here, out there, anywhere — are the ones who solve problems instead of creating new ones."

Instruction: The 6-Step Problem-Solving Model (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're going to learn a model. Six steps. Simple to understand, hard to do when you're under pressure. But the more you practice it when things are calm, the more available it becomes when things are hot."

Step 1: Stop and Think — Don't React

"Before you do anything, you stop. You create a gap between the problem and your response. We talked about this in Week 2 with the STOP technique. This is the same principle.

Your body will want to react immediately. Adrenaline kicks in. Your thinking narrows. Your emotions start driving. Step 1 is interrupting that process. Take a breath. Feel your feet on the floor. Give yourself 10 seconds.

Ten seconds doesn't sound like much. But most of the worst decisions in this building were made in less than ten seconds. If you can create that gap, you've already changed the outcome."

Step 2: Define the Problem Clearly

"Most people skip this step. They think they know what the problem is, so they jump straight to solving it. But half the time, they're solving the wrong problem.

Example: You're angry because your cellmate keeps leaving the cell a mess. That feels like the problem — 'he's a slob.' But is that really the problem? Maybe the real problem is that you feel disrespected. Maybe the real problem is that you've asked three times and he ignores you, which means the issue is communication. Maybe the real problem is that you have zero personal space and the mess makes you feel out of control.

Defining the problem means asking: what's actually happening here? What's the real issue, not just the surface issue? If you solve the wrong problem, the real problem stays."

Step 3: Gather Information

"Before you act, get the facts. Not assumptions. Not what somebody told you about what somebody else said. Facts.

In here, information travels fast and gets distorted faster. By the time a story gets to you, it's gone through three people and picked up details that never happened. Step 3 says: before you make a decision, verify what's actually true.

Ask questions. Talk to the people directly involved. Don't rely on secondhand information. This step alone prevents more unnecessary conflicts than any other."

Step 4: Generate Options — At Least 3

"This is where most people get stuck. They see a problem and they see one solution — or at most, two. 'I can fight or I can walk away.' 'I can confront him or I can let it go.' Either/or.

The rule in this model is: generate at least 3 options before you choose one. Why three? Because when you force yourself to come up with a third option, you usually break out of the either/or trap and find something more creative.

Let's try it right now. Problem: someone in the dorm owes you a favor and they've been ducking you for two weeks. Option 1? [Let participants suggest — usually confrontation.] Option 2? [Usually avoidance or letting it go.] Option 3? [Push for something creative — talk to them directly in a calm setting, bring it up in a group, accept the loss and adjust the relationship, etc.]

See how option 3 opens up the thinking? That's the point. More options means better decisions."

Step 5: Evaluate Consequences of Each Option

"For every option you generate, run it forward. Ask: if I do this, what happens next? And then what? And then what?"

Not just what happens to you — what happens to everyone affected. What happens immediately? What happens tomorrow? What happens next month?"

This is where you apply everything we learned about empathy and perspective-taking. You're not just asking 'what's best for me right now.' You're asking 'what's the full picture of consequences for every option?'

Some options look good in the short term and terrible in the long term. Some options feel uncomfortable now but lead somewhere better. Step 5 is about seeing the full chain before you commit."

Step 6: Choose, Act, and Review

"Once you've generated options and evaluated consequences, you choose. Not perfectly — there's no perfect choice. But deliberately. You pick the option that leads to the best outcome for the most people over the longest time.

Then you act. Not halfway. Not with one foot out the door. You commit to the choice and you execute it.

And then — this is the part people forget — you review. Did it work? What happened? What would you do differently next time? Every decision is data. You learn from it and you refine your process."

Pause.

Facilitator:

"Six steps. Let me say them one more time:

- 1. Stop and think — don't react.*
- 2. Define the problem clearly.*
- 3. Gather information.*
- 4. Generate options — at least 3.*
- 5. Evaluate consequences of each option.*
- 6. Choose, act, and review.*

Now let's talk about what gets in the way."

Common problem-solving traps:

"Impulsivity. Acting before thinking. This is the biggest one. Your nervous system is wired to act fast in threatening situations — that's survival. But most problems you face are not life-or-death. They feel urgent, but they're not. Impulsivity treats every problem like a crisis.

Tunnel vision. Seeing only one solution. 'There's only one way to handle this.' There's never only one way. If you believe there's only one way, you haven't thought hard enough.

Either/or thinking. 'I can fight or I can be disrespected.' 'I can snitch or I can stay quiet.' False choices. Almost every either/or has a third, fourth, or fifth option that you haven't considered.

Emotional reasoning. 'I feel disrespected, therefore I've BEEN disrespected.' Feelings are real, but they're not always accurate interpretations of reality. You learned this in Week 2 — your feelings follow your thoughts. If your thoughts are distorted, your feelings will mislead you.

Pride. Choosing the option that protects your image instead of the option that actually solves the problem. Pride is the most expensive thing in this building. It costs people their freedom, their safety, and their future."

Practice Exercise: Apply the 6-Step Model (30 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Time to use this. I want you to apply the 6-step model to a real problem — something you're actually dealing with right now. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It can be a conflict with someone, a decision you're facing, a situation you've been avoiding. Pick something real.

In your journal, work through all 6 steps. Write it out."

Individual work (12 min). Facilitator circulates and coaches: - "You jumped to Step 6 — go back. What are your other options?" - "You listed two options. What's a third?" - "You evaluated the consequences for yourself. What about the other person?" - "Is that the real problem, or is that the surface problem?"

Small group share (10 min): Groups of 3. Each person shares their problem and their 6-step analysis. Group members can suggest options or consequences the person missed.

Full group debrief (8 min):

Facilitator:

"What was the hardest step? Where did you get stuck?"

Common answers: Step 2 (defining the real problem) and Step 4 (generating more than two options).

"Those two steps are where the model earns its value. If you can define the real problem and generate multiple options, you've already elevated your decision-making above 90% of people. Most people react to the surface problem with the first solution that comes to mind. You're learning to go deeper and wider.

Here's the key: you don't need 20 minutes to do this in real life. Once you've practiced it enough, you can run through these steps in 60 seconds. Stop, define, gather, generate, evaluate, choose. It becomes mental muscle memory. But you have to practice it slowly before you can do it fast."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What's one problem in your life right now that you've been handling with impulsivity or avoidance — and what would Step 1 (stop and think) look like for that problem?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for tomorrow: Take the problem you worked on today and go deeper. Write out all the consequences for each option you generated — short-term and long-term, for you and for everyone else involved. Bring it tomorrow — we're going to build on this.

Tomorrow we talk about what happens when you have to make decisions under pressure — when your body and your environment are both screaming at you to react. See you Wednesday."

Session 25 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with relationship homework check
- Connection made between Weeks 7-8 material and problem-solving
- 6-step problem-solving model taught (all steps with examples)
- Common traps covered (impulsivity, tunnel vision, either/or, emotional reasoning, pride)
- Individual practice exercise completed (real problem, 6 steps)
- Small group sharing and feedback
- Full group debrief on hardest steps
- Closing circle completed

- [] Homework assigned (expand consequence evaluation for each option)

SESSION 26: Decision Making Under Pressure

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain how stress narrows decision-making capacity (tunnel vision effect) 2. Define and practice "pre-deciding" — making decisions before the pressure hits 3. Write at least 5 personal rules for high-pressure situations 4. Apply the 10-10-10 rule to a pressure decision 5. Recognize the difference between urgency and importance

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today? And did you expand on your consequence evaluation from yesterday? If you did, what surprised you about the consequences you hadn't originally considered?"

Send the talking piece. Listen for evidence that participants are beginning to think more broadly about consequences.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday you learned a 6-step model for solving problems. Clean, logical, step-by-step. Here's the challenge: life doesn't always give you time to pull out a worksheet and work through six steps.

Sometimes the problem hits you fast. Someone gets in your face. A situation escalates. You hear something that makes your blood boil. You have to decide in seconds — not minutes, not hours.

And here's what the science says: when you're under stress, your brain literally functions differently. Your prefrontal cortex — the part of your brain that does rational thinking, planning, evaluating options — it goes quiet. Your amygdala — the part that handles fear, anger, threat detection — it takes over. Your body floods with adrenaline and cortisol. Your heart rate spikes. Your vision narrows. Your hearing changes. You stop thinking and start reacting.

This is tunnel vision. And in tunnel vision, you don't see options. You see one path — usually the most aggressive or most familiar one. Fight. Flex. Shut down. Run. Whatever your default is, that's where your body takes you.

Today is about beating tunnel vision. Not by being superhuman. By being prepared."

Instruction: Pre-Deciding (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"The single most powerful strategy for making good decisions under pressure is making the decision before the pressure hits. We call this pre-deciding.

Think about it this way: a firefighter doesn't decide how to respond to a fire while the building is burning. They trained for it. They ran scenarios. They decided in advance: if this happens, I do this. When the fire hits, they don't think — they execute a decision they already made.

You can do the same thing. You already know most of the situations you're going to face in here. They're not surprises. Someone disrespects you. Someone takes your property. Someone tests your boundaries. Someone tries to pull you into drama. A CO pushes your buttons. These situations happen over and over. And if you wait until they happen to decide how to respond, you'll respond with emotion instead of intention.

Pre-deciding means sitting down when you're calm — like right now — and making clear decisions about how you will handle specific situations. So that when the moment comes, the decision is already made. You just have to execute."

Example:

"Let me give you an example. Situation: someone calls you out in front of people. Disrespects you publicly. In the old way, you react — you match their energy, you escalate, you protect your reputation. That reaction feels automatic, but it's actually a decision — you just made it so fast you didn't notice.

Pre-deciding means: right now, sitting here, you decide: 'If someone disrespects me publicly, I will not respond in the moment. I will take a breath, look them in the eye, and say nothing. I will address it later, privately, when I'm calm.' That's a pre-decision.

Is that easy to execute in the moment? No. But it's a lot easier than trying to think of the right response while your adrenaline is spiking and everyone's watching. The decision is already made. You just have to follow through."

Instruction: Personal Rules (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Pre-deciding works best when you turn your decisions into personal rules. Personal rules are non-negotiable commitments to yourself about how you will and won't behave — regardless of the situation.

They start with 'I will always...' or 'I will never...'

The power of a personal rule is that it removes the decision from the moment. You don't have to weigh pros and cons when you're heated. The rule is already set.

Let me give you some examples — these aren't prescriptions, they're examples of what personal rules look like:

- *'I will never put my hands on someone unless I'm defending myself from physical attack.'*
- *'I will always walk away from a situation before I say something I can't take back.'*
- *'I will never make a major decision when I'm angry — I will wait 24 hours.'*
- *'I will always ask myself: is this worth my freedom?'*
- *'I will never carry a weapon.'*
- *'I will always treat a new arrival the way I wish I'd been treated.'*
- *'I will never participate in a group punishment or gang-up.'*

Notice something about these rules? They're clear. There's no gray area. There's no 'unless' or 'except when.' The simplicity is the point. In a pressure moment, you need clarity — not nuance."

Discussion (5 min):

"What personal rules do you already have — whether you've stated them or not? Things you've decided you will or won't do? Some of you already operate by personal rules even if you've never written them down."

Let 3-4 people share. Validate and build on what they offer.

Instruction: The 10-10-10 Rule (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's another tool for pressure decisions. It's called the 10-10-10 rule. It's simple but it works.

When you're facing a decision — especially one where your emotions are pushing you toward something fast — ask three questions:

How will I feel about this decision in 10 minutes? How will I feel about it in 10 months? How will I feel about it in 10 years?

Most impulsive decisions feel great in 10 minutes and terrible in 10 months. Punching someone who disrespected you? Feels like justice in 10 minutes. In 10 months, you're dealing with a write-up, lost privileges, maybe time added to your sentence. In 10 years, you're explaining to your kids why you made a choice that kept you away from them longer.

The reverse is also true. Walking away from a confrontation feels terrible in 10 minutes — your pride is stinging, people saw you back down. In 10 months, nobody remembers. In 10 years, it was the best decision you ever made.

The 10-10-10 rule forces you to zoom out. It takes you out of the heat of the moment and makes you look at the full timeline. And almost always, the right decision is the one that looks best at 10 months and 10 years — not 10 minutes."

Quick practice (5 min):

"Think of a time you made a decision that felt right in 10 minutes but looked terrible at 10 months. Turn to the person next to you and share it. What would the 10-10-10 rule have changed?"

Let pairs discuss briefly. No full-group share needed — the point is personal reflection.

Practice Exercise: Pressure Decision Scenarios (30 minutes)

Purpose: Practice applying pre-deciding, personal rules, and the 10-10-10 rule to realistic pressure situations.

Facilitator:

"I'm going to give you scenarios. These are situations where the pressure is on and you have to decide fast. For each one, I want you to work in pairs and answer three things:

- 1. What personal rule would apply here?*
- 2. What does the 10-10-10 rule say?*
- 3. What's the pre-decided response — what would a man who's done this work say or do?"*

Scenario 1: You're in the chow hall. Someone bumps into you hard and doesn't say anything — just keeps walking. Two guys at your table are watching you, waiting to see what you do.

Scenario 2: Your cellmate has been borrowing your stuff without asking. You've told him twice. You come back to your cell and he's using your commissary items again. You're already having a bad day — you just got denied for a program transfer.

Scenario 3: A guy you used to run with from the streets is in your dorm. He's telling people you're "soft" now because of FORGE. Some guys are starting to look at you differently. He approaches you and says, "What happened to you, man? You used to be about it."

Scenario 4: You overhear two guys planning to jump someone in the dorm tonight. They don't know you heard. You know the person they're targeting. What do you do?

Scenario 5: A CO is having a bad day and takes it out on you — shakes down your cell, throws your stuff around, makes comments. Other inmates are watching. Someone says, "You just gonna let him do that?"

Process: 1. Read each scenario aloud. (1 min) 2. Pairs discuss and apply the tools. (4 min per scenario) 3. Brief full-group share after each scenario — what did people decide? (2 min per scenario)

Facilitator coaches throughout: - Push back when someone's response is still reactive: "That's a reaction. What's the pre-decided response?" - Challenge when pride is driving the decision: "Is this about solving the problem or protecting your image?" - Affirm when someone chooses the harder, better path: "That takes more strength than the alternative. And you know it."

Debrief (5 min):

Facilitator:

"Which scenario was hardest? Why?"

I'll tell you which ones are hardest for most people: the ones with an audience. When people are watching, the pressure to perform goes up. Your personal rules get tested by social pressure. That's why the rules have to be non-negotiable — because the moment you make them situational, they stop working.

A personal rule that only applies when no one is watching isn't a rule. It's a preference."

Writing Exercise: Your 5 Personal Rules (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Before we close, I want you to write down your personal rules. At least 5. These are the decisions you're making right now about who you will be under pressure.

'I will always...' or 'I will never...'

Write them in the front of your journal — same place you put your personal commitment from Week 1. These are your non-negotiables. When the pressure hits, these are what you fall back on."

Individual writing (7 min). Facilitator is quiet. Let them think.

Optional share (3 min): "Anyone want to read one of their rules to the group? Not required."

Let 2-3 people share if willing.

Closing Circle (5 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Closing round. One sentence: **What's the personal rule that you need the most — the one that, if you could consistently follow it, would change your life?**"*

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework: keep your 5 personal rules visible. Read them every morning this week. When a pressure moment comes — and it will — notice whether you follow them or not. Journal about it. No judgment — just observation.

*Tomorrow we go deeper on consequences. Not just 'what happens to me' but 'what happens to everyone.'
Ripple effect mapping. Playing the tape forward. See you Thursday."*

Session 26 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
 - Opening circle completed with homework check
 - Stress and tunnel vision science explained
 - Pre-deciding concept taught with examples
 - Personal rules concept taught with examples
 - 10-10-10 rule taught with quick practice
 - Pressure decision scenarios completed (5 scenarios, pairs)
 - Full group debrief — audience pressure discussion
 - 5 personal rules written in journals
 - Closing circle completed
 - Homework assigned (read rules daily, journal on pressure moments)
-

SESSION 27: Consequential Thinking

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Distinguish between short-term and long-term consequences 2. Identify consequences beyond themselves (ripple effect) — to family, community, other people 3. Practice "playing the tape forward" — tracing the full chain of consequences from a single decision 4. Take a past bad decision and map every consequence that flowed from it 5. Apply the 6-step problem-solving model with full consequence analysis to rewrite a past decision

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today? Did you use your personal rules this week yet? What happened?"

