



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 2 of 36

How Thinking Works

Sessions 4–6

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 1: Foundation — "Know Yourself"

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:

	<i>Original</i>	<i>Restructured</i>
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