



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 6 of 36

# Conflict Resolution Deep Dive

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Sessions 16–18

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 6: Conflict Resolution Deep Dive

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## Week 6 Overview

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**Purpose:** Take the FORGE conflict resolution model from concept to capability. Participants have been building skills for five weeks — cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, active listening, assertive communication. This week, they put it all together. By the end of Week 6, every participant should be able to assess a conflict's intensity, de-escalate a heated situation using specific techniques, and mediate a dispute between two other people. This is where theory becomes practice.

**Sessions This Week:** - Session 16 (Tuesday): The FORGE Conflict Resolution Model (Expanded) - Session 17 (Wednesday): De-escalation Techniques - Session 18 (Thursday): Mediation Skills

**Materials Needed:** - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - FORGE Handbooks (participants should have these — reference the conflict resolution section) - Handout or board display: "The Heat Scale" (1-10 rating chart) - Handout or board display: "FORGE 5-Step Conflict Resolution Model" - Handout or board display: "De-escalation Checklist" - Handout or board display: "Mediation Ground Rules" - 10 scenario cards for heat scale exercise (facilitator can read aloud if cards aren't available) - Space for standing role-play exercises — move chairs to the sides if needed

**Connection to Previous Weeks:** Week 2 gave them thinking tools. Week 3 gave them emotional regulation. Week 4 gave them trauma awareness. Week 5 gave them listening and communication skills. This week integrates everything. Conflict resolution is not a separate skill — it's the application of every skill they've learned so far, under pressure.

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# SESSION 16: The FORGE Conflict Resolution Model (Expanded)

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**Day:** Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 16 **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. Recite and explain the 5 steps of the FORGE Conflict Resolution Model 2. Apply specific techniques within each step 3. Use the "heat scale" to rate a conflict's intensity from 1-10 4. Match their response approach to the level of heat 5. Rate and discuss appropriate responses to 10 realistic scenarios

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in round. Think about the last conflict you witnessed or were part of — how was it handled? Scale of 1-10, how well did it go?"*

Send the talking piece. Note what participants describe — this gives you real material to reference later.

**Facilitator (after the round):**

*"Most conflicts in this environment are handled badly. That's not an insult — it's a fact. Most people don't have tools. They have reactions. This week, you get tools."*

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## Review and Bridge (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Open your handbooks to the conflict resolution section. You've seen this before. The 5-step model. But today we're going deeper than the handbook goes. We're going to break each step apart, add specific techniques to each one, and then practice applying the whole thing to real situations.*

*Before we do that — let me connect this to everything you've learned so far.*

*Week 2: Your thinking drives your behavior. In a conflict, your thinking errors will scream at you. Closed thinking: 'I'm right, they're wrong.' Power thrust: 'I'll make them stop.' Victim stance: 'They started it.' If you can't catch those in real time, you'll escalate every conflict you walk into.*

*Week 3: Your emotions will flood you. The escalation curve goes from calm to agitated to flooded. If you're flooded, you can't think. If you can't think, you can't resolve anything. Regulation comes first.*

*Week 5: If you can't listen, you can't understand what the conflict is actually about. And if you communicate aggressively, you'll pour gasoline on every fire you're trying to put out.*

*This week is where it all comes together."*

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## Instruction: The 5-Step Model — Deep Dive (35 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"You know the 5 steps. Let's go deeper."*

### STEP 1: PAUSE & POSTURE

*"This is the most important step because it determines everything that follows. If you skip this step, nothing else works.*

**Pause** means: do not react. Whatever your first impulse is — suppress it. Don't speak. Don't move forward. Don't change your facial expression. Buy yourself 3-5 seconds.

