



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 3 of 36

Emotional Literacy

Sessions 7–9

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 1: Foundation — "Know Yourself"

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.