Send the talking piece. Listen for real stories of application — or honest acknowledgment that the moment came and they couldn't hold the rule. Both are valuable.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Tuesday we learned a system for solving problems. Yesterday we learned how to pre-decide so you don't freeze or react under pressure. Today we go to the hardest part: looking at the full picture of consequences. Here's what I mean by that. Most of the time, when we make a decision, we think about one consequence — the immediate one. 'If I do this, this happens.' And usually we're only thinking about what happens to us. But decisions don't work that way. Every decision sends out ripples. Like throwing a rock into water — the impact doesn't stop at the point of contact. It spreads. And the people standing on the shoreline — your mother, your children, your cellmate, the man you harmed, the CO who has to deal with the aftermath, the community that's affected — they all feel the ripples. Today is about learning to see the full ripple pattern before you throw the rock."

Instruction: Short-Term vs. Long-Term Consequences (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me give you a framework for thinking about consequences. Every decision has four categories of consequences:

Short-term positive: *What feels good or benefits me right now? Short-term negative:* *What costs me right now? Long-term positive:* *What benefits me or others over time? Long-term negative:* *What costs me or others over time?*

Most bad decisions have strong short-term positives and devastating long-term negatives. That's the trap. The payoff is now. The price is later."

Example:

"Let's take a common situation. Someone disrespects you in front of people. You get in their face, escalate, maybe it turns physical. Let's map the consequences:

Short-term positive: *You feel powerful. Your reputation is protected. People know not to cross you. The immediate sting of disrespect goes away.*

Short-term negative: *Maybe you get hurt. Maybe you hurt someone. Adrenaline crash. Possible lockdown.*

Long-term positive: *...hard to find one, isn't there? Maybe some people give you more space going forward. But that's fear, not respect.*

Long-term negative: *Write-up. Possible charges. Time added to your sentence. Relationship with FORGE damaged. Your mother gets a phone call that you're in the hole again. Your child asks 'why isn't Daddy calling?' The man you hurt has consequences too — medical, emotional, family. The dorm climate gets worse for everyone.*

Now let's map the alternative. Someone disrespects you. You pause, take a breath, walk away, and address it later privately.

Short-term positive: *You maintained control. You didn't give someone else power over your behavior.*

Short-term negative: *It stings. Your pride takes a hit. Some people might see it as weakness.*

Long-term positive: *No write-up. No added time. Your relationship with FORGE stays intact. You addressed it your way, on your terms. People who matter — your family, your cohort — see a man with discipline. The dorm is safer because you didn't escalate. Your track record stays clean.*

Long-term negative: *Minimal. Maybe you have to address the disrespect again if the person persists. But you've got tools for that."*

"See the difference? When you zoom out, the 'tough' choice and the 'weak' choice look completely different. The choice that feels powerful in the moment is usually the one that costs the most over time."

Instruction: Ripple Effect Mapping (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now let's make this concrete. I want to teach you a technique called ripple effect mapping. It's visual. It forces you to trace every consequence from a single decision.

Here's how it works."

On the board or easel paper (if available), draw a circle in the center with the decision in it. Then draw outward rings like ripples in water.

"In the center: the decision. First ring: what happens immediately — to you and to the other person directly involved. Second ring: what happens to the people close to you — family, cellmate, FORGE cohort. Third ring: what happens to the broader community — the dorm, the facility, your neighborhood back home. Let's do one together."

Group exercise: Map the ripple effect of a specific decision.

"Decision: A FORGE participant gets into a fight in the dorm. Let's map every ripple."

Walk the group through brainstorming consequences in each ring. Write them down where everyone can see.

Ring 1 — Immediate: - He gets hurt or hurts someone - He gets written up - He gets sent to the hole - The other person has consequences - Witnesses are affected — stress, fear, having to choose sides

Ring 2 — Close relationships: - His family hears about it — worry, disappointment - His cellmate may be affected by the shakedown - His FORGE cohort loses a member — trust is damaged - His mentor questions whether the program is working - His children lose phone calls, visits

Ring 3 — Community: - Dorm climate deteriorates — everyone is on edge - COs tighten restrictions — everyone pays - Other potential FORGE participants see this and think the program doesn't work - Facility statistics go up — reinforces the narrative that "these men can't change" - Victim's family is affected

Facilitator:

"One decision. Look how far the ripples go. And I didn't even get into what happens if charges are filed, if time is added, if the other person has permanent injuries.

This is what we mean by consequential thinking. It's not about guilt-tripping yourself. It's about seeing clearly. When you can see the full ripple pattern, the decision becomes obvious. The hard part isn't knowing what to do — it's caring enough about the ripples to choose differently."

Practice Exercise: Playing the Tape Forward and Rewriting the Decision (35 minutes)

Part 1: Playing the Tape Forward (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Playing the tape forward means mentally walking through the entire chain of consequences before you act. You start with the decision and you keep asking: 'And then what? And then what? And then what?'"

Here's your exercise. In your journal, I want you to take a past bad decision — a real one from your life. Something with real consequences. And I want you to map it. What actually happened as a result of that decision? Not just to you — to everyone.

Start with the decision. Then write every consequence that flowed from it — immediate, days later, weeks later, months later, years later. Every person affected. Every ripple.

This is going to be hard. It should be. This is accountability work — connecting your choices to their full impact."

Individual writing (12 min). Facilitator circulates quietly. If someone is struggling: - "You don't have to go to the darkest moment. Pick something you can sit with." - "Don't just list what happened to you. Who else was in the blast radius?" - "Keep asking: and then what happened? Follow the chain."

Brief pair share (3 min): "Turn to the person next to you. Share what you're comfortable sharing. What did you see when you mapped the full consequence chain?"

Part 2: Rewriting the Decision (15 min)

Facilitator:

"Now — take that same situation and go back to the moment before the decision. Apply the 6-step model. Rewrite what happened.

Step 1: Stop and think. What would pausing have looked like? Step 2: Define the real problem. What was actually going on? Step 3: Gather information. What did you not know or not consider? Step 4: Generate options. What were at least three things you could have done instead? Step 5: Evaluate consequences. Map the ripple effect of each option. Step 6: Choose. Which option leads to the best outcome over time, for the most people?

Write the new version. Not to torture yourself about the past — but to train your brain for the future. Every time you practice this thinking, you're building the neural pathways that will be available to you next time."

Individual writing (12 min). Facilitator circulates and coaches.

Full group debrief (5 min):

Facilitator:

"I'm not going to ask you to share the details. But I want to hear: what was different about the rewritten version? What changed when you applied the model?"

Let 3-4 people respond.

"Most of you will say the same thing: the rewritten version isn't perfect, but it's dramatically better. Fewer people hurt. Fewer ripples. More options you never saw in the moment. That's the power of this framework. And here's the thing — you can't go back and change the past. But you can use the past to train for the future. Every bad decision is data if you're willing to learn from it."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. This has been a heavy week — problem-solving, pressure decisions, consequences. Here's your closing question:

Complete this sentence: 'The decision I'm most proud of in my life is __, because __.'

We've spent a lot of time on bad decisions. Let's end with a good one. You've all made at least one decision you're proud of. Maybe being in this room is one of them."

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for this weekend — one assignment:

Use the 6-step model for one real decision this week. *It doesn't have to be a crisis. It can be something simple — how to handle a disagreement, whether to approach someone about a problem, how to spend your time. The point is practice. Run the six steps. Write it up in your journal. What was the problem? What options did you generate? What consequences did you evaluate? What did you choose? What happened?*

Next week is Week 10 — the final week of new content before integration and review. We're talking about mindset and purpose. Growth mindset — how to keep growing when things are hard. Purpose — finding the reason that makes all of this work matter. And the stakeholder identity — who you're becoming and what that means for everyone around you.

The work is building. You can feel it. You're not the same men who walked in here 8 weeks ago. The question now is: what are you going to do with what you're building?

See you Tuesday."

Session 27 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with personal rules homework check
- Short-term vs. long-term consequences framework taught
- Four categories of consequences explained with example
- Ripple effect mapping demonstrated (group exercise on board)
- Playing the tape forward concept taught
- Individual exercise: map consequences of a past bad decision
- Individual exercise: rewrite the decision using 6-step model
- Full group debrief on rewritten decisions
- Closing circle completed (decision you're proud of)
- Homework assigned (use 6-step model for one real decision this week)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 9

What to Watch For

Problem-solving avoidance: Some participants will resist the exercises because they require confronting past decisions honestly. This isn't laziness — it's often shame or pain. Don't let them off the hook, but be aware of what's underneath the resistance. A quiet "I know this is hard. Stay with it." goes further than pushing.

Intellectualizing vs. doing: Watch for participants who understand the 6-step model perfectly on paper but can't apply it to their own life. They'll analyze hypothetical scenarios brilliantly and freeze when asked to work with their own problems. Push gently: "I don't need a textbook answer. I need your answer."

Peer pressure in scenarios: During the pressure decision scenarios, watch for participants who give the "right" answer in the group but whose body language or side comments suggest they wouldn't actually do it. Don't call this out publicly — note it and address it individually. "I noticed you said you'd walk away, but you didn't look like you believed it. What's the real answer?"

Emotional responses to consequence mapping: The ripple effect exercise, especially mapping real past decisions, can surface deep regret, grief, and guilt. This is appropriate — the exercise is designed to build accountability. But watch for anyone who seems overwhelmed. Check in privately after the session: "That was heavy material. How are you sitting with it?"

Growth since Week 1: By Week 9, you should be seeing visible changes in how participants engage. More honest sharing. More willingness to be uncomfortable. More thoughtful responses. Name this growth when you see it — not as flattery, but as observation: "I notice you responded to that differently than you would have in Week 2. That's real progress."

Common Week 9 Challenges

"This is common sense." Response: "If it were common sense, you wouldn't be here. Common sense is common knowledge — it's not common practice. The gap between knowing what to do and doing it is exactly what this model addresses."

"I don't have time for six steps when someone's in my face." Response: "You're right — you don't. That's why we're practicing now, when things are calm. And that's why we talked about pre-deciding. The six steps

aren't for the heat of the moment — they're for building the thinking patterns that kick in automatically. A fighter doesn't think about each punch in the ring — but they trained every one of them in the gym."

"Playing the tape forward just makes me feel guilty." Response: "Guilt and regret are natural when you see the full picture. But that's not the point of the exercise. The point is training your brain to see consequences BEFORE the decision, not after. You can't change the past. You can change the future. That's where the six-step model earns its value."

"Some situations don't have good options." Honest response: "That's true. Sometimes every option has a cost. The model doesn't promise a perfect outcome — it promises a better one. And 'better' might mean 'least damage' instead of 'no damage.' That's still worth it."

Preparation for Week 10

- Review Carol Dweck's growth mindset framework — know the key distinctions between fixed and growth mindset
- Re-read Viktor Frankl's core ideas from *Man's Search for Meaning* — be ready to present them authentically and connect them to participants' experience
- Review FORGE's stakeholder model from the handbook and Week 1 materials
- Prepare "letter from my future self" exercise instructions (Session 29)
- Prepare stakeholder commitment template (Session 30)
- This is the last week of new content before integration — bring energy. The participants need to feel the arc coming together

Week 10: Mindset and Purpose

Week 10 Overview

Purpose: This is the capstone week of new content in Phase 1. Everything before this — cognitive skills, emotional literacy, trauma awareness, communication, conflict resolution, accountability, empathy, problem-solving — was building toward this question: **Who are you becoming, and why does it matter?** Week 10 ties it all together. Growth mindset gives participants the mental framework to keep developing when things get hard. Purpose gives them the reason to keep going. The stakeholder identity gives them something bigger than themselves to live for. By Thursday, every participant should be able to articulate not just what they've learned but who they're choosing to be.

Sessions This Week: - Session 28 (Tuesday): Growth Mindset - Session 29 (Wednesday): Finding Purpose - Session 30 (Thursday): The Stakeholder Identity

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) - Lined paper for "Letter from My Future Self" exercise (Session 29) — participants can use journal pages - Stakeholder commitment template for Session 30 (can be hand-drawn — see Session 30)

SESSION 28: Growth Mindset

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define fixed mindset and growth mindset and explain the difference with personal examples 2. Explain why "yet" is a powerful word in changing self-perception 3. Reframe failure as information rather than identity 4. Identify at least 3 fixed-mindset beliefs they hold and rewrite them as growth-mindset statements 5. Describe how incarceration can function as a crucible for growth rather than a period of stagnation

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. How are you doing today? And did you use the 6-step problem-solving model for a real decision this past week? If you did, tell us what happened — briefly. If you didn't, tell us why."

Send the talking piece. Listen for whether the problem-solving framework is becoming a natural tool or still feels forced. Both are data.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're in Week 10. Take a second and let that register. Ten weeks ago, most of you walked into this room not sure what you were getting into. Some of you were skeptical. Some of you were going through the motions. Some of you were hungry for change but didn't know where to start.

In 10 weeks, you've learned how your thinking drives your behavior. You've learned to identify and manage your emotions. You've learned about trauma and how it shows up. You've practiced active listening, assertive communication, and giving feedback. You've worked through conflict resolution and de-escalation. You've taken accountability — real accountability, not the performative kind. You've built empathy, learned to read a room, and evaluated your relationships honestly. You've learned a system for solving problems and making decisions under pressure.

That's not a small thing. That's a foundation.

But here's the question this week answers: now what? What do you do with this foundation? And more importantly — who do you become with it? That's what this week is about."

Instruction: Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There's a psychologist named Carol Dweck who spent 30 years studying why some people keep growing and others plateau. What she found is simple but powerful. It comes down to what you believe about your own ability to change.

She identified two mindsets."

Fixed Mindset:

"A fixed mindset says: my abilities, my intelligence, my character — these are set. I am who I am. I'm either smart or I'm not. I'm either talented or I'm not. I either have it or I don't.

In a fixed mindset:

- **Challenges are threats.** *If I try something hard and fail, it proves I'm not good enough. So I avoid challenges.*
- **Effort is pointless.** *If I have to try hard, it means I don't have natural ability. Real talent shouldn't require effort.*
- **Feedback is an attack.** *When someone criticizes my work, they're criticizing me as a person. So I get defensive.*
- **Other people's success is a threat.** *If you succeed, it makes me feel like a failure. So I tear you down or withdraw.*
- **Failure is permanent.** *If I failed, I'm a failure. That's my identity now.*

Sound familiar? Most of us have lived with fixed-mindset beliefs our entire lives. 'I'm not a school person.' 'I'm not smart enough for that.' 'That's just how I am — I've always had a temper.' 'People like me don't change.'

These beliefs feel like facts. They're not. They're stories. And they keep you stuck."

Growth Mindset:

"A growth mindset says: my abilities can be developed. I'm not finished. I can get better at anything with effort, strategy, and help.

In a growth mindset:

- **Challenges are opportunities.** *Hard things are how I grow. I lean into them.*
- **Effort is the path.** *Trying hard isn't a sign of weakness — it's how mastery happens. Nobody gets good at anything without effort.*
- **Feedback is information.** *When someone tells me what I can improve, they're giving me a tool. I don't have to like it, but I can use it.*
- **Other people's success is inspiring.** *If you can do it, maybe I can learn from you.*
- **Failure is data.** *If I failed, I learned something. I adjust and try again. Failure is an event, not an identity."*

Pause.

Facilitator:

*"Here's the most important word in a growth mindset: **yet**.*

'I can't control my temper.' That's fixed. Add one word: 'I can't control my temper YET.' Now it's growth.

'I don't know how to be a good father.' Fixed. 'I don't know how to be a good father YET.' Growth.

'I can't read well.' Fixed. 'I can't read well YET.' Growth.

'I don't know how to handle conflict without aggression.' Fixed. 'I don't know how to handle conflict without aggression YET.' Growth.

That one word changes everything. It takes a closed door and cracks it open. It says: this is where I am, but it's not where I'm staying.

Every single man in this room has said something about himself that's fixed-mindset. 'I've always been this way.' 'That's just who I am.' I'm asking you to challenge those statements today. Not because they're lies — they might be accurate descriptions of who you've been. But they don't have to be descriptions of who you're becoming."

Discussion (5 min):

"Let me hear from you. What's a fixed-mindset belief you've carried — something you've told yourself about who you are or what you can't do? Be real."

Let 4-5 people share. After each one, the facilitator or group adds "yet."

"Did you hear that? Every single one of those statements changed when we added 'yet.' That's not a gimmick. That's a shift in how you see yourself. And it opens up possibilities that the fixed version closes off."

Instruction: Failure as Information (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about failure. Because in a fixed mindset, failure is the worst thing that can happen. It proves you're not good enough. It confirms your worst beliefs about yourself. So you avoid anything that might lead to failure — which means you avoid growth.