*This is where the 4-4-4 breathing technique from Week 3 earns its keep. Four seconds in. Four seconds hold. Four seconds out. You can do this without anyone noticing.*

**Posture** means: arrange your body to communicate safety, not threat. This is deliberate, not natural. - Shoulders down and relaxed (not raised and tense) - Hands visible (not in pockets, not behind your back, not balled into fists) - Open palms — the oldest signal in human history that says 'I'm not armed, I'm not a threat' - Slight angle — don't stand directly face-to-face. Turn your body 15-20 degrees to the side. Direct face-to-face position is confrontational. An angle is conversational. - Maintain comfortable distance — at least arm's length. Closer than that triggers threat response.

*Here's the thing about posture: it's not just for the other person. It actually changes YOUR brain chemistry. When you relax your shoulders and open your hands, your nervous system gets the signal that you're not in danger. Your heart rate drops. Your thinking clears. You're hacking your own stress response through body positioning.*

*If you're mediating — if you're the third party walking into someone else's conflict — Pause & Posture is how you enter the space. Don't rush in. Walk in calm. Your energy sets the tone."*

## STEP 2: NAME THE HEAT

*"Before you do anything else, acknowledge the emotional temperature. Don't pretend it's not hot. Don't jump straight to problem-solving. Name what's happening.*

*'I can see this is heated.' 'I can tell you're both frustrated right now.' 'This clearly matters to both of you.'*

*Why does this work? Because when someone is escalated, the first thing they need is to feel seen. If you walk into a conflict and start asking 'What happened?' without acknowledging that two people are about to come out of their skin, they feel like you're ignoring their reality. They'll either ignore you or escalate on you.*

*Naming the heat also gives people permission to be honest about their emotional state. In this environment, admitting you're angry is risky. Admitting you're hurt is riskier. When you say 'I can tell this is intense,' you're creating space for the truth to come out.*

*What you DON'T do: - Don't say 'Calm down.' Those two words have never in human history made anyone calm down. They make people angrier because they feel dismissed. - Don't say 'It's not that serious.' You don't get to decide what's serious to someone else. - Don't say 'You need to relax.' Same energy as 'calm down.'*

*What you DO say: - 'I can see this matters to you. I want to understand.' - 'You've got every right to be frustrated. Let's figure this out.' - 'I'm not here to dismiss what you're feeling. I'm here to help.'"*

## STEP 3: FACTS > STORIES

*"Once you've paused and acknowledged the heat, you need to separate what actually happened from the stories people are telling themselves about what happened.*

*Here's what I mean. Two guys are in a conflict. One says, 'He disrespected me in front of everybody.' That's a story. The fact might be: 'He made a comment about my shoes during chow.' The story — 'he disrespected me in front of everybody' — is an interpretation layered with emotion, ego, and assumption.*

*Your job is to get to the facts.*

*The technique: give each person 60 seconds to tell their side. Uninterrupted. Ground rules: - No insults - No name-calling - Tell me what happened — what was said, what was done — not what you think they meant by it 'I want to hear both sides. [Name], you go first. Tell me what happened — just the facts. What was said, what was done. Sixty seconds. [Other name], your turn is next, and you'll get the same time. Right now, your job is to listen.'*

*After each person speaks, reflect back the facts — not the interpretations: 'So what happened is: you were at chow, he made a comment about your shoes, and that felt disrespectful to you.'*

*This does something powerful: it strips the conflict down to its actual components. Half the time, when you lay out the facts cleanly, both parties realize the situation is smaller than they thought it was. The stories made it bigger."*

#### **STEP 4: NEEDS & OPTIONS**

*"Once you have the facts, shift the conversation from what happened to what each person needs.*

*'What do you actually need here? Not what you want to happen to him — what do you need for this to be resolved?'*

*This question changes everything. It moves people from positions ('He needs to apologize' or 'He needs to leave me alone') to interests (respect, safety, fairness).*

*Common needs underneath dorm conflicts: - Respect: 'I need to not feel disrespected.' - Safety: 'I need to feel safe in my own space.' - Fairness: 'I need things to be fair.' - Space: 'I need my boundaries respected.' -*

