



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 5 of 36

# Active Listening and Communication

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Sessions 13–15

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

*Dooly State Prison*

# FORGE Curriculum

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# Phase 1: Foundation — "Know Yourself"

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# Week 5: Active Listening and Communication

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## Week 5 Overview

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**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?"

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# SESSION 13: Active Listening

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**Day:** Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 13 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

## Learning Objectives

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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

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## Session Plan

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### 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."*

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## 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."*

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## 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.

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## 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."

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## 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."*

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## **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."*

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## 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)

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# SESSION 14: Communication Styles

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**Day:** Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 14 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

## Learning Objectives

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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

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## Session Plan

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### 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."*

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## 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."*

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## **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."

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## 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."*

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## 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."*

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## 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)

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# SESSION 15: Giving and Receiving Feedback

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**Day:** Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 15 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

## Learning Objectives

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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

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## Session Plan

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### 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.

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### 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."*

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## 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."*

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## 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."*

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## **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."*

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## 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."*

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## 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."*

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## 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)

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# FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 5

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## What to Watch For

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**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

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**"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

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- 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