In a growth mindset, failure is just information. It tells you what doesn't work. It tells you what to adjust. It tells you where you need to learn more. Every successful person you've ever heard of failed repeatedly before they succeeded. They didn't fail less — they learned more from each failure.

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. He said, 'I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed 26 times. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.'

In this program, you're going to fail. You're going to lose your temper after you promised you wouldn't. You're going to fall back into old thinking patterns. You're going to have days where you feel like nothing has changed. That's not evidence that you can't do this. That's evidence that you're doing something hard.

The question isn't whether you'll fail. The question is: when you fail, what do you do next? Do you quit and say 'I knew I couldn't change'? Or do you get up, figure out what went wrong, and try again?

In FORGE, failure is not the end of the road. Failure is a data point. What matters is what you do with the data."

Personal connection:

"Let me ask you this: think about a time you failed at something in this program — a moment where you didn't live up to what you've been learning. Maybe you lost your temper. Maybe you didn't do the homework. Maybe you said something to someone that you wouldn't have said if you'd been using your tools.

Now — did you learn from it? Did it change what you did next time? If so, that failure was valuable. It wasn't a sign you can't change. It was part of changing."

Let 2-3 people share briefly.

Practice Exercise: Rewriting Fixed-Mindset Beliefs (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Get out your journals. I want you to identify 3 fixed-mindset beliefs you hold about yourself. Things you've accepted as permanent facts about who you are.

Write them down on the left side of the page. Be honest. These might be things you've never said out loud.

Then, on the right side, rewrite each one as a growth-mindset statement. Add 'yet.' Add 'I'm learning to.' Add 'I'm working on.' Whatever language makes it true for you."

Examples on the board (if available):

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
I'm not an educated person.	I haven't had the education I need yet — but I can learn.
I'll always have anger problems.	I'm learning to manage my anger. It's getting better.
I'm not the kind of guy who talks about feelings.	I'm not comfortable with it yet, but I'm building the skill.
Nobody will hire me with my record.	It will be harder, but people with records get hired every day. I need to prepare.
I'm a bad father.	I've made mistakes as a father. I'm learning to be better.

Individual work (8 min). Facilitator circulates. If someone is stuck: - "What's something you've said 'I can't' about? Start there." - "What would someone who believed in you say about that statement?"

Pair share (5 min): "Share your three statements with a partner. Read the fixed version first, then the growth version. Let the other person hear the difference."

Full group debrief (5 min):

Facilitator:

"What shifted when you rewrote those statements? What felt different?"

Let 3-4 people respond.

"The fixed version keeps you where you are. The growth version gives you somewhere to go. Both versions might be honest descriptions of today. But only one of them has a future in it.

Here's your challenge: every time you catch yourself saying a fixed-mindset statement — 'I can't,' 'I'm not,' 'I'll never' — stop yourself. Add 'yet.' Retrain how you talk to yourself. Because the conversation you have with yourself every day is the most important conversation you'll ever have."

Instruction: Incarceration as a Crucible (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I want to address something directly. You're doing personal development work inside a prison. Some people would say that's ironic. Or pointless. 'How are you going to grow in a place designed to hold you in place?' Here's my answer: some of the most profound personal transformation in human history has happened in confinement. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison and came out the leader of a nation — not in spite of prison, but partly because of what he built in himself during that time. Malcolm X discovered his entire intellectual identity in prison. Viktor Frankl — you'll hear about him tomorrow — developed his life's philosophy in a concentration camp.

I'm not comparing your situation to theirs. I'm making a point: confinement does not determine growth. YOU determine growth. This environment strips away distractions, excuses, and escape routes. You can't run from yourself in here. And that means — if you choose it — you can do deeper work on yourself than most people ever do in their entire free lives.

Out there, people fill their lives with noise — jobs, screens, substances, busyness — so they never have to sit with themselves. You don't have that luxury. Which means you have an advantage that most people will never have: the time and space to actually change.

Whether you use that advantage is up to you. But don't ever let someone tell you that growth isn't possible in here. The men who built this program are living proof that it is."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence: 'Something I used to believe I couldn't do, that I'm now beginning to believe I can, is ____.'"

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework tonight: In your journal, write about one failure in your life that taught you something valuable. Not the failure itself — what it taught you. What did you learn that you couldn't have learned any other way? Tomorrow we talk about something even deeper than mindset. We talk about purpose — the reason that keeps you going when growth gets painful. Viktor Frankl. The 'why' that makes every 'how' possible. See you Wednesday."

Session 28 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with problem-solving homework check
- Week 10 framed as capstone week of new content
- Fixed mindset defined with examples
- Growth mindset defined with examples
- "Yet" as transformational word — demonstrated and practiced
- Failure as information (not identity) — taught with examples
- Rewriting fixed-mindset beliefs exercise completed (3 beliefs, individual + pairs)
- Incarceration as crucible — addressed directly
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal about a failure that taught you something)

SESSION 29: Finding Purpose

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define purpose and explain how it differs from goals 2. Explain how purpose functions as a protective factor against destructive behavior and recidivism 3. Describe Viktor Frankl's core insight about meaning and suffering 4. Write a detailed "letter from my future self" articulating who they are becoming and why it matters 5. Identify at least one source of purpose in their current life

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today? And what failure did you write about last night — not the failure itself, but what it taught you?"

Send the talking piece. Listen for depth of reflection. By Week 10, participants should be moving past surface-level answers. If someone gives a deep, honest reflection on what failure taught them, acknowledge it: "That's growth mindset in action. You turned pain into learning."

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday we talked about mindset — the difference between believing you're fixed and believing you can grow. Growth mindset gives you the HOW. But it doesn't give you the WHY.

Think about it. You can believe you're capable of change. You can have all the tools. You can know the six steps, the regulation techniques, the communication skills. But on a Tuesday night when you're exhausted and frustrated and someone is pushing your buttons and the old way is calling — what keeps you on the new path?

It's not tools. It's not knowledge. It's not even discipline — discipline runs out.

What keeps you on the path is purpose. A reason that's bigger than the moment. A 'why' that outweighs the cost of doing the hard thing.

Today we're going to find that 'why.' Or at least start looking for it."

Instruction: Goals vs. Purpose (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me start by making a distinction that most people miss. Goals and purpose are not the same thing.

***Goals** are specific, measurable things you want to achieve. 'I want to get my GED.' 'I want to make parole.' 'I want to get a job when I get out.' 'I want to reconnect with my kids.' Goals are important. They give you direction and milestones.*

But goals have a problem: you can achieve them and still feel empty. You get the GED — then what? You make parole — then what? You get the job — then what? If all you have is goals, you're always chasing the next one without ever feeling like you've arrived.

Purpose** is different. Purpose isn't something you achieve — it's something you live. It's the ongoing reason behind everything you do. It's the answer to the question: **why does my life matter?

Goals are destinations. Purpose is the direction.

Let me give you an example. Goal: 'I want to be a good father.' That's specific. You can measure it. But what's the purpose underneath it? Maybe it's: 'I exist to break the cycle — to give my children what I didn't get, so they don't end up where I am.' That's not a goal you check off. That's a reason you live by. Every day. In every decision.

Purpose is what gets you up on the mornings when your goals feel unreachable. Purpose is what keeps you on the path when nobody's watching and nobody would blame you for quitting."

Discussion (5 min):

"Has anyone ever achieved a goal and then felt lost afterward? Or felt like it wasn't enough? What was that like?"

Let 2-3 people share. This is a common experience and naming it validates the distinction between goals and purpose.

Instruction: Viktor Frankl and Meaning in Suffering (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I want to tell you about a man named Viktor Frankl. He was an Austrian psychiatrist — a doctor of the mind. In 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz — a Nazi concentration camp. His wife was killed. His parents were killed. His brother was killed. He lost everything.

He spent three years in the camps. Starving. Beaten. Watching people die every day. In conditions that make anything any of us have experienced look mild.

*After the war, he wrote a book called **Man's Search for Meaning**. In it, he described something he observed in the camps: the people who survived weren't always the strongest or the healthiest. They were the ones who had a reason to live. Some had work they needed to finish. Some had a person they needed to see again. Some had a God they refused to stop serving. The reason didn't matter as much as having one.*

*Frankl wrote: **'Those who have a WHY to live can bear almost any HOW.'***

Read that again in your mind. Those who have a why to live can bear almost any how.

He said that the last human freedom — the one freedom that no one can take from you, not even in a concentration camp — is the freedom to choose your attitude. The freedom to choose what your suffering means.

Frankl didn't say suffering is good. He said suffering is inevitable — and when it comes, you have a choice: let it destroy you or let it reveal what matters most to you."

Pause. Let it sit.

Facilitator:

"I'm not comparing this facility to a concentration camp. But the principle applies. You're in a place you didn't choose. You face conditions you can't fully control. You've lost things — time, relationships, opportunities, freedom. That loss is real.

But you still have the freedom Frankl talked about. The freedom to choose what this time means. You can choose to let incarceration be the thing that defined you. Or you can choose to let it be the thing that refined you. The crucible that burned away what didn't serve you and revealed what does.

That choice — that's purpose. It's deciding that your suffering has a direction. That it points somewhere. That you're not just doing time — you're using time."

Discussion (5 min):

"Frankl said the last freedom is the freedom to choose your attitude. Do you believe that? Is it possible to choose your attitude in here, with everything you're dealing with? Be honest — if you think it's easier said than done, say that."

Let 3-4 people respond. Don't argue with skeptics. Acknowledge the difficulty and the reality:

"It IS easier said than done. Frankl would agree with you — he said it was the hardest thing a human being can do. But he also said it was possible. And the fact that you're sitting in this room, doing this work, suggests that part of you already believes it."

Instruction: Purpose as a Protective Factor (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me connect this to something concrete. Research shows that people who have a sense of purpose — a reason for living that goes beyond their own comfort — are significantly less likely to reoffend, less likely to use substances, less likely to engage in violence, and more likely to maintain healthy relationships after release.

Purpose protects you. Not like a shield that blocks everything — like an anchor that holds you in place when the current is pulling.

Think about it. When you know WHY you're staying on the path, the temptations don't disappear — but they lose their power. The old crew is still out there. The substances are still available. The shortcuts are still tempting. But when you have a purpose — 'I'm alive so I can raise my daughter differently than I was raised' or 'I'm here to prove that a man from where I'm from can become something' or 'I exist to help other men find what I found' — that purpose becomes the filter for every decision.

'Does this serve my purpose, or does it undermine it?' That's the question purpose gives you. And when you have that question, the decisions get clearer."

Practice Exercise: Letter from My Future Self (35 minutes)

Purpose: This is one of the most powerful exercises in Phase 1. Participants write a letter to their present self from the man they are becoming — 5 years in the future. This exercise forces them to articulate a vision for who they want to be, and it creates an emotional connection to that future identity.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do an exercise that participants in programs across the country call one of the most meaningful things they've ever done. It's called 'Letter from My Future Self.'

Here's what I want you to do. Close your eyes for a moment. Take a breath.

Now imagine yourself 5 years from now. Where are you? What does your life look like? Not what you hope happens to you — who have you become? What kind of man are you? What are your relationships like? What do you do with your days? What do you stand for? What has changed about you?

See that man clearly. Feel what it would be like to be him.

Now — that man is going to write a letter to you. The you sitting in this chair right now. He's going to tell you what he sees in you. He's going to tell you what to hold onto and what to let go of. He's going to tell you what matters and what doesn't. He's going to tell you why the work you're doing right now is worth it."

Write these prompts where everyone can see them (or read them aloud twice):

"Start the letter with: 'Dear [your name]...'

Your future self should address:

- 1. Where are you now, 5 years later? What does your life look like?*
- 2. What did you have to let go of to get here?*
- 3. What did you have to hold onto?*
- 4. What do you wish you could tell your present self about the hard days?*
- 5. What is your purpose — the reason you kept going?*
- 6. What are you most proud of about the man you've become?*

Write at least a full page. Take your time. Be honest. Be specific. Don't write what sounds good — write what's true."

Individual writing (20 min). This exercise requires extended quiet time. Facilitator does not circulate aggressively. Sit down. Write your own letter if you haven't before. The room should be quiet. If someone looks stuck: - Quietly: "Just start writing. Don't edit. Let the words come." - "What does that future man want to say to you right now?"

Voluntary sharing (10 min):

Facilitator:

"This letter is yours. You don't have to share it. But if anyone wants to read theirs to the group — or part of it — this is a safe space to do that."

Let anyone who wants to share read their letter. Do not force this. If 2-3 people share, that's powerful. If no one shares, that's fine too — the value is in the writing.

After each reading, the group responds with silence or a brief acknowledgment. No commentary, no critique, no "you should add..." Just witnessing.

Facilitator (after sharing):

"Put this letter in the front of your journal — right next to your personal commitment from Week 1 and your personal rules from Week 9. When the hard days come — and they will — read it. Let that man remind you why you're doing this."

Debrief (5 min):

"What was that like? What came up for you as you wrote?"

Let 3-4 people share their experience of the writing process (not the content, unless they choose to).

"For most people, this exercise does something unexpected. It makes the future feel real. It makes the man you're becoming feel possible — not distant and theoretical, but concrete. You just heard his voice. You just read his words. He exists inside you already. The work you're doing is giving him room to emerge."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. In one sentence, what is your purpose — the reason that keeps you going? If you don't know yet, say 'I'm still finding it.' That's honest and that's enough."

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework tonight: Re-read your letter from your future self. Then write a response — a letter back. The you sitting in this chair right now writes back to the man you're becoming. Tell him what you commit to. Tell him what you're afraid of. Tell him what you need from him."

Tomorrow is Session 30 — the last session of new content in Phase 1. We're going deep on the stakeholder identity. Everything in this program has been building toward this: not just who you're becoming, but what that means for everyone around you. Bring everything you've got. See you Thursday."

Session 29 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with failure/learning homework check
- Goals vs. purpose distinction taught
- Viktor Frankl presented — meaning in suffering
- Discussion on choosing your attitude in confinement
- Purpose as protective factor explained
- "Letter from My Future Self" exercise completed (20+ min writing time)
- Voluntary sharing facilitated with care
- Letters placed in front of journals

- [] Closing circle completed (one-sentence purpose statement)
- [] Homework assigned (write a response letter to future self)

SESSION 30: The Stakeholder Identity

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain the FORGE stakeholder model in their own words with depth and conviction 2. Articulate what changes when you accept that you are a stakeholder, not a bystander 3. Connect their personal transformation work (Weeks 1-9) to collective responsibility 4. Write a specific, actionable stakeholder commitment (5 actions) 5. Commit to living as a stakeholder for the remaining weeks of Phase 1 and beyond

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today? And did you write the response letter to your future self? If you did, what was one thing you committed to in that letter?"

Send the talking piece. This is a deeply personal check-in — honor whatever people share.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This is Session 30. The last session of new content before we spend Weeks 11 and 12 integrating and assessing everything you've learned. We're going to circle back to where we started — the very first thing I told you in Session 1.

Anyone remember?"

Let someone recall. If no one does:

"I said: 'We are stakeholders in this system.' Some of you nodded. Some of you looked skeptical. I told you then that you wouldn't believe it because I told you to — you'd believe it because you'd live it.

Ten weeks later, here we are. You've done the work. You've looked at your thinking, your emotions, your trauma, your communication, your conflicts, your accountability, your relationships, your decision-making, your mindset, your purpose. All of that was about you — knowing yourself.

Today is about the shift from 'I' to 'we.' From personal transformation to collective responsibility. This is the session where everything comes together."

Instruction: Deep Dive on the Stakeholder Model (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me tell you what a stakeholder is, at its core.

A stakeholder is someone who has a stake — an investment — in how things go. Not just for themselves. For the whole system. A stakeholder isn't a passenger, riding along and hoping things turn out okay. A stakeholder isn't a victim, blaming the system and waiting for someone else to fix it. A stakeholder is someone who says:

'What happens here is partly my responsibility. And I'm going to act like it.'

In a prison, the default identity is the opposite of a stakeholder. The default is: I'm here against my will. This place is designed to hold me. I have no power. I have no influence. Nothing I do matters. My only job is to survive, do my time, and get out.

That mindset is understandable. And it's a trap. Because when you believe you have no power, you give up the power you actually have. And you have more than you think."

What power do you actually have?

"You don't control the sentence. You don't control the policies. You don't control the COs. You don't control who you live with. Let's be clear about what you DON'T control.