*Acknowledgment: 'I need him to see that what he did affected me.'*

*Once needs are on the table, generate options together: 'Okay, so you need respect, and you need acknowledgment. Let's talk about what that could look like. What are 2-3 things that would resolve this for both of you?'*

*Push for at least 2-3 options. Don't accept the first one. The first option is usually positional ('He apologizes').*

*The second and third options are usually more creative and more durable."*

#### **STEP 5: AGREEMENT & CHECK-BACK**

*"Once both parties agree on a solution, make it concrete: - Who does what? - By when? - What happens if it doesn't hold?"*

*Don't leave it vague. 'We're cool' is not an agreement. It's a handshake over an unresolved wound.*

*'So here's what we've agreed: [specific terms]. Does that work for both of you? Good. I'm going to check back with both of you tomorrow to see how it's going.'*

*The check-back is essential. Most dorm conflicts 'resolved' without a check-back resurface within 48 hours. The follow-up tells both parties: this matters, someone is paying attention, and the agreement has weight.*

*If the agreement falls apart at check-back — that's not failure. It's information. Go back to Step 3 and find what was missed."*

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### **Instruction: The Heat Scale (10 minutes)**

**Facilitator:**

*"Not every conflict is the same intensity, and your response should match the heat level. We use a 1-10 scale."*

**Write or display the Heat Scale:**

**1-3: LOW HEAT** — **Annoyances and minor friction** - Examples: TV too loud, someone borrowed your stuff without asking, a rude comment - Response: Direct, calm conversation between the parties. Usually resolves with a simple "I" statement. A mentor might not even need to be involved — the individuals should handle it themselves. - Key skill: Assertive communication

**4-6: MEDIUM HEAT** — **Real conflict, escalating emotions** - Examples: Ongoing roommate tensions, disrespect that's becoming a pattern, property disputes, broken agreements - Response: The full 5-step model. A mentor may need to step in to mediate. Both parties need to be heard. This is where most dorm conflicts live. - Key skills: Active listening, "I" statements, mediation

**7-8: HIGH HEAT** — **Serious tension, potential for violence** - Examples: Direct threats, physical posturing, crowd gathering, retaliation being planned - Response: Immediate de-escalation. Priority is preventing violence. Separation first, resolution later. Use the de-escalation techniques from Session 17. Consider whether this needs to be referred. - Key skills: De-escalation, body language, tactical empathy

**9-10: RED LINE** — **Imminent danger or beyond mentor scope** - Examples: Weapons present or mentioned, active assault, suicidal statements, gang-directed violence, sexual assault - Response: Do not attempt to resolve. Ensure your own safety. Refer to staff immediately. Your job is not to be a hero — your job is to prevent tragedy and get help. - Key skill: Knowing your limits

**Facilitator:**

"Here's the mistake people make: they treat every conflict like it's a 7 or 8, or they treat a 7 or 8 like it's a 3. Both are dangerous. Overreacting to a low-heat situation makes you look controlling. Underreacting to a high-heat situation can get someone hurt.

Matching your response to the actual heat level — that's judgment. That's what separates a trained mentor from someone who just means well."

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## Exercise: Rating the Heat (20 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

"I'm going to read 10 scenarios. For each one, I want you to rate it on the heat scale — 1 to 10 — and tell me how you'd respond. Write your rating down first, then we'll discuss. No shouting out — think before you speak."

**Read each scenario. Allow 30 seconds to write, then discuss.**

**Scenario 1:** "Your neighbor's radio is louder than it should be after lights-out. It's happened twice this week."

Expected rating: 2-3. Handle it yourself with a direct, respectful conversation.

**Scenario 2:** "Two men are arguing at the card table. One accuses the other of cheating. Voices are raised but there's no physical posturing yet."

*Expected rating: 4-5. Monitor. May need to step in if it escalates. 5-step model if you do.*

**Scenario 3:** "A man finds out someone has been telling people on the yard that he 'snitched' to a CO. He tells you he's going to 'handle it tonight.'"

*Expected rating: 7-8. This could become violent. De-escalate immediately. May need to refer depending on how specific the threat is.*

**Scenario 4:** "Two cellmates aren't speaking to each other. The tension has been building for a week. Others in the dorm are starting to pick sides."

*Expected rating: 5-6. Needs mediation before it escalates further. The fact that others are picking sides makes this urgent.*

**Scenario 5:** "Someone makes a sarcastic comment about another man's family during a group conversation. The other man stiffens up but says nothing."

*Expected rating: 3-4. Worth a check-in with the man who went silent. He may be processing or planning. The silence is more concerning than an argument would be.*

**Scenario 6:** "You see two men from different parts of the facility standing chest-to-chest in the common area. A crowd is forming."

*Expected rating: 7-8. Immediate de-escalation needed. Physical posturing plus a crowd is a volatile combination.*

**Scenario 7:** "A man tells you he heard that someone in another dorm has 'put a green light' on him."

*Expected rating: 9-10. Red line. This involves potential organized violence. Refer to staff. Do not attempt to mediate gang-directed threats.*

**Scenario 8:** "Someone borrowed your pen last week and hasn't returned it. You've asked twice."

*Expected rating: 1-2. Handle it directly. Not worth more than a simple assertive request.*

**Scenario 9:** "Two FORGE participants are in a heated argument about who's not pulling their weight on a group project. Both are raising their voices."

Expected rating: 4-5. This is within the FORGE community and needs to be resolved using program standards. Good opportunity to model the 5-step process.

**Scenario 10:** "A man approaches you, visibly shaking, and says someone threatened to stab him if he doesn't pay a debt by tomorrow."

Expected rating: 9-10. Red line. Weapon mentioned, specific threat, specific timeline. This needs to go to staff. Keep the man safe in the immediate term.

### Debrief (5 minutes):

**Facilitator:**

"Where did you disagree with each other on ratings? That's where the interesting conversations are. Reasonable people can disagree on whether something is a 5 or a 6. But if you're rating a weapon threat as a 4, or rating a pen dispute as an 8 — you need to recalibrate.

The heat scale is a thinking tool. Use it. Before you respond to a conflict, ask yourself: what's the actual number here? Then match your response to the number, not to your emotional reaction."

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### Closing Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

"Closing round. Which step of the 5-step model do you think will be hardest for you personally, and why?"

Send the talking piece.

**Facilitator (closing):**

"Homework for tomorrow: 1. Memorize the 5 steps. You should be able to recite them without looking: Pause & Posture, Name the Heat, Facts > Stories, Needs & Options, Agreement & Check-Back. 2. Journal about a past conflict that you handled poorly. Walk through it again using the 5-step model. What would you have done differently at each step?

Tomorrow we go hands-on. De-escalation techniques — body language, tone, tactical empathy, and knowing when to step back. You'll be on your feet. Come ready to move."

## Session 16 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
  - Review and bridge to previous weeks' skills
  - 5-step model taught in depth (Pause & Posture, Name the Heat, Facts > Stories, Needs & Options, Agreement & Check-Back)
  - Specific techniques within each step explained with examples
  - Heat scale introduced and explained (1-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-10 ranges)
  - 10 scenarios rated and discussed
  - Disagreements on ratings explored productively
  - Closing circle completed
  - Homework assigned (memorize 5 steps + journal on past conflict)
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# SESSION 17: De-escalation Techniques

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**Day:** Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 17 **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. Demonstrate de-escalation body language (stance, hands, distance, eye contact) 2. Adjust tone and pace to lower the emotional temperature 3. Use tactical empathy to acknowledge without agreeing 4. Redirect a conversation from positions to interests 5. Identify red-line situations and explain when to step back and refer

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Quick check-in. Recite the 5 steps of the FORGE conflict resolution model. I'm going around the room and I want to hear them. No handbooks."*

Go around the circle. Each person recites the 5 steps. If someone stumbles, the person next to them helps. By the end of the round, everyone should have it.