But here's what you DO control:

- *How you respond to every situation you face*
- *How you treat the people around you*
- *What standards you hold yourself to*
- *Whether a conflict in your dorm gets resolved or escalates*
- *Whether a new arrival gets tested or gets helped*
- *Whether your dorm is a place people dread or a place people can breathe*
- *Whether the culture in your space is one of fear or one of respect*
- *Whether the man sleeping ten feet from you feels safe tonight*

That's not nothing. That's enormous. And when you multiply it — when 10 or 15 men in a dorm all decide to be stakeholders — you change the entire reality of that space. Not because you have authority. Because you have intention."

What changes when you accept the stakeholder identity?

Facilitator:

"Let me be specific about what shifts when you go from passenger to stakeholder.

Bystander mentality dies. *You stop watching things happen and saying 'that's not my problem.' If it's happening in your space, it IS your problem. Not because you're the police — because you're a stakeholder.*

Excuses lose their power. *'The system is broken' might be true. But a stakeholder doesn't use that as a reason to do nothing. A stakeholder says: 'The system is broken, AND I'm going to improve my corner of it.'*

Accountability becomes natural. *When you see yourself as a stakeholder, taking responsibility isn't a burden — it's an expression of who you are. You own your behavior because you understand that your behavior shapes the community.*

Service becomes purposeful. *Service Over Self isn't a nice idea anymore — it's a direct expression of your stakeholder identity. You serve because the community you're invested in needs your service.*

Your actions gain meaning. *Every small thing matters. The way you handle a disagreement. The way you talk to a new arrival. The way you respond to disrespect. None of it is trivial — because all of it shapes the culture you live in.*

You stop waiting to be saved. *Nobody is coming to fix this place. The administration isn't going to solve the culture problem. External programs come and go. The only people who can change the culture of a dorm are the people who live there. That's you. That's the stakeholder reality."*

Pause.

Facilitator:

"I know some of you are thinking: 'That's a lot to put on me. I'm trying to survive my own situation. You're telling me I'm responsible for the whole dorm?'

I hear that. And I'm not saying you're responsible for everything. I'm saying you're responsible for what you can influence. And your influence is bigger than you think — especially after the work you've done in this program.

You now have skills that most people in this facility don't have. You can manage your emotions. You can communicate without aggression. You can resolve conflicts. You can solve problems. You can see things from other people's perspectives. You have tools. And with tools comes responsibility — not to fix everything, but to use what you have.

That's what a stakeholder does."

Instruction: Connecting Personal Transformation to Collective Responsibility (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me connect the dots on everything you've learned.

Week 2: You learned how thinking drives behavior. *As a stakeholder, you don't just monitor your own thinking — you help others examine theirs. When a man in your dorm is operating on a thinking error, you have the skill to help him see it.*

Week 3: You learned emotional regulation. *As a stakeholder, your calm becomes contagious. When the dorm is heated, you're the one who brings the temperature down — not by ignoring the emotion, but by modeling how to handle it.*

Week 4: You learned about trauma. *As a stakeholder, you see the man who's reacting disproportionately and you understand that there's something underneath the behavior. Instead of matching his energy, you respond to the person, not the reaction.*

Week 5: You learned communication. *As a stakeholder, you model how to talk — assertively, respectfully, honestly. You change the standard of communication in your space.*

Week 6: You learned conflict resolution. *As a stakeholder, you step into conflicts that would otherwise escalate. Not as a hero — as a resource. Someone who has a process that works.*

Week 7: You learned accountability. *As a stakeholder, you hold yourself and others to a higher standard — with care, not with force.*

Week 8: You learned empathy and social awareness. *As a stakeholder, you see people others miss. The man who's struggling quietly. The new arrival who's terrified. The tension building between two groups before it breaks.*

Week 9: You learned problem-solving and decision-making. *As a stakeholder, you bring rational thinking to situations where everyone else is reacting emotionally.*

This week: You learned growth mindset and purpose. *As a stakeholder, you believe in the possibility of change — not just for yourself, but for every man in your dorm. And your purpose gives you the staying power to do this work when it's hard and thankless.*

Every single skill you've learned has a personal application AND a community application. That's the parallel process. You do the work on yourself. Then you live it in your community. That's the FORGE model."

Practice Exercise: My Stakeholder Commitment (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We started this program by asking what it means to be a stakeholder. Today, you're going to answer that question — not with a definition, but with a commitment. Specific, concrete actions.

In your journal, I want you to write your stakeholder commitment. Five specific actions you will take as a stakeholder in your dorm — starting now and continuing for the rest of the program and beyond.

These should be:

- **Specific** — not 'be a good person.' What will you actually DO?
- **Observable** — someone else could see you doing it
- **Consistent** — things you'll do regularly, not one-time acts
- **Connected to your skills** — use what you've learned in this program
- **Honest** — don't write what sounds impressive. Write what you'll actually commit to.

Let me give you some examples to spark your thinking — but your commitments should be yours, not mine:

- *'I will check in with at least one person in my dorm every day — someone who seems like they're having a hard time.'*
- *'I will step into conflicts early — before they escalate — and use the conflict resolution model.'*
- *'I will welcome every new arrival personally and orient them to the dorm.'*
- *'I will model emotional regulation — when I'm angry, I'll use my tools instead of reacting, so others can see it's possible.'*
- *'I will hold my FORGE brothers accountable when they're slipping — privately, with care, using the accountability steps.'*
- *'I will refuse to participate in gossip, and I'll redirect conversations that tear other people down.'*
- *'I will keep my area and the common areas clean without being asked — because the environment reflects the culture.'*
- *'I will practice active listening with at least one person every day — not just hearing them, but really listening.'"*

Individual writing (12 min). Facilitator writes his own commitment alongside the group.

Circle share (10 min):

Facilitator:

"This is important enough to share. We're going to go around the circle. Read your 5 commitments to the group. When you read them out loud to these men, they become real. These men become your witnesses. And they become the people who will hold you to what you just said."

Send the talking piece. Each person reads their 5 stakeholder commitments. No commentary between — just listening and witnessing.

Facilitator (after everyone has shared):

"You just heard [number] commitments from [number] men. If every one of those commitments is lived out — not perfectly, but consistently — think about what that changes. Think about what this dorm looks like. Think about what this facility looks like.

That's the stakeholder model. Not one man saving the world. A community of men, each doing their part, each holding the others accountable, each choosing to serve. That's FORGE."

Closing Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"We're going to close Week 10 the same way we opened Week 1 — with a go-around. But the question is different now.

In Session 1, I asked you: 'Name one thing you want to be different about yourself in 9 months.'

Today's question: 'What IS different about you now — 10 weeks in? And what's your purpose — the reason you're going to keep going?'

Take a moment. Think about it. Then we'll go around."

One minute of reflection.

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (after everyone has shared):

"Listen to what you just heard. Ten weeks ago, you walked in here uncertain, skeptical, maybe a little scared. Today you just told this group who you're becoming and why it matters. That's not nothing. That's transformation in progress.

Here's your homework — and this one is different from anything I've assigned before. This one isn't a one-night assignment. This is for the next two weeks:

Start living your stakeholder commitment. Every day. Journal about it daily — even if it's just three sentences. What did I do today as a stakeholder? What was hard? What impact did it have?

Weeks 11 and 12 are integration and assessment. We'll combine everything you've learned, practice it in complex scenarios, and get ready for the Phase 1 gate. The learning doesn't stop — but the foundation is built. What you've done in these 10 weeks is real. Now you prove it by living it.

Service Over Self. See you Tuesday."

Session 30 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with response letter homework check
- Session framed as final new-content session — connection to Session 1
- Stakeholder model deep dive completed (what you control, what changes)
- Personal transformation connected to collective responsibility (Weeks 2-9 skills mapped to stakeholder actions)
- Stakeholder commitment exercise completed (5 specific actions written)
- Circle share — all commitments read aloud to group
- Closing circle completed (what's different + purpose statement)
- Homework assigned (live stakeholder commitment daily, journal for 2 weeks)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 10

What to Watch For

Emotional depth: Week 10 is the most emotionally charged week since Week 4 (trauma). The "Letter from My Future Self" exercise and the purpose discussion can break things open for participants who have been intellectualizing their growth. Be ready for tears, for silence, for someone who can't finish their letter. That's not failure — it's the program working.

Authenticity vs. performance: By Week 10, you know each participant well enough to distinguish between genuine reflection and performing what they think you want to hear. The stakeholder commitment exercise is especially susceptible to performance — people writing impressive-sounding commitments they have no intention of keeping. Push for specificity and realism: "Is that something you'll actually do every day? Or is that something that sounds good on paper?"

The arc from Week 1: Make the connection explicit. Reference specific moments from earlier weeks. "Remember when [participant] said in Week 1 that he wasn't sure he belonged here? Listen to what he just shared." This reinforces the reality of their growth and makes the program feel cohesive, not like a series of disconnected lessons.

Participants who haven't connected to purpose: Some men will struggle with the purpose material. They may not be able to articulate why their life matters. That's not unusual — many of them have never been asked the question. Don't push for a polished answer. "I'm still finding it" is a valid response and it's honest. Purpose often emerges gradually. The letter exercise plants seeds that may take weeks or months to bloom.

Common Week 10 Challenges

"Growth mindset is just positive thinking." Response: "No, it's not. Positive thinking says 'everything is fine.' Growth mindset says 'this is hard AND I can learn from it.' Growth mindset doesn't ignore reality — it believes you can work with reality. It's realistic optimism, not fantasy."

"Frankl was in a concentration camp — that's different." Response: "It is different. I'm not comparing your situation to his. But the principle is the same: when you can't control your circumstances, you can still control your response to them. That's not a comparison of suffering — it's a universal human truth."

"I don't have a purpose." Response: "Maybe you don't have the words for it yet. But you're here. You show up. You do the work. Something is driving that. Let's figure out what it is. Sometimes purpose doesn't announce itself — it reveals itself through action. The fact that you care enough to be in this seat is evidence that something matters to you."

"The stakeholder model sounds nice, but the system doesn't care about us." Response: "You might be right that the system doesn't care about you the way it should. But the stakeholder model isn't about the system caring about you. It's about you deciding to have influence regardless of whether anyone gives you permission. The system may not change because you decide to be a stakeholder. But your dorm will. The men around you will. Your family will. And you will. That's enough to start."

Resistance to the closing exercise (what's different about you): Some participants may feel like they haven't changed enough, or may be uncomfortable claiming growth in front of the group. Normalize this: "Growth isn't always dramatic. Sometimes it's a man who used to blow up in 2 seconds now taking 10 seconds to breathe. That's growth. Name the small shifts — they add up."

Preparation for Week 11

- Review all Phase 1 content — be ready to design integrated scenarios that require multiple skills
- Prepare 3 multi-layered scenarios for Session 31 that combine cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, active listening, conflict resolution, and problem-solving
- Prepare the self-assessment questionnaire for Session 32
- Review each participant's engagement throughout Phase 1 — who is ready for Phase 2 and who needs additional support
- Plan for the peer evaluation process in Session 33
- Begin gathering materials for the Phase 1 knowledge check (Week 12)
- Bring energy and intention — this is the week where you show participants that everything connects

Week 11: Integration and Review

Week 11 Overview

Purpose: Bring it all together. Over the past 10 weeks, participants have learned cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, active listening, conflict resolution, problem solving, accountability, empathy, and the stakeholder identity — as separate skills. This week, they learn to use them all at once. Real life doesn't hand you one problem at a time. Real life hands you a complicated situation where you need five skills simultaneously. Week 11 is where participants prove — to themselves and to each other — that they can do that. This week also begins the formal self-assessment process that feeds into the Phase 1 portfolio.

Sessions This Week: - Session 31 (Tuesday): Skills Integration Practice - Session 32 (Wednesday): Self-Assessment and Reflection - Session 33 (Thursday): Peer Evaluation and Feedback

Materials Needed: - Scenario handouts for Session 31 (3 scenarios — printed or read aloud) - Participant journals (participants should bring all journal entries from Weeks 1-10) - Self-Assessment Questionnaire (1 per participant — see Session 32) - Lined paper or essay sheets for self-assessment essay (2+ pages per participant) - SBI Feedback Forms (3 per participant — see Session 33) - Facilitator Observation Notes (prepared in advance — one set of notes per participant) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece - Timer or watch

SESSION 31: Skills Integration Practice

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Apply multiple Phase 1 skills simultaneously in a realistic scenario 2. Identify which skills a situation demands and shift between them fluidly 3. Work collaboratively in a small group to analyze and respond to complex situations 4. Observe others' responses and provide constructive feedback 5. Recognize their own strengths and gaps across the Phase 1 skill set

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in. We're in Week 11. Two weeks left in Phase 1. The question for this round: **What's one skill from the past 10 weeks that you feel strongest in — and one you're still working on?** Be honest. No one's expected to have mastered everything."*

Send the talking piece around. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you. Here's the truth about today: in real life, you don't get to pick which skill you need. A situation in the dorm doesn't come with a label that says 'This is a conflict resolution problem' or 'This is an emotional regulation problem.' It comes at you all at once — and you have to figure out what it needs in real time. Today, we're going to practice exactly that. Three scenarios. Each one is layered — it's going to require you to use cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, active listening, conflict resolution, and problem solving together. Not one at a time. Together."

Setup and Group Formation (5 minutes)

Divide participants into 3 groups (4-5 per group). Mix them intentionally — put people together who haven't worked closely together. If you have quieter participants, spread them across groups so they aren't all in one cluster.

Facilitator:

"Each group is going to work through all three scenarios. Here's how it works:

- 1. I'll read the scenario out loud. You'll also have it on paper.*
- 2. Your group has 15 minutes per scenario.*
- 3. Within those 15 minutes: first, analyze the situation together — what's happening, what skills does it require, what are the risks? Then, choose one person to role-play the FORGE response while the rest play the other characters. After the role-play, rotate — someone new takes the lead.*
- 4. Every person in the group must take a lead role in at least one scenario. No spectators.*

After each scenario, we'll debrief as a full group before moving to the next one."

Scenario 1: The Domino Effect (20 minutes)

Read aloud, then distribute or display:

SCENARIO 1: The Domino Effect

It's Wednesday evening in the dorm. Marcus, a quiet guy who mostly keeps to himself, comes back from a visit looking visibly upset. He sits on his bunk staring at the wall. Twenty minutes later, another man — DeShawn — accidentally bumps Marcus's shelf while walking past, knocking a photo to the floor.

Marcus explodes. He jumps up, gets in DeShawn's face, and starts yelling: "You did that on purpose! You think I'm soft? You think you can just disrespect my space?" DeShawn, who genuinely didn't mean to bump the shelf, gets defensive: "Man, back up off me. It was an accident. You better check yourself."

Three other dorm members are watching. One of them says to you quietly, "Marcus just found out his mom is sick. He's been on edge all day." Another dorm member — someone who's always looking for entertainment — is egging it on: "Oh, he's not gonna let that slide. This about to go down."

You're a FORGE participant. What do you do?

Layers to address: - Marcus's emotional state (emotional regulation — he's flooded; the real issue isn't the shelf) - DeShawn's defensiveness (de-escalation — he feels falsely accused) - The bystander egging it on (reading the room, social dynamics) - The information about Marcus's mom (empathy, active listening — but you have to use it carefully; Marcus didn't tell you directly) - Preventing physical escalation (conflict resolution — Pause & Posture, Name the Heat) - Your own composure (staying calm when two people are about to fight in front of you)

Small groups work for 15 minutes. Facilitator and Senior Mentor circulate, observe, and coach lightly — don't take over. Ask questions like: - "What's Marcus actually feeling right now? Is it really about the shelf?" - "How do you approach DeShawn without making him feel like you're taking Marcus's side?" - "What do you do about the guy egging it on?" - "Do you mention Marcus's mom? He didn't tell you himself. Think about that."

Full group debrief (5 minutes):

Facilitator:

"What did your group decide to do first? Why?"

Let 2-3 groups share their approach. Then:

"Here's what this scenario tests: Can you read the room? Can you see that Marcus isn't angry about a photo — he's in pain about his mother and he's flooding? Can you de-escalate DeShawn without dismissing his legitimate frustration? Can you handle the bystander without escalating further? And can you do all of that while staying calm yourself?"

Notice — there's no single right answer. There are a lot of wrong ones, though. Ignoring it is wrong. Jumping in aggressively is wrong. Taking sides is wrong. The right approach uses multiple skills at once."

Scenario 2: The Slow Burn (20 minutes)

SCENARIO 2: The Slow Burn

Over the past two weeks, tension has been building between two sides of the dorm. It started small — an argument about the TV channel. Then it was who gets to use the phone first. Then someone's commissary went missing and accusations flew. Now, people are sitting on opposite sides of the day room. Conversations go quiet when certain people walk by. You can feel it — the energy is off.