*"Good. Today we're going to focus on what happens when the heat is at 7 or 8. When someone is escalated. When violence is on the table but hasn't happened yet. This is the moment that separates a trained mentor from a bystander."*

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## Instruction: De-escalation — Why It Works (5 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"De-escalation is not about convincing an angry person that they shouldn't be angry. It doesn't work that way. You can't argue someone out of an emotional state. Logic doesn't reach a flooded brain.*

*De-escalation works by changing the environment — your body, your voice, your energy — so that the other person's nervous system starts to downregulate. You're not controlling them. You're giving their brain different inputs than the ones fueling the escalation.*

*Think about it like this: when someone is escalated, their amygdala is in charge. The thinking brain has gone offline. Everything looks like a threat. If your body language, your tone, and your words communicate 'I'm not a threat, I see you, I'm here to help' — their brain starts to get the signal that this isn't a combat situation. Their heart rate drops. Their vision widens. The thinking brain starts to come back online.*

*That's the science. Here's the practice."*

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## Instruction: Body Language in De-escalation (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Your body speaks louder than your words. When someone is escalated, they're reading your body before they process a single word you say. If your body says 'fight,' they'll fight. If your body says 'safe,' they have a chance to come down.*

*Stand up. I'm going to walk you through de-escalation posture."*

### Have everyone stand. Demonstrate each element.

**Stance:** *"Feet shoulder-width apart. Weight balanced. Not leaning forward — that's aggressive. Not leaning back — that looks scared. Balanced. Grounded. Turn your body slightly to the side — 15-20 degrees. Never stand directly squared up. Square is confrontational. The angle says 'conversation,' not 'confrontation.' Try it."*

*Participants practice the angled stance.*

**Hands:** *"Hands visible at all times. Down at your sides, palms slightly forward. Or raised gently to about chest level, palms out — the universal 'I come in peace' gesture. Never: hands in pockets (you're hiding something), arms crossed (you're closed off), fists clenched (you're ready to fight), pointing (you're accusing). Watch."*

*Demonstrate each wrong way, then the right way. Have participants practice.*

**Distance:** "Maintain at least arm's length. If someone is escalated, give them MORE space, not less. Crowding someone who's already activated is like cornering a trapped animal — they'll come at you.

If they move toward you, step back calmly. Don't hold your ground like you're proving something. Creating space is not retreating — it's strategic. It gives them room to think and it keeps you safe."

**Eye contact:** "Steady but not hard. You're looking at them to show you're present and paying attention — not staring them down. If someone is highly escalated, you can soften your gaze slightly. Look at the bridge of their nose instead of directly in their eyes. It reads as eye contact without the intensity.

If they break eye contact, don't chase it. Let them look away. Sometimes people need to look away to regulate."

**Facial expression:** "Neutral to warm. Not blank — blank looks like you don't care. Not smiling — that looks like you're not taking it seriously. Slight warmth. Concern. The face of someone who gives a damn but isn't scared."

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## Instruction: Tone and Pace (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

"Sit back down. Let's talk about your voice, because your voice is a de-escalation instrument.

When someone is escalated, everything speeds up — their speech, their heartbeat, their breathing. If you match their speed and volume, you join the escalation. If you deliberately go slower and softer, you pull them in your direction.

This is called **spacing down**.

**Volume:** Drop your voice below theirs. Not to a whisper — that's weird. But noticeably lower. If they're at a 7 in volume, you're at a 4. Human brains unconsciously mirror the volume around them. If you go lower, they usually follow.

**Speed:** Slow your speech by about 30%. Put... pauses... between... your sentences. When you slow down, their brain has to slow down to track you. It's like downshifting a car.

**Pitch:** Lower your pitch. High-pitched voices communicate stress and urgency. A deeper, steady tone communicates calm and authority. You're not doing a bass voice — you're just settling into the lower range of your natural register.