Today, a man named James approaches you privately. James is respected in the dorm — not because he's aggressive, but because he's been down a long time and people listen to him. James says: "Look, I'm telling you because you're FORGE. Something's going to pop off. I don't know when, but I can feel it. These young guys on the east side think the west side took their stuff, and the west side thinks the east side is disrespecting them. Nobody's talking. Everybody's posturing. If somebody doesn't do something, this is going to end bad."

You know James is right — you've felt the tension too. You also know that you're not a CO, you're not in charge of the dorm, and you're still in Phase 1 of FORGE. But you've got skills. And James is looking at you like he expects you to do something.

Layers to address: - Problem analysis (what's the actual problem? Is it the TV, the phone, the commissary — or something deeper?) - Decision making under pressure (the 6-step model — don't react, define the problem, gather info, generate options) - Knowing your limits (you're Phase 1 — what can you do and what's beyond your scope?) - Conflict resolution on a group level (this isn't two people — it's two factions) - The stakeholder identity (this is what being a stakeholder looks like) - When to involve staff or a certified mentor (referral judgment) - Cognitive restructuring (check your own thinking — are you making assumptions about who's right and who's wrong?)

Small groups work for 15 minutes. Rotate the lead role.

Facilitator coaching questions: - "Is this a conflict you should try to mediate yourself? Or is this bigger than one person?" - "What information do you need before you act? How do you get it without making things worse?" - "What are your options? List at least three." - "What does 'playing the tape forward' tell you about what happens if nobody intervenes?" - "Where's the line between being a stakeholder and overstepping your role?"

Full group debrief (5 minutes):

Facilitator:

"This scenario is different from the first one. The first was a crisis in the moment — two people about to fight. This one is slower. It's a pattern building over days. Both are dangerous. But the slow burn requires a different kind of thinking.

What I'm looking for: Did you stop and think before acting? Did you gather information? Did you generate real options — not just 'I'll go talk to them'? Did you consider what's beyond your scope? Some of you probably realized that this situation might need a certified mentor or even staff awareness. That's not weakness — that's judgment. The smartest thing a Phase 1 participant can do in a situation like this is recognize when it's bigger than one person and bring in the right resources.

Being a stakeholder doesn't mean handling everything alone. It means making sure something gets handled."

Scenario 3: The Mirror (20 minutes)

SCENARIO 3: The Mirror

A younger man in your dorm — Kevin, 22 years old, first time locked up — has been struggling. He's angry all the time. He snaps at people over nothing. He got into a shoving match last week and barely avoided a DR. He reminds you of yourself when you first came in.

You've tried to talk to Kevin a few times. Sometimes he listens. Sometimes he tells you to mind your business. Today, he comes to you voluntarily. He looks tired. He sits down and says:

"I don't know what's wrong with me, man. I keep messing up. I told myself I wasn't going to be like this in here, but I can't stop. Everything makes me angry. The COs. The noise. People looking at me. I got a letter from my girl yesterday saying she's done. And I just... I wanted to break something. I wanted to hurt somebody. I didn't. But I wanted to.

And the worst part is, I know it's my fault she left. I know I put myself here. But knowing that doesn't make it stop. It just makes me feel worse. Like I'm never going to be different.

You've been through this program. Do you actually think I can change? Or is that just something people say?"

Layers to address: - Active listening (he's opening up — don't blow this moment by lecturing him) - Emotional regulation coaching (he just described being on the escalation curve — help him see it) - Cognitive restructuring (fixed mindset: "I'm never going to be different" — what thinking error is this?) - Empathy without over-identifying (he reminds you of yourself — manage your own reaction) - Genuine honesty (he asked you a direct question: "Do you actually think I can change?" — answer it) - The anger beneath the anger (he says anger, but listen — he's describing shame, grief, fear, loss) - Knowing your limits (is Kevin in crisis? Does this need a referral? Or is this a normal moment of vulnerability?)

Small groups work for 15 minutes. This one should be role-played carefully — the person playing Kevin should lean into the emotion.

Facilitator coaching questions: - "He just opened up to you. What's the most important thing you do in the first 30 seconds?" - "He asked, 'Do you think I can change?' How do you answer that honestly?" - "What's underneath his anger? He named it himself if you were listening." - "Is this a referral situation? Why or why not?" - "He says he 'wanted to hurt somebody.' Does that change how you handle this?"

Full group debrief (5 minutes):

Facilitator:

"This scenario is the most important one today. Not because it's the most dangerous — it's not. But because this is what being a mentor looks like. Someone coming to you at their lowest and trusting you with it.

The worst thing you can do in this moment is lecture. The second worst thing is minimize — 'You'll be fine, bro, just hang in there.' The third worst thing is make it about you — 'Let me tell you about when I went through the same thing...'

The right thing is to listen. Reflect back what you hear. Validate the pain without excusing the behavior. And when he asks you that direct question — 'Can I change?' — you answer it honestly. Not with a speech. With your own truth.

Something like: 'Yeah, I believe you can. Not because it's easy. Because I've watched myself do things I didn't think I could do. And because the fact that you're sitting here asking me that question — instead of punching a wall — tells me something about you.'

That's integration. You just used active listening, emotional awareness, cognitive restructuring, empathy, and honest communication — all in one conversation. That's what 10 weeks of work looks like when it comes together."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Closing round. Today was hard. You had to put it all together. Here's the question: **What did today show you about where you are — what are you ready for, and what do you still need to work on?"***

Send the talking piece around.

Facilitator (closing):

"Tomorrow is Self-Assessment and Reflection. I need you to bring your journals — every entry from Week 1 through now. You're going to look back at who you were when you walked in here 10 weeks ago and compare it to who you are today. It's going to be powerful if you're honest with yourself.

*Also — start thinking about this question, because you're going to write about it tomorrow: **'Who was I when I started FORGE, and who am I now?'***

See you tomorrow."

Session 31 Checklist

- Room set up in circle before participants arrive
- Opening circle completed — strengths and growth areas identified
- Groups formed (3 groups, mixed intentionally)
- Instructions and format explained clearly
- Scenario 1 (The Domino Effect) completed — role-play and debrief
- Scenario 2 (The Slow Burn) completed — role-play and debrief
- Scenario 3 (The Mirror) completed — role-play and debrief
- Every participant took a lead role in at least one scenario
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (bring journals, begin thinking about self-assessment essay)

SESSION 32: Self-Assessment and Reflection

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Review their own journal entries and thinking reports from 10 weeks and identify patterns of growth 2. Honestly assess their skills across all Phase 1 domains using a structured questionnaire 3. Identify their areas of greatest growth and areas still needing development 4. Write a reflective self-assessment essay articulating their personal transformation 5. Prepare materials for their Phase 1 portfolio

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in. Simple question today: **Did you bring your journal? And how are you feeling about looking back at where you started?**"*

Send the talking piece. Note who brought journals. If someone forgot theirs, they can still do the questionnaire and essay from memory — but encourage them to retrieve it before Session 35 (Portfolio Review).

Facilitator (after the round):

"Today is different from most sessions. Today isn't about learning something new. It's about looking at what you've already learned — honestly. No performing. No telling me what you think I want to hear. This is for you.

Here's what we're going to do: 1. First, you'll spend time reviewing your journal and thinking reports from the past 10 weeks. 2. Then, you'll complete a self-assessment questionnaire — rating yourself honestly on every skill we've covered. 3. Finally, you'll write a 2-page self-assessment essay: 'Who I was when I started FORGE and who I am now.'

This essay becomes part of your Phase 1 portfolio. It matters. Not because I'm grading your writing — I'm not. Because it forces you to put into words what's actually changed. And if nothing's changed, it forces you to face that too."

Journal Review (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Open your journals to Week 1. Your first entry. Read it. Then slowly move through — Week 2, Week 3, and on. Don't rush. Pay attention to:

- **How you were thinking** in those early weeks vs. now
- **What you were struggling with** then vs. what you struggle with now
- **Moments where something shifted** — an exercise that hit home, a conversation that changed how you saw something, a thinking report that made you realize something about yourself
- **Patterns** — things that keep coming up, themes in your thinking, emotions you keep wrestling with

As you read, mark 5 entries that you think are the most important — the ones that show your journey. These will be part of your portfolio.

You have 25 minutes. This is quiet, individual work. No talking."

Facilitator and Senior Mentor: This is not a break. Walk the room quietly. Observe. Some participants may get emotional reading early entries — that's normal and healthy. Be available but don't interrupt someone who's doing deep work. If someone seems stuck or is just flipping pages, sit near them and quietly ask, "What are you noticing?"

Self-Assessment Questionnaire (25 minutes)

Distribute the Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

Facilitator:

"This questionnaire covers every major skill area from Phase 1. Rate yourself honestly — 1 through 5. Nobody's going to judge you for a low number. What matters is that your self-assessment is accurate. If you give yourself a 5 on everything, that tells me you're not being honest — nobody's a 5 on everything after 10 weeks.

After the ratings, there are three open-ended questions. Answer those in full sentences. Take your time."

FORGE Phase 1 Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Name: __ Date: __

Rate yourself honestly on each item. 1 = I'm still struggling with this. 2 = I understand it but don't consistently apply it. 3 = I can usually do this when I'm thinking about it. 4 = This has become natural for me most of the time. 5 = This is now part of who I am.

Cognitive Skills

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
1	I can identify my own thinking errors when they happen	
2	I can complete a thinking report accurately (situation, thought, feeling, action, consequence)	
3	I can challenge and replace a thinking error with a more accurate thought	
4	I use the STOP technique (Stop, Think, Options, Plan) before reacting	
5	I recognize closed thinking, victim stance, entitlement, and other errors in real time	

Emotional Regulation

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
6	I can name what I'm feeling using specific emotion words (not just "mad" or "fine")	
7	I recognize where I am on the escalation curve (calm, agitated, flooded, crisis)	
8	I use breathing or grounding techniques to regulate before I respond	

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
9	I can identify the emotions beneath my anger (shame, fear, hurt, grief)	
10	I track my emotional patterns and know my triggers	

Communication

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
11	I practice active listening — I hear people out without planning my response	
12	I use "I" statements instead of "You" accusations	
13	I can give feedback using the SBI model (Situation, Behavior, Impact)	
14	I can receive feedback without getting defensive	
15	I communicate assertively — not aggressively, not passively	

Conflict Resolution

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
16	I know and can apply the 5-step FORGE conflict resolution model	
17	I can de-escalate a tense situation using body language and tone	
18	I can stay neutral when mediating between two people	
19	I know when a situation is beyond my scope and needs referral	
20	I can rate a situation on the heat scale and match my response appropriately	

Problem Solving and Decision Making

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
21	I use the 6-step problem-solving model instead of reacting impulsively	
22	I generate at least 3 options before choosing a course of action	
23	I think through consequences before I act (short-term and long-term)	
24	I have personal rules that guide my decisions under pressure	
25	I can "play the tape forward" to see where a decision leads	

Accountability, Empathy, and Values

#	Skill	Rating (1-5)
26	I take full accountability for my actions without excuses or minimization	
27	I can see a situation from another person's perspective	
28	I act with integrity even when no one is watching	
29	I practice Service Over Self — I look for ways to help others daily	
30	I see myself as a stakeholder, not a bystander, in my environment	

Open-Ended Questions:

1. **What is the single biggest change in how you think or behave since starting FORGE?** (3-5 sentences)
2. **What is your biggest remaining challenge — the area where you still struggle the most?** (3-5 sentences)
3. **What specific evidence can you point to — a situation, a conversation, a decision — that proves you've grown?** (3-5 sentences)

Facilitator (as participants work):

Walk the room. If someone finishes quickly, check in: "Did you really sit with each one? Take another pass." If someone is stuck on the open-ended questions, prompt them: "Think about a specific moment. Something that happened in the dorm where you handled it differently than you would have 10 weeks ago."

Self-Assessment Essay (40 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now for the essay. This is the most important piece of writing you'll do in Phase 1. Two pages, minimum.

The prompt is:

'Who I was when I started FORGE and who I am now.'

This isn't a book report. It's not a list of things you learned. It's your honest reflection on your own transformation — or lack of it. Here's what I want you to address:

- 1. **Who were you on Day 1?** How were you thinking? How were you handling conflict? How were you managing your emotions? What was your mindset?*
- 2. **What happened over these 10 weeks?** Not a summary of every session — pick the moments that mattered. The breakthroughs. The hard days. The times you almost quit. The times something clicked.*
- 3. **Who are you now?** Be specific. What do you do differently? How do you think differently? Give real examples from your life in the dorm.*
- 4. **What's still unfinished?** What work do you still need to do? Where are you still falling short?*

Be honest. If you write two pages of 'FORGE changed my life and I'm a completely different person,' I'm going to push back — because growth is never that clean. The best essays will be the ones that tell the truth about both the progress and the struggle.

You have 40 minutes. Write in silence. This is for your portfolio."

Facilitator and Senior Mentor: Walk the room periodically but let people write. This is sacred time. If someone is staring at a blank page after 10 minutes, sit beside them and say quietly: "Start with Day 1. What was on your mind when you walked into that first session? Write that." Some participants will struggle with writing — that's okay. Encourage them to write what they can. Two pages is a minimum, but a genuine one-and-a-half pages is better than two pages of filler.

Closing (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"If you didn't finish your essay, that's okay — complete it tonight. Bring the finished version to Session 35 for your portfolio. But I want to close with a brief round.

One sentence: What surprised you about looking back at your own journey?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Tomorrow is Peer Evaluation and Feedback. Here's what that means: your cohort members are going to give you honest feedback about your growth — using the SBI model you learned in Week 5. And you're going to do the same for them.

This is a gift. It's rare in life — especially in this environment — to hear honest, caring feedback from people who've watched you up close for 10 weeks. Take it seriously. Come ready to give it with respect and receive it with humility.

If you didn't finish your essay, finish it tonight. Also, spend some time thinking about each person in this cohort. Tomorrow you'll need to give specific, honest feedback to three of your peers. Think about what you've observed — their growth, their strengths, and one area where they can keep growing.

See you tomorrow."

Session 32 Checklist

- Room set up in circle before participants arrive
- Opening circle completed
- Journals reviewed — participants identified 5 key entries
- Self-Assessment Questionnaires distributed and completed
- Self-Assessment Essay prompt explained clearly
- Essay writing time provided (40 minutes of quiet writing)
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (finish essay, prepare peer feedback thoughts)
- Collect completed questionnaires (or note who needs to finish)

SESSION 33: Peer Evaluation and Feedback

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Deliver structured, honest peer feedback using the SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact) model 2. Receive feedback from peers with openness and without defensiveness 3. Identify growth areas validated by multiple observers 4. Understand the Phase 1 to Phase 2 transition requirements 5. Process facilitator observations about their individual development

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in. Today's going to be intense — in a good way. The question: **How does it feel to know you're about to receive honest feedback from the men in this circle?**"*

Send the talking piece. Listen for anxiety, eagerness, defensiveness — all are normal.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Some of you said 'nervous.' Some said 'ready.' Both are honest. Here's what I want to be clear about: today is not about tearing anyone down. Today is about something rare and valuable — hearing the truth from people who've walked beside you for 10 weeks.

In most of our lives — in here and out there — nobody tells us the truth. People either avoid us, talk behind our back, or sugarcoat everything. Today, we're going to do something different. We're going to look each other in the eye and say: 'Here's what I've seen in you. Here's what's strong. Here's where you can grow.'

That takes courage to give. And it takes even more courage to receive."

SBI Review and Feedback Setup (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's review the SBI model. You learned this in Week 5, and you're going to use it today.

S — Situation. *When and where did you observe this? Be specific. Not 'in class.' More like 'During the conflict resolution role-play two weeks ago...'*

B — Behavior. *What did the person actually do? Observable behavior — not your interpretation of their motives. Not 'You were being disrespectful.' More like 'You raised your voice and talked over the other person.'*

I — Impact. *What effect did the behavior have? On you, on the group, on the situation. 'When you did that, I felt like my point didn't matter.' Or: 'When you did that, the whole energy in the room shifted — people leaned in and started listening.'*

SBI works for positive feedback AND growth feedback. Today, each of you is going to give feedback to 3 peers. For each peer, you'll share:

- 1. **One strength** — something you've observed them do well, using SBI.*
- 2. **One growth area** — something you think they can improve, using SBI.*

That's it. One strength, one growth area. Specific, honest, respectful."

Distribute SBI Feedback Forms (3 per participant).

SBI Feedback Form:

From: __ To: __

STRENGTH — Something I've observed you do well: - Situation: - Behavior: - Impact:

GROWTH AREA — Something I think you can improve: - Situation: - Behavior: - Impact:

Feedback Assignments (5 minutes)

Pre-assign feedback pairs. Every participant should give feedback to 3 peers and receive feedback from 3 peers. Plan this in advance so that: - Everyone gets feedback from a mix of people (not just friends) - The assignments ensure everyone gives and receives 3 - No one is left out

Facilitator:

"I'm going to tell you which three people you'll be giving feedback to. You have 10 minutes to fill out your three forms. Think carefully. This is a skill — giving honest feedback that helps someone grow, not feedback that makes you feel powerful. If you can't think of a specific situation, go back to what you've observed over 10 weeks. There were moments. Find them."

Writing time (10 minutes). Quiet work. Facilitator walks the room and checks that feedback is specific and uses SBI format, not vague generalizations.

Peer Feedback Rounds (50 minutes)

Structure: Each participant sits in the "feedback seat" for approximately 4 minutes. Their 3 peers deliver feedback one at a time. Then the person in the seat responds briefly.

Facilitator:

"Here's how this works. One person at a time sits in the feedback seat. Your three feedback partners will each share their strength observation and their growth observation — using SBI, out loud, to the whole group. After all three have spoken, the person in the seat gets to respond — briefly. You can say thank you, ask a clarifying question, or share what landed. What you cannot do is argue, defend, or explain away. If someone tells you something you disagree with, sit with it. You don't have to accept every piece of feedback as gospel truth. But you do have to hear it."

Ground rules: 1. Be honest — sugarcoating helps no one 2. Be respectful — this is feedback, not an attack 3. Be specific — SBI format, real situations, observable behavior 4. The rest of the group listens in silence during each person's round

Who wants to go first?"

Run through each participant. This will take the bulk of the session. Keep it moving — if someone is giving a speech instead of SBI feedback, gently redirect: "Can you put that in SBI format? What was the specific situation?"

Facilitator modeling: If the feedback gets too soft (everyone just saying nice things), intervene:

"I appreciate the kindness in this room. But I'm going to push you. Growth feedback isn't optional. If you only give someone praise, you're not serving them. You're making yourself comfortable. Every person in this room has something they can improve. Name it — with respect, but name it."

If feedback gets too harsh or personal, intervene:

"Hold on. That's not SBI — that's a character judgment. Reframe it. What was the specific behavior you observed, and what was its impact?"

Facilitator Observations (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now it's my turn. Over the past 10 weeks, I've been watching each of you — in sessions, during exercises, in how you interact with each other. I have observations to share. Some of it will line up with what your peers just told you. Some of it might be different. Either way, this is what I've seen."

Go through each participant briefly (1-2 minutes each). Share: - One specific strength you've observed with a concrete example - One specific area for growth with a concrete example - Your honest assessment of their readiness for Phase 2

Facilitator note: Prepare these observations in advance. Review your notes from 10 weeks of sessions. Be specific. Don't wing this — it matters too much. Participants will remember what you say here for a long time.

Example:

"David — here's what I've seen. In Week 3, during the emotion wheel exercise, you couldn't name a single emotion beyond 'angry' and 'fine.' Last week, during the scenario practice, you said, 'I think what I'm feeling right now is shame, not anger.' That's growth that I can see. That's real.

Where you need to keep pushing: receiving feedback. Today, when Marcus gave you his growth observation, I watched your jaw tighten and your arms cross. You didn't argue — and I give you credit for that — but your body was saying, 'I don't want to hear this.' The next level for you is not just hearing it without arguing, but actually leaning into it. Letting it land. That's the work ahead."

Phase 2 Transition Discussion (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about what's ahead. Next week — Week 12 — is your Phase 1 assessment. Here's what that looks like:

Tuesday — Session 34: *Phase 1 Knowledge Check. A written assessment — 30 questions covering everything we've learned. Thinking errors, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, communication, problem solving, FORGE values. You need 70% — that's 21 out of 30 — to advance to Phase 2. Study your journals. Review the skills. Know the models.*

Wednesday — Session 35: *Portfolio Review. You'll present your Phase 1 portfolio to a review panel. That includes your thinking reports — you need at least 15 — your emotion logs, your impact awareness letter, your self-assessment essay, your stakeholder commitment, and 5 journal entries of your choice. We'll go through the full checklist next week.*

Thursday — Session 36: *Phase 1 Celebration and Phase 2 Preview. If you've met the requirements, we'll recognize your completion of Phase 1. Certificates. A ceremony. And then a preview of Phase 2 — where you start learning to build others.*

Questions?"

Answer questions honestly. Common concerns: - "What if I don't pass the test?" — "You retake it. This isn't a trap — it's a check to make sure you've learned the material. If you've been doing the work, you'll pass." - "What if my portfolio isn't complete?" — "You have one week. If you're missing thinking reports or your essay isn't done, get it done. Come to me if you need help." - "What if I don't advance?" — "Then you'll know exactly what you need to work on, and you'll have support to get there. Nobody gets left behind permanently — but nobody gets pushed forward before they're ready, either."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Final round. Today you heard from your peers and from me. You got honest feedback. That doesn't happen often. Here's the closing question:

What is one piece of feedback you received today that you know is true — even if it was hard to hear?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"The fact that you can sit in this circle and hear honest feedback — and respond with humility instead of hostility — is proof of how far you've come. Ten weeks ago, most of you would have shut down or fought back. Today, you sat with it. That's the work.

*Homework for next week: 1. **Study for the Knowledge Check.** Review your journal, your handbook, and especially: the 8 thinking errors, the escalation curve, the 5-step conflict resolution model, the 6-step problem-solving model, communication styles, and FORGE values. Tuesday's test covers all of it. 2. **Complete your portfolio.** Make sure you have at least 15 thinking reports, your emotion logs, your impact awareness letter, your self-assessment essay, your stakeholder commitment, and 5 selected journal entries. Wednesday you present it. 3. **Finish your self-assessment essay** if you haven't already.*

You've done 10 weeks of hard work. One more week. Bring everything you've got.

See you Tuesday."

Session 33 Checklist

- Room set up in circle before participants arrive
- Opening circle completed
- SBI model reviewed clearly
- Feedback forms distributed (3 per participant)
- Feedback assignments given (pre-planned)
- Writing time for feedback forms (10 minutes)
- Peer feedback rounds completed — each participant received feedback from 3 peers
- Facilitator observations shared for each participant (prepared in advance)
- Phase 2 transition requirements explained clearly
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (study for knowledge check, complete portfolio, finish essay)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 11

What to Watch For

Integration gaps: During Scenario practice (Session 31), watch for participants who can apply individual skills but struggle when they need to use multiple skills at once. This is normal — but it tells you who needs the most coaching before the Phase 1 assessment. Note which skill combinations give people trouble.

Self-assessment honesty: During Session 32, watch for two patterns. First, the inflators — participants who rate themselves 4 and 5 on everything. These men may lack self-awareness or may be performing. Push them gently: "Is that really a 5? Can you give me an example?" Second, the deflators — participants who rate themselves low across the board, often out of genuine low self-worth. Help them see their real growth: "I've watched you do [specific behavior]. That's not a 1. Be fair to yourself."

Feedback dynamics: Session 33 will test the group's trust. Watch for: - **Retaliation feedback** — giving someone harsh feedback because of a personal grudge, not genuine observation. If you see this, intervene immediately. - **Collusion feedback** — friends giving each other only praise and saving criticism for people they don't like. Call it out. - **Defensive receiving** — arms crossed, jaw tight, dismissive responses. Coach in the moment: "I see your body tensing up. That's normal. Breathe. Let it land." - **Emotional responses** — some participants may get tearful or visibly moved by positive feedback, especially if they've never received genuine affirmation. Give that moment space. Don't rush past it.

Common Week 11 Challenges

"I'm not ready for the assessment." Honest response: "You've had 10 weeks of preparation. If you've been doing the work — the journal entries, the thinking reports, the exercises — you have what you need. This isn't a surprise test on material you've never seen. It's a check on what you've been living. If you're nervous, use that energy to review. Come see me if you need help."

"The peer feedback was unfair." Response: "Maybe it was. Sometimes feedback says more about the giver than the receiver. But before you dismiss it — sit with it for 24 hours. Ask yourself honestly: is there any truth in it? Even 10%? That 10% is the part worth paying attention to."

"I don't have enough thinking reports." Response: "You need 15 for your portfolio. If you're short, you have one week. Write them. Go back to situations from the past 10 weeks that you remember clearly and

complete the reports. The thinking report skill doesn't expire — you can apply it to any situation, past or present."

Preparation for Week 12

- Prepare and print the Phase 1 Knowledge Check (30 questions — see Session 34)
- Prepare Phase 1 portfolio checklists (one per participant)
- Prepare presentation rubric for Portfolio Review (Session 35)
- Prepare Phase 1 Completion Certificates (one per participant — have them ready)
- Plan the Phase 1 celebration (Session 36) — consider what's possible within facility constraints. A ceremony doesn't need to be elaborate to be meaningful.
- Review all participant portfolios for completeness before Session 35 if possible
- Prepare your Facilitator Observation notes for each participant if not completed during Session 33
- Review Phase 2 curriculum to be ready for the preview in Session 36
- Prepare the recommitment ceremony script

Week 12: Phase 1 Assessment and Transition

Week 12 Overview

Purpose: This is the finish line for Phase 1. Everything over the past 11 weeks has led here. Participants demonstrate what they've learned through a written knowledge check, present their portfolios, and — if they've met the requirements — celebrate their completion of Phase 1 and prepare for Phase 2. This week should feel like a milestone, not an obstacle. The assessment is a verification of learning, not a gotcha. The portfolio is a presentation of growth, not a defense of perfection. And the celebration is earned — every man who's done the work deserves to be recognized for it.

Sessions This Week: - Session 34 (Tuesday): Phase 1 Knowledge Check - Session 35 (Wednesday): Portfolio Review - Session 36 (Thursday): Phase 1 Celebration and Phase 2 Preview

Materials Needed: - Phase 1 Knowledge Check — printed (1 per participant + 2 extras) - Answer key for Knowledge Check (facilitator only) - Pens/pencils (extras — pens die during tests) - Portfolio Review Checklist (1 per participant) - Portfolio Presentation Rubric (1 per panel member per participant) - Phase 1 Completion Certificates (pre-printed, 1 per completing participant) - Phase 2 overview handout (if available — otherwise verbal) - Recommitment forms (1 per participant) - Talking piece - Timer or watch

SESSION 34: Phase 1 Knowledge Check

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available, for proctoring)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will have: 1. Demonstrated their knowledge of all Phase 1 concepts through a written assessment 2. Applied cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, communication, and problem-solving concepts to realistic scenarios 3. Articulated FORGE values, Code of Conduct principles, and the stakeholder model in their own words 4. Identified their score and understood what it means for Phase 2 advancement

Session Plan

Opening (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Today is the Phase 1 Knowledge Check. I know some of you are nervous. That's normal — it means you care. Let me put a few things on the table right now:

- 1. **This is not designed to trick you.** Every question on this test comes from material we've covered in sessions. If you've been doing the work — attending, journaling, completing your thinking reports, participating in exercises — you know this material.*
- 2. **You need 70% to advance.** That's 21 out of 30. It's a fair bar. I'm not looking for perfection. I'm looking for understanding.*
- 3. **If you don't pass today, it's not the end.** You can retake it. This is a knowledge check, not a character judgment. Some people test better than others. What matters is that you know the material.*
- 4. **The format:** There are multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and scenario-based questions. For short answer and scenario questions, I'm looking for substance, not length. A clear, specific answer in 2-3 sentences is better than a vague paragraph.*

You have 75 minutes for 30 questions. That's more than enough time. Don't rush. Read each question carefully. If you get stuck, move on and come back.

Any questions before we start?"

Answer questions. Then distribute the Knowledge Check.

"Pens up. Begin."

Knowledge Check Administration (75 minutes)

Facilitator and Senior Mentor: Proctor the test. Walk the room periodically. Don't hover over anyone. Be available if someone has a question about what a question is asking (clarify the question, don't give the answer). If someone finishes early, they can sit quietly or review their answers — no talking, no leaving until the 75 minutes are up or everyone is done.

FORGE Phase 1 Knowledge Check

Name: ___ Date: ___ Cohort: _____

Instructions: Answer all 30 questions. For multiple choice, circle the best answer. For short answer, write 2-3 clear sentences. For scenario questions, explain what you would do and why. You have 75 minutes. 70% (21/30) is required to advance to Phase 2.

Section 1: Thinking Errors and Cognitive Restructuring (Questions 1-8)

1. What are the three parts of the Think-Feel-Act cycle?

a) Situation → Response → Consequence b) Thought → Feeling → Action c) Problem → Solution → Outcome d) Trigger → Reaction → Regret

2. Match each thinking error to its correct description. Write the letter next to the number.

Thinking Error	Description
1. Closed thinking	___ A. "It's not that serious" — making harmful behavior seem less important
2. Victim stance	___ B. "I'll make them do what I want" — using force or intimidation to control
3. Minimizing	___ C. "I deserve special treatment" — believing rules don't apply to you
4. Power thrust	___ D. "I'm right, period" — refusing to consider any other viewpoint
5. Entitlement	___ E. "It's everyone else's fault" — refusing to accept responsibility

3. Read the following statement and identify which thinking error is present. Explain why.

"Yeah, I shoved him. But he disrespected me first. What was I supposed to do — just let him talk to me like that? Anyone would have done the same thing."

Thinking error(s): _____

Explanation: _____

4. What does STOP stand for in the STOP technique?

S: _____

T: _____

O: _____

P: _____

5. Rewrite the following thought using cognitive restructuring. Replace the thinking error with a more accurate, productive thought.

Original thought: "This CO has it out for me. He's always targeting me. There's no point trying to follow the rules because he's going to write me up no matter what."

Restructured thought: _____

6. A thinking report has five parts. List them in order.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

7. What is "cognitive indolence" and how does it show up in daily life? Give one example.

8. What is the difference between a thinking error and a negative emotion? (Short answer)

Section 2: Emotional Regulation (Questions 9-13)

9. Put the five stages of the escalation curve in the correct order:

___ Crisis ___ Calm ___ Recovery ___ Flooded ___ Agitated

10. Name two physical body signals that tell you anger is building (before you say or do anything).

1.

2.

11. Describe the 4-4-4 breathing technique. When should you use it?

12. SCENARIO: You just found out that your family member didn't show up for a scheduled visit. No call, no explanation. You're sitting on your bunk and you can feel the anger rising — your chest is tight, your jaw is clenched, you want to hit something.

What would you do in the next 5 minutes? Be specific about which regulation techniques you would use and why.

13. Explain what it means to say "anger is a secondary emotion." What emotions typically lie beneath anger? Name at least three.

Section 3: Conflict Resolution (Questions 14-18)

14. List the 5 steps of the FORGE Conflict Resolution Model in order.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

15. What does "tactical empathy" mean in de-escalation?

- a) Pretending to agree with someone so they calm down
- b) Acknowledging what someone is feeling without necessarily agreeing with their position
- c) Manipulating someone's emotions to get the outcome you want
- d) Telling someone you understand even when you don't

16. Name three things you should do with your body language when trying to de-escalate a tense situation.

1.

2.

3.

17. SCENARIO: Two men in the dorm are arguing about who was supposed to clean the bathroom. The argument started calm but is getting louder. One of them just said, "If you call me lazy one more time, we're going to have a real problem." Other dorm members are starting to watch.

Walk through how you would intervene using the FORGE Conflict Resolution Model. Address each step specifically.

Step 1 (Pause & Posture): _____

Step 2 (Name the Heat): _____

Step 3 (Facts > Stories): _____

Step 4 (Needs & Options): _____

Step 5 (Agreement & Check-Back): _____

18. List three "red line" situations where a FORGE participant should step back and refer to staff rather than trying to handle it themselves.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Section 4: Communication Skills (Questions 19-22)

19. What are the five components of active listening?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

20. Rewrite each aggressive statement as an assertive "I" statement.

a) "You never listen to me. You always just do whatever you want."

Rewrite: _____

b) "You're always running your mouth about me behind my back."

Rewrite: _____

21. What does SBI stand for in the feedback model? Briefly explain each part.

S: _____

B: _____

I: _____

22. What is the difference between aggressive communication and assertive communication? (Short answer — 2-3 sentences)

Section 5: Problem Solving and Decision Making (Questions 23-26)

23. List the 6 steps of the FORGE problem-solving model in order.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6.

24. What is the 10-10-10 rule? How does it help with decision making?

25. SCENARIO: You've been saving commissary items to send a package to your family. You find out that a man in your dorm — someone you're friendly with — has been taking items from your shelf when you're not around. You're angry. You want to confront him right now.