Let me demonstrate."

## Demonstrate two versions of the same statement:

**Version 1 (fast, loud, high):** "Hey, you need to stop right now, this isn't going anywhere good, you need to think about what you're doing!"

**Version 2 (slow, low, steady):** "Hey... I hear you. I can see this is real for you. Let's talk about it."

"Same intent. Completely different energy. Which one would reach you if you were heated?"

## Instruction: Tactical Empathy (15 minutes)

### **Facilitator:**

*"Tactical empathy is a term from crisis negotiation. It means: showing someone that you understand their feelings and perspective — even when you don't agree with what they're doing.*

*This is not about being soft. Hostage negotiators use tactical empathy. They're not agreeing with the hostage-taker. They're saying 'I understand why you feel that way' so the person feels heard enough to start talking instead of acting.*

*In your world, tactical empathy sounds like this:"*

***Situation: A man is furious because he says his cellie stole from him. He's pacing, fists clenched.***

*Bad response: 'Calm down, man. It's probably not that serious.' (This dismisses his feelings. He'll escalate.)*

*Bad response: 'Yeah, he probably did steal it. That's messed up.' (This takes sides and validates potential retaliation.)*

*Tactical empathy: 'If someone stole from you, I understand why you're angry. That's your property. That matters. I want to help you figure this out without making things worse for yourself.'*

*Notice what happened: - You validated his feeling: 'I understand why you're angry.' - You validated his concern: 'That's your property. That matters.' - You didn't take sides on the facts: 'If someone stole' — not 'he definitely stole.' - You shifted toward resolution: 'I want to help you figure this out.' - You introduced consequence awareness: 'without making things worse for yourself.'"*

***Another example: A man is angry because a CO disrespected him in front of the dorm.***

*Tactical empathy: 'Being talked to like that in front of people — yeah, I get it. That eats at you. Anybody would feel some type of way about that. Let me ask you something though — what's the move that protects you here? Not what feels good in the moment, but what actually protects your situation.'*

*You acknowledged his pain. You validated it. Then you redirected toward his self-interest. That last part — 'what protects your situation' — is powerful because it engages his thinking brain. He has to actually consider consequences instead of just reacting."*

### **Facilitator:**

*"The key phrases to memorize: - 'I can see why you'd feel that way.' - 'That makes sense.' - 'Anybody in your shoes would be frustrated.' - 'I hear you. Let me make sure I understand.' - 'What do you need right now?'*

*These phrases buy time, build rapport, and lower heat. Use them until they're second nature."*

## Instruction: The Redirect (10 minutes)

### **Facilitator:**

*"The redirect is what you use when someone is stuck in a loop — repeating the same grievance, escalating themselves, spiraling. They keep going back to the same point: 'He disrespected me. He disrespected me. He disrespected me.'*

*Looping happens because the person doesn't feel heard. So the first move is always to validate: 'I hear you. He said something that crossed a line. I get that.'*

*But if they keep looping after validation, you redirect. You shift the conversation from the problem to the solution. From what happened to what happens next.*

*Redirect phrases: - 'I hear you on what happened. Now help me understand — what would resolution look like for you?' - 'If you could wave a magic wand and fix this, what would that look like?' - 'What outcome are you looking for here?' - 'What's the best-case scenario you'd accept?'*

*The redirect works because it gives the person a new job. Instead of replaying the offense, they're now thinking about what they want. That's a completely different cognitive process. It pulls them out of the emotional loop and into problem-solving mode.*

*One warning: don't redirect too early. If you try to redirect before someone feels heard, they'll feel dismissed and escalate. Validate first. Redirect second."*

## Instruction: Red Lines (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

"There are situations where your job as a mentor is NOT to resolve the conflict. Your job is to step back and refer. We talked about these on the heat scale — 9s and 10s. Let's be specific about what they are."