Apply the 6-step problem-solving model to this situation.

Step 1 (Stop and think): _____

Step 2 (Define the problem): _____

Step 3 (Gather information): _____

Step 4 (Generate options — list at least 3):

Option A: _____

Option B: _____

Option C: _____

Step 5 (Evaluate consequences): _____

Step 6 (Choose, act, review): _____

26. What does "playing the tape forward" mean? Give a brief example of how you would use it.

Section 6: FORGE Values and Code of Conduct (Questions 27-30)

27. In your own words, explain what "Service Over Self" means. Give one specific example of what it looks like in the dorm. (3-4 sentences)

28. What does it mean to be a "stakeholder" in the FORGE model? How is it different from being a bystander?

29. SCENARIO: A man you've become friends with in the FORGE program tells you confidentially that he's been carrying a sharpened piece of metal "just for protection." He says he feels threatened by someone in another dorm and he'll get rid of it soon. He asks you not to tell anyone.

What do you do? Explain your reasoning. Reference the Code of Conduct in your answer.

30. The FORGE accountability spectrum goes from denial to full accountability. Put these five levels in order from least accountable to most accountable:

___ Full accountability ___ Blame-shifting ___ Denial ___ Partial ownership ___ Minimization

Now write one sentence explaining the difference between "partial ownership" and "full accountability."

End of Knowledge Check

Answer Key (Facilitator Only)

1. b) Thought → Feeling → Action

2. 1-D, 2-E, 3-A, 4-B, 5-C

3. Multiple thinking errors present: **Victim stance** ("he disrespected me first" — blaming the other person), **Minimizing** ("I shoved him" — downplaying the aggression), and **Cognitive indolence / Closed thinking** ("What was I supposed to do?" — refusing to consider alternatives, acting as if there was no other option). Accept any two correctly identified and explained.

4. S = Stop, T = Think, O = Options, P = Plan

5. Acceptable restructured thoughts should: remove the assumption of persecution ("has it out for me"), acknowledge what the participant can control, and recognize that following rules has value regardless of the CO's behavior. Example: "This CO has been strict with me. I don't know his reasons. What I can control is my own behavior. Following the rules is for me and my future — not for him."

6. 1. Situation, 2. Thought, 3. Feeling, 4. Action, 5. Consequence

7. Cognitive indolence is the thinking error of not wanting to think something through — taking mental shortcuts, refusing to consider consequences, or being too lazy to think before acting. Example: "I didn't really think about it, I just did it" or not planning ahead because thinking about it is uncomfortable.

8. A thinking error is a distorted or inaccurate way of interpreting a situation (faulty thinking). A negative emotion is a feeling (like anger, sadness, fear). Thinking errors lead to or intensify negative emotions, but they are not the same thing. You can feel a negative emotion without a thinking error (grief over a real loss), but thinking errors often make emotions worse or create emotions that don't fit the situation.

9. 4-Crisis, 1-Calm, 5-Recovery, 3-Flooded, 2-Agitated. Correct order: Calm → Agitated → Flooded → Crisis → Recovery

10. Accept any two: jaw clenching, fists tightening, chest tightness, face getting hot, muscles tensing, heart racing, stomach tightening, shallow breathing, etc.

- 11.** Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds. Use it when you feel yourself escalating — when you notice body signals of anger or stress — before you respond to a situation. It activates the body's calming response.
- 12.** Look for: identification of body signals (chest tight, jaw clenched), use of a specific regulation technique (4-4-4 breathing, 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, or another technique taught in class), and a decision to delay any action until regulated. Award full credit for any answer that names a specific technique, describes how they'd use it, and demonstrates awareness that acting while flooded leads to bad outcomes.
- 13.** Anger is called a secondary emotion because it usually covers up a deeper, more vulnerable feeling. Beneath anger are typically: shame, fear, hurt, sadness, grief, rejection, powerlessness, humiliation, or feeling disrespected. Accept any three.
- 14.** 1. Pause & Posture, 2. Name the Heat, 3. Facts > Stories, 4. Needs & Options, 5. Agreement & Check-Back
- 15.** b) Acknowledging what someone is feeling without necessarily agreeing with their position
- 16.** Accept any three: keep hands visible and open, maintain a non-threatening stance (slightly angled, not squared up), keep a safe distance (arm's length+), lower your posture slightly (don't tower over them), slow your movements, keep eye contact without staring, relax your shoulders, uncross your arms.
- 17.** Award up to full credit based on how specifically and accurately the participant applies each step. Key elements: - Step 1: Approach calmly, check own body language, breathe, position yourself at an angle not between them - Step 2: Acknowledge the tension ("I can see this is getting heated" or similar) - Step 3: Give each person a chance to state facts without insults or blame — "What happened?" to each, with time limits - Step 4: Identify what each person actually needs (a clean bathroom, respect, fairness) and generate options (a schedule, splitting the task, etc.) - Step 5: Get a specific agreement and commit to checking back the next day
- 18.** Accept any three: weapons present/mentioned, threats of serious violence, suicidal or self-harm statements, gang-related conflict, active mental health crisis, medical emergency, staff safety concerns.
- 19.** 1. Attending (giving full attention), 2. Reflecting (mirroring back what you heard), 3. Clarifying (asking questions to make sure you understand), 4. Summarizing (capturing the key points), 5. Validating (acknowledging the person's feelings/experience)
- 20.** Accept rewrites that: use "I" as the subject, describe the speaker's feeling or experience, avoid blame language ("you always," "you never"), and make a specific request. Examples: a) "I feel unheard when decisions get made without my input. I need us to talk things through together." b) "I feel hurt when I hear that things are being said about me. I'd rather you come to me directly."

21. S = Situation (when and where the behavior happened), B = Behavior (what the person specifically did — observable, not interpreted), I = Impact (the effect the behavior had — on you, others, or the situation)

22. Aggressive communication violates others' rights — it uses threats, blame, intimidation, or disrespect to force an outcome. Assertive communication respects both your own rights and the other person's — it's direct and honest without being hostile. Aggressive communication damages relationships; assertive communication builds them.

23. 1. Stop and think, 2. Define the problem clearly, 3. Gather information, 4. Generate options (at least 3), 5. Evaluate consequences of each option, 6. Choose, act, and review

24. Ask yourself: How will I feel about this decision in 10 minutes? In 10 months? In 10 years? It helps by forcing you to think beyond the immediate impulse and consider long-term consequences. A decision that feels satisfying in 10 minutes (like punching someone) can look very different at 10 months (a DR, loss of privileges) or 10 years (a pattern of violence that's cost you relationships and freedom).

25. Award credit based on clear application of each step: - Step 1: Don't confront immediately; calm down first - Step 2: Define it clearly — someone is taking my property; I need to address it without violence - Step 3: Confirm the facts — is it really him? How do I know? Have I seen it or is it assumption? - Step 4: At least 3 real options (e.g., talk to him directly and calmly, ask a trusted person to help mediate, move my items to a more secure location, report it, talk to a FORGE mentor) - Step 5: Weigh consequences of each — confrontation could escalate; mediation preserves the relationship; doing nothing lets it continue - Step 6: Choose the option with the best long-term outcome and plan to revisit how it went

26. "Playing the tape forward" means mentally walking through the full chain of consequences of a decision before you make it — seeing where it leads, step by step, all the way to the end. Example: "If I get in this fight → I get a DR → I lose my good time → my release date gets pushed back → my kids wait longer → is that worth it?"

27. Look for: a clear definition that goes beyond "helping people" — should include the idea of choosing to use your time, energy, or influence for others' benefit, even when it costs you something. The example should be specific and realistic — not vague. Award full credit for authenticity and specificity.

28. A stakeholder is someone who accepts personal responsibility for the shared environment — the dorm, the facility, the community. A bystander watches things happen and says "not my problem." A stakeholder sees the same situation and says "I have a role in how this goes." The difference is ownership: stakeholders don't wait for someone else to fix things.

29. This is a zero-tolerance situation under the Code of Conduct. The participant must report it — weapons are a red-line issue regardless of the reason. The correct answer acknowledges: the Code of Conduct's zero-tolerance weapons policy, the safety of everyone in the dorm, the reality that "just for protection" doesn't

change the risk, and the duty to report even though the person is a friend. Partial credit for answers that show awareness but hesitate on the duty to act. No credit for answers that say they'd keep the secret.

30. Order: 3-Full accountability, 4-Blame-shifting, 1-Denial, 5-Partial ownership, 2-Minimization. Wait — correct order from least to most: 1-Denial, 2-Minimization, 3-Blame-shifting, 4-Partial ownership, 5-Full accountability.

The difference: Partial ownership admits some responsibility but still holds back ("I did it, but..." — there's always a 'but' that shifts some blame). Full accountability owns it completely — no excuses, no qualifiers, no "but." It says: "I did this. It was wrong. Here's who it hurt. Here's what I'll do differently."

Scoring: - Questions 1, 4, 9, 15: 1 point each (straightforward recall) - Questions 2, 30 (ordering): 1 point each (all correct to earn the point) - Questions 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28: 1 point each (substance and accuracy) - Questions 6, 14, 23: 1 point each (must be in correct order with correct terms) - Questions 12, 17, 25, 29: 1 point each (scenario-based — scored on application quality)

Total: 30 points. Passing: 21/30 (70%).

Facilitator note on grading: Be fair but not rigid. On short answer and scenario questions, look for demonstrated understanding, not perfect wording. If a participant clearly understands the concept but uses different language than the manual, give credit. The goal is to verify learning, not penalize vocabulary.

Post-Test (25 minutes)

Collect all tests. If time allows, do a brief, informal review:

Facilitator:

"Tests are done. Take a breath. Before tomorrow, let me walk through a few of the concepts that tend to trip people up — not giving you answers, but reinforcing the learning."

Review 3-4 key concepts briefly — the ones you know participants struggled with based on questions you got during the test or based on the past 11 weeks of observation. Keep it conversational, not lecture-style.

Facilitator:

"I'll have your scores by tomorrow. If you passed, you'll know before the portfolio review. If you didn't, I'll talk to you individually about next steps. Either way — the knowledge check is one part of the Phase 1 gate. Your portfolio, your attendance, your peer evaluations, and your conduct all factor in.

Tomorrow: Portfolio Review. Bring everything. Your thinking reports, your emotion logs, your impact awareness letter, your self-assessment essay, your stakeholder commitment, and your 5 selected journal entries. You'll present your portfolio to a panel. It's not a trial — it's a chance to show your journey.

See you tomorrow."

Session 34 Checklist

- Room set up with individual desks/writing surfaces (not circle formation — testing setup)
- Knowledge Checks printed and distributed
- Pens/pencils available (extras on hand)
- 75 minutes of quiet testing time provided
- Test proctored — questions about clarity answered without giving away content
- All tests collected
- Post-test concept review completed
- Tomorrow's portfolio requirements communicated clearly
- Plan in place to grade tests before Session 35

SESSION 35: Portfolio Review

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available) + additional panel member (certified FORGE mentor or staff observer)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will have: 1. Presented their complete Phase 1 portfolio to a review panel 2. Articulated their personal growth journey in their own words 3. Demonstrated the ability to reflect on their learning honestly and specifically 4. Received feedback on their portfolio from the panel 5. Understood their readiness status for Phase 2

Session Plan

Opening (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Today is Portfolio Review. Before we start, let me share your Knowledge Check results."

Share scores individually. You can do this in one of two ways depending on your group: - Option A: Call each person's name and say "You passed" or "Come see me after the session." (Public but minimal.) - Option B: Hand back the tests with scores written on top. (Private.)

Choose based on what serves your group best. Don't publicly announce failing scores.

Facilitator (after scores are shared):

"For those who passed — congratulations. For those who need to retake — we'll work out a plan. The knowledge check is important, but it's one piece. Today's portfolio review is where you show the real evidence of your growth.

Here's how today works: Each of you will present your portfolio to a panel — that's me, [Senior Mentor name], and [third panel member if present]. You'll have approximately 8 minutes. In those 8 minutes, you'll walk us through:

- 1. Your portfolio contents — showing us that everything is complete*
- 2. Your highlights — what entries or documents best represent your journey*
- 3. Your self-assessment — who you were, who you are, what's still unfinished*

After you present, we may ask you 1-2 questions. This is not an interrogation. It's a conversation about your growth.

While you're waiting for your turn, review your materials. When someone else is presenting, you listen with respect. This is their moment."

Portfolio Completeness Check (10 minutes)

Before presentations begin, do a quick completeness check. Go around the room and verify each participant has the required items. Use the checklist:

Phase 1 Portfolio Checklist:

- **Thinking Reports** — Minimum 15 completed, each with all five parts (Situation, Thought, Feeling, Action, Consequence)
- **Emotion Tracking Logs** — At least 3 weeks of daily emotion tracking (time, emotion, body signal, trigger)
- **Impact Awareness Letter** — Completed letter addressing the harm caused, the ripple effect, and personal accountability (from Week 7)
- **Self-Assessment Essay** — 2-page minimum: "Who I was when I started FORGE and who I am now" (from Week 11)
- **Stakeholder Commitment** — 5 specific actions the participant commits to as a stakeholder (from Week 10)
- **Journal Highlights** — 5 journal entries selected by the participant as most representative of their journey
- **Personal Coping Strategy Card** — 5 strategies for managing distress (from Week 4)

- [] **Self-Assessment Questionnaire** — Completed with honest ratings and open-ended responses (from Week 11)

Facilitator:

"If you're missing anything, note it. You'll need to complete any missing items before you can be cleared for Phase 2. Let's begin."

Portfolio Presentations (80 minutes)

For a cohort of 12-15, budget approximately 8 minutes per person. Adjust timing if needed — you may not get through everyone in 80 minutes with a full cohort. If so, extend into the pre-celebration time in Session 36, or split presentations across Sessions 35 and 36.

Presentation structure for each participant:

1. **Portfolio walk-through (3 minutes):** Show each item on the checklist. The panel verifies completeness.
2. **Personal reflection (3 minutes):** The participant shares their growth story in their own words. Not reading the essay — speaking from it. What changed? What was the hardest part? What moment meant the most?
3. **Panel questions (2 minutes):** 1-2 questions from the panel.

Panel instructions (review with panel members before the session):

Facilitator (to panel):

"Our job is to verify completeness, assess the quality of self-reflection, and affirm genuine growth. We're not looking for perfection. We're looking for honesty, self-awareness, and evidence that this person has internalized — not just memorized — the material. Ask questions that draw out depth. Don't grill anyone."

Portfolio Presentation Rubric:

Criteria	1 (Incomplete)	2 (Developing)	3 (Competent)	4 (Exemplary)
Completeness	Multiple items missing or incomplete	1-2 items missing or significantly incomplete	All items present and substantially complete	All items present, thorough, and detailed

Criteria	1 (Incomplete)	2 (Developing)	3 (Competent)	4 (Exemplary)
Quality of Thinking Reports	Surface-level, vague, or formulaic	Some depth but inconsistent	Demonstrates genuine self-analysis in most reports	Deep, honest, specific — shows real cognitive work
Self-Assessment Honesty	Inflated or deflated — doesn't match observed behavior	Somewhat honest but avoids hard truths	Honest about strengths and weaknesses	Deeply honest — names specific struggles and specific growth
Articulation of Growth	Cannot describe what's changed	Vague — "I've grown a lot" without specifics	Can name specific changes with examples	Compelling, specific, connects skills to real life
Engagement with Process	Disengaged — presenting because required	Compliant but surface-level	Engaged and invested in the reflection	Deeply invested — this clearly matters to them

Scoring: Each criterion scored 1-4. Total: 20 points. Minimum to pass: 12/20.

Sample panel questions (choose 1-2 per participant):

- "Looking at your thinking reports — which one was the hardest to write? Why?"
- "You rated yourself a [number] on [skill]. Can you give me a real example of a time you used that skill this week?"
- "What's the thinking error you still catch yourself in most often?"
- "Read us one sentence from your impact awareness letter — a sentence that was hard to write."
- "Your self-assessment essay says [reference something specific]. Tell me more about that moment."
- "If a new cohort member asked you, 'Is FORGE worth it?' — what would you tell him?"
- "What's one skill you learned that you've actually used outside this room?"
- "Where do you still struggle the most? What's the work that's not done yet?"

Individual Feedback (10 minutes)

After all presentations, briefly share the panel's overall feedback:

Facilitator:

"I want to acknowledge what just happened in this room. Each of you stood up and shared your journey — your real journey, not a cleaned-up version. That takes courage. I've been in enough programs to know the difference between someone going through the motions and someone who's done the work. Today, I saw men who've done the work.

I'll share individual portfolio scores and panel feedback with each of you before tomorrow's session. If there are missing items, you'll know exactly what needs to be completed. For now — be proud of what you put together. That portfolio is evidence of 11 weeks of growth. It belongs to you."

Facilitator note: After this session, review each portfolio score, combine it with the knowledge check score, attendance record, peer evaluations, and your observations. Determine each participant's advancement status before Session 36. If anyone is not advancing, meet with them individually BEFORE the celebration to discuss the plan.

Closing (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Tomorrow is Session 36 — our final session of Phase 1. I want you to come with two things:

- 1. A clear head. Show up present. Don't sleepwalk through this.*
- 2. An open heart. Tomorrow we celebrate what you've accomplished, and we look ahead at what's coming.*

*One-word closing round: **What's one word for how you feel right now?**"*

Send the talking piece.

"See you tomorrow."

Session 35 Checklist

- Knowledge check scores shared with participants
- Portfolio completeness check completed for every participant
- Panel assembled (facilitator + senior mentor + additional member if available)
- Presentation rubric used for each participant
- Each participant presented (approximately 8 minutes each)

- Panel questions asked — drawing out depth, not grilling
- Overall feedback given to the group
- Individual scores and advancement decisions prepared for Session 36
- Any non-advancing participants notified privately before Session 36
- Closing circle completed

SESSION 36: Phase 1 Celebration and Phase 2

Preview

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor + any available certified FORGE mentors or staff supporters

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will: 1. Be formally recognized for completing Phase 1 of the FORGE program 2. Receive their Phase 1 Completion Certificate 3. Understand what Phase 2 requires and what it will demand of them 4. Recommit to the FORGE mission through a formal recommitment ceremony 5. Transition from "Know Yourself" to "Build Others" with clarity and conviction

Session Plan

Setup (Before participants arrive)

Set the room differently today. This is a ceremony — treat it like one. Suggestions (adapt based on what's possible in your facility): - Chairs in a circle or semicircle, not classroom-style - Certificates laid out on a table at the front — visible, organized, facing the group - Talking piece placed in the center with intention - If you can get a tablecloth, a clean surface, any small touch that makes the space feel set apart from a normal session — do it. It doesn't need to be elaborate. It needs to feel intentional. - If any guests are attending (staff, certified mentors, administration), have their seats arranged

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Come in. Sit down. Look around this circle.

Twelve weeks ago, you walked into this room as strangers. Some of you didn't want to be here. Some of you came because someone told you to check it out. Some of you came because something inside you said, 'I need something different.'

Today, you're not strangers anymore. You've sat in this circle and heard things from each other that most people never share. You've been honest when it would have been easier to lie. You've stayed when it would have been easier to quit.

*Before we do anything else — check-in round. The question: **What does it feel like to be sitting here, at the end of Phase 1?**"*

Send the talking piece. Let this round breathe. Don't rush it.

Reflection: The Journey (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I want to take you back. Week 1. You walked in and I said, 'This program is not easy. It's not a check-the-box program. You won't get through this by just showing up and sitting quietly.'

How many of you, honestly, thought about quitting at some point?"

Pause. Let hands go up. Acknowledge it.

"That's honest. Let me tell you something about the men who make it through Phase 1 — it's not the ones who never struggled. It's the ones who struggled and stayed.

Let me remind you of what you've done:

- You learned the Think-Feel-Act cycle and started catching your own thinking errors — not because I asked you to, but because you started seeing them yourself.*
- You learned to name your emotions with words more specific than 'angry' and 'fine.' You learned what's underneath the anger. You learned to breathe before you react.*
- You practiced active listening — real listening, not waiting for your turn to talk.*
- You worked through the FORGE conflict resolution model until it started to feel natural.*
- You learned problem solving — the 6-step model, consequence thinking, playing the tape forward.*
- You wrote thinking reports. Some of you dreaded them. Some of you found them. Most of you now understand why they matter.*
- You wrote an impact awareness letter. That might have been the hardest thing you've ever written. Sitting with the real harm you've caused — not to punish yourself, but to see it clearly — takes more strength than most people ever show.*
- You wrote a self-assessment essay that required you to be honest about who you are. Not who you pretend to be. Who you are.*
- You gave and received peer feedback. You heard the truth from men who know you, and you sat with it.*

That's not a class you took. That's work you did on yourself. Nobody can take that from you."

Pause. Let it sit.

Phase 1 Completion Ceremony (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now we recognize it formally.

When I call your name, I want you to stand and come forward. You'll receive your Phase 1 Completion Certificate. Before you take it, I'm going to ask you one question — the same question for everyone:

'What is the most important thing you learned about yourself in Phase 1?'

One sentence. From the heart. Then you take your certificate. Then this circle — your cohort — acknowledges you."

The ceremony:

For each participant:

1. Facilitator calls the participant's name. They stand and come forward.
2. Facilitator faces them directly.

Facilitator:

*"[Name]. You started this program on [approximate start date]. Over 12 weeks, you completed [number] thinking reports, attended [number] sessions, and committed to the work of knowing yourself. Before I hand you this certificate — one sentence: **What is the most important thing you learned about yourself in Phase 1?**"*

1. Participant answers. One sentence.
2. Facilitator responds genuinely — not with a script but with a brief, personal acknowledgment. Examples:

"That took courage to say. Hold onto it."

"I've watched you live that out. It's real."

"When you walked in here 12 weeks ago, I don't think you could have said that. The fact that you can now — that's the work."

1. Hand the certificate. Firm handshake or whatever is natural and appropriate.
2. **Group acknowledgment:** The cohort claps or offers verbal affirmation. Let the room give the moment its weight.

Facilitator note: This will take time. Don't rush it. Each person gets their moment. If a participant gets emotional, give them space. If the group gets emotional, that's exactly right. This is what it feels like to be part of something that matters.

If a participant did not meet Phase 1 requirements: You should have spoken with them individually before this session. They can still be present for the ceremony — they're still part of the cohort. Their plan for completing requirements should already be in place. Do not exclude them from the room. Do not embarrass them. When their name would come up, you can acknowledge their journey:

"[Name], you've been part of this cohort from Day 1 and your presence has mattered. You and I have talked about your plan to complete the remaining requirements, and I'm confident you'll get there. This cohort has your back."

Phase 2 Preview: "Now the Real Work Begins" (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Certificates in hand. Phase 1 complete. I hope you're proud — you should be.

Now let me tell you what's coming. And I'm going to be straight with you, because that's what I've always been:

Phase 1 was about knowing yourself. Phase 2 is about building others. And Phase 2 is harder.

Here's why: In Phase 1, the only person you had to be honest with was yourself. In Phase 2, you have to take everything you've learned and figure out how to teach it, how to facilitate it, how to use it to help someone else. And here's the hard truth — other people don't always want your help. Other people will test you, resist you, question you, push your buttons, and then ask you to still show up for them.

That's what a mentor does. A mentor shows up — even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard."

Phase 2 overview:

"Phase 2 — 'Build Others' — runs for 12 weeks, same schedule. Here's what you'll learn:

Weeks 13-14: The Mentor Identity. *What makes a good mentor. Mentor boundaries — what you do and don't do. The parallel process — you can't give what you don't have, so your self-work doesn't stop.*

Weeks 14-15: Teaching and Facilitation Skills. *How to design a lesson. How to facilitate a discussion. How to manage a group. You'll each deliver practice lessons and get feedback.*

Weeks 16: Motivational Interviewing. *How to talk to someone who doesn't want to change — without pushing, without lecturing, without giving up on them.*

Weeks 17-20: Simulation Training. *This is what makes FORGE different. You'll walk into realistic scenarios — dorm conflicts, mentee crises, boundary tests, safety situations — and respond in real time. We'll freeze the scene, coach you, and replay. By the end, you'll have handled situations most people never practice before they face them for real.*

Weeks 21-22: Restorative Practices and Life Skills Facilitation. *How to run a circle. How to have an accountability conversation. How to teach life skills topics you'll use with mentees.*

Weeks 23-24: Simulation Assessments, Co-Facilitation Practice, and the Phase 2 gate.

Phase 2 is where you become someone who doesn't just manage their own life — you become someone who can change another person's life. That's what you're training for."

Pause.

"Questions about Phase 2?"

Answer questions honestly. Common ones: - "Is it harder than Phase 1?" — "Differently hard. Phase 1 was emotionally hard because you had to face yourself. Phase 2 is skill-hard — you're learning to teach, facilitate, and mentor. Both are challenging. You're ready for it." - "What if I'm not a good teacher?" — "Nobody is when they start. That's why we practice. You'll deliver lessons, get feedback, and improve. By Week 15, you'll be teaching in front of the group." - "When do we get actual mentees?" — "Phase 3. Phase 2 is preparation. Phase 3 is where you're assigned real mentees and facilitate real sessions."

Recommitment Ceremony (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"In Week 1, you signed a Participant Commitment. You made a promise to this program and to each other. Today, I'm asking you to recommit — not because the first commitment wasn't real, but because you're a different person now than you were then. You know more. You've seen more. You understand what this program actually asks of you. So the commitment you make today carries more weight, because you make it with full knowledge.

I'm going to read the Recommitment Statement. When I'm done, I'll ask each of you to add one personal commitment — something specific to you, something you're committing to in Phase 2 that goes beyond the general pledge. Then you'll sign."

Recommitment Statement (read by facilitator — slowly, with weight):

"I, [name], having completed Phase 1 of the FORGE program, recommit to the following:

*I commit to **continued self-work** — knowing that the foundation I've built in Phase 1 requires daily maintenance. I will continue to examine my thinking, manage my emotions, and hold myself accountable.*

*I commit to **Service Over Self** — not as a slogan, but as a way of life. I will look for opportunities to serve others every day, without expectation of recognition or reward.*

*I commit to **honesty and integrity** — in this program and in every area of my life. I will speak the truth, keep my word, and align my actions with my values.*

*I commit to **the men in this circle** — my cohort. I will support their growth, hold them accountable with respect, and show up for them as I hope they will show up for me.*

*I commit to **becoming a mentor worthy of trust** — knowing that the men I will eventually mentor deserve someone who has done the work, not someone who has simply completed the program.*

*I commit to the FORGE mission: **to build a culture of peace, responsibility, and service — modeling the change I want to see in every community.**"*

Pause.

"Now — each of you, one at a time. Stand. State your name. Add one personal commitment — something specific to you and your journey. Then sign the recommitment form.

Who goes first?"

Each participant stands, states their name, adds their personal commitment, and signs. Facilitator (or Senior Mentor) signs as witness.

Examples of personal commitments participants might add: - "I commit to catching my victim stance thinking every time it comes up — because that's been my biggest pattern." - "I commit to being a father my kids can be proud of — and that starts with how I carry myself in here." - "I commit to using active listening with everyone, not just in FORGE sessions — especially with the men I don't get along with." - "I commit to never walking past a conflict I can help de-escalate."

Closing Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last round for Phase 1. I want you to do something specific. Look at the man sitting across from you. Really look at him. You've seen this person grow over 12 weeks. You've heard his story. You've given him feedback and received it from him.

The closing question — and take your time with it:

*'What does **FORGE** mean to me now — not what I thought it would be, but what it actually is?'"*

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing — after the talking piece returns):

"In Week 1, Session 1, I asked each of you to name one thing you want to be different about yourself in 9 months. I wrote down what you said."

If you kept notes from Session 1, read back what each person said. If not, reference the general themes.

"Look at how far you've come. Some of you said you wanted to control your temper. Some said you wanted to be a better father. Some said you wanted to stop making the same mistakes.

You're not there yet. Nine months isn't over. But you've built the foundation. You know yourself better now than you did 12 weeks ago. That's not a small thing — that's the hardest work most people never do.

Phase 2 starts [date]. Same time, same room. New work. Harder work. But you don't walk in as strangers anymore. You walk in as men who've earned each other's trust and earned the right to learn how to build others.

There's a saying in FORGE: 'Leadership is not granted. It is forged.' You've started the forging. Phase 2 is where it intensifies.

I'm proud of every one of you. Not because you're perfect — but because you're honest. And honesty is where everything real begins.

Service Over Self. See you in Phase 2."

Session 36 Checklist

- Room set up intentionally for ceremony (not standard classroom)
- Certificates prepared and displayed
- Guests/supporters seated (if attending)
- Opening circle completed — "What does it feel like to be here?"
- Reflection on the Phase 1 journey delivered
- Each participant recognized individually — stood, answered the question, received certificate
- Any non-advancing participants acknowledged with dignity and a clear plan
- Phase 2 overview presented — clear, honest, motivating
- Recommitment Statement read aloud
- Each participant added personal commitment and signed
- Recommitment forms collected and filed
- Closing circle completed — "What does FORGE mean to me now?"
- Week 1 goals referenced or read back
- Phase 2 start date announced

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 12

What to Watch For

Test anxiety: Some participants will be visibly nervous about the knowledge check. This is normal and sometimes reflects past negative experiences with testing — school, GED programs, or previous programs where they felt set up to fail. Reassure them without being dismissive. The test is fair. If they've done the work, they'll pass. If they struggle with reading or writing, offer to read questions aloud to them individually (accommodations are appropriate and not weakness).

Portfolio gaps: Some participants will arrive at Session 35 with incomplete portfolios. This is where your preparation matters — if you've been tracking assignments throughout Phase 1, you know who's likely to be short. Reach out to these participants before Session 35 if possible. Give them a clear list of what's missing and a deadline to complete it.

Emotional intensity during the ceremony: Session 36 is designed to be emotional. Some participants may cry. Some may get quiet. Some may deflect with humor. Let it happen. Don't redirect emotion — make space for it. Many of these men have never been recognized for anything positive. For some, this certificate may be the first tangible evidence of achievement they've held in years. Honor that.

Non-advancing participants: Handle this with extreme care. If someone didn't pass the knowledge check or has an incomplete portfolio, they should know BEFORE Session 36. Meet with them privately. Be honest and specific: "Here's what's incomplete. Here's your plan to finish. You're not being removed — you're being given more time." Do not let them be surprised during the ceremony.

Common Week 12 Challenges

"The test wasn't fair." Response: "Tell me specifically which questions you think were unfair, and we'll look at them together. If you didn't know the material, that's different from the test being unfair. Either way, you can retake it, and I'll help you prepare."

"My portfolio is missing stuff because I didn't know we'd need it." Response: "The portfolio requirements have been clear since Week 1, and I've reminded the group multiple times. But I'm not interested in blame — I'm interested in helping you finish. Here's what you need. Here's the deadline. Let's get it done."

"Phase 2 sounds too hard." Response: "Phase 1 sounded too hard 12 weeks ago. You did it anyway. Phase 2 will push you in new ways, but you're not starting from zero anymore — you're starting with a foundation. Trust the process. Trust yourself."

Participants who are emotional about the ceremony and resist showing it. Don't push. Don't say "It's okay to cry." Just be present. Some men will process this later, in their bunks, alone. That's fine. The moment still matters even if the emotion shows up later.

Grading the Knowledge Check

- Grade all tests the same evening if possible — participants should know their scores before Session 35
- For short answer questions, use the answer key as a guide, not a rigid rubric. The question is: does this person understand the concept? If yes, give credit, even if the wording isn't textbook.
- For scenario questions, look for: correct identification of the relevant skill/model, specific application (not just "I would use conflict resolution" but HOW they would use it), and awareness of complexity (acknowledging that situations aren't simple)
- Keep a record of which questions were most commonly missed — this tells you where the curriculum may need strengthening for the next cohort
- Any participant scoring 17-20 (close to passing) should be given targeted review and a retake opportunity within one week

Preparation for Phase 2

- Review Phase 2 curriculum (Weeks 13-24) in detail
- Prepare materials for Week 13: The Mentor Identity
- If Phase 3 mentors or certified FORGE mentors are available, coordinate their involvement in Phase 2 sessions (especially simulation training)
- File all Phase 1 portfolios, knowledge checks, peer evaluations, and facilitator observations in participant files
- Update attendance records — confirm each participant meets the 85% minimum
- Complete the Phase 1 cohort summary: how many started, how many completed, average knowledge check score, common strengths and gaps
- Schedule any retakes or portfolio completion deadlines for participants who need them
- Celebrate yourself. You just facilitated 36 sessions of intensive personal development work. That's not nothing.