**Red Line 1: Weapons** "If a weapon is mentioned, seen, or suspected — this is beyond your scope. You are not law enforcement. You are not security. A mentor with good intentions and a sharp object pointed at him is just a target.

What you do: Remove yourself from immediate danger. Do not attempt to disarm or negotiate. Report to staff. If someone tells you they have a weapon for 'protection,' that's still a red line. 'I hear you, and I understand you feel you need it. But I can't know about a weapon and not act on it. That's the agreement I made when I joined FORGE. Let's figure out a way to address your safety that doesn't put everyone at risk.'"

**Red Line 2: Direct threats of serious violence** "Not 'I'm frustrated' or 'I could punch something.' Those are expressions of emotion. A red line is: 'I'm going to hurt him. Tonight.' Specific target. Specific intent. Specific timeline. If you hear that, you need to involve staff."

**Red Line 3: Gang-directed conflict** "Gang dynamics operate on rules that FORGE does not have the authority or ability to override. If a conflict is gang-related, attempting to mediate puts you in danger and may make the situation worse. Recognize it. Step back. Refer."

**Red Line 4: Suicidal or self-harm statements** "If someone tells you they're thinking about hurting themselves or ending their life, this is a mental health crisis. You stay present. You listen. You do NOT leave them alone. And you get help. This is not a mentoring conversation — this is a safety situation."

**Red Line 5: Sexual assault or coercion** "If you become aware that someone is being sexually assaulted or coerced, this requires immediate staff involvement. Do not attempt to confront the perpetrator."

### Facilitator:

"Knowing your limits is not weakness. It's wisdom. A mentor who thinks he can handle everything is a mentor who's going to get himself or someone else hurt. The bravest thing you can do in a red-line situation is swallow your pride and get help.

If any of this feels unclear — if you're not sure whether something crosses a red line — err on the side of referring. It's better to refer unnecessarily than to not refer when someone is in danger."

## Exercise: Standing De-escalation Practice (20 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"On your feet. We're going to practice. Pair up.*

**Round 1: Body language only. No words.** *Partner A: You're the escalated person. You're angry. Show it with your body — tense posture, hard eyes, invading space. Don't touch anyone, but make it real. Partner B: You're the de-escalator. Use body language only to communicate calm. Stance, hands, distance, eye contact, facial expression. See if you can shift your partner's energy without saying a word.*

*Go for 2 minutes. Then switch."*

*Run Round 1. Facilitator circulates and coaches.*

**Round 2: Add voice.** *"Same setup, but now Partner B can speak. Use the tone and pace techniques: lower, slower, steady. Use tactical empathy phrases. Don't try to solve anything — just bring the temperature down.*

*Partner A, you can respond. Stay in character — you're heated. Don't make it easy, but don't be impossible either. If your partner is doing it right, let yourself come down gradually.*

*Three minutes. Then switch."*

*Run Round 2. Facilitator circulates and coaches.*

**Round 3: Full scenario.** *"I'm going to give you a scenario. Partner A is the escalated person. Partner B uses everything — posture, tone, tactical empathy, redirect. Partner A, play it real. Partner B, work the steps.*

*Scenario: Partner A just found out someone has been talking about his family on the yard. He's furious and says he's going to go find the person right now. Partner B walks up and sees his energy."*

*Run Round 3. Five minutes. Then debrief.*

### Debrief (5 minutes):

*"What worked? What didn't? What happened in your body when your partner started using de-escalation on you? Did you feel the shift?"*

*Allow 3-4 people to share.*

*"That shift you felt — when someone's calm energy started to change your energy — that's what you're going to give to every heated situation you walk into. It's not magic. It's skill. And it gets better with practice."*

## Closing Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Closing round. What's one thing from today's session that you want to make sure you remember when it matters?"*

Send the talking piece.

**Facilitator (closing):**

*"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Practice your de-escalation posture tonight. Stand in front of a mirror if you can. Check your stance, your hands, your expression. Get comfortable in that body position so it becomes automatic. 2. Journal: Write about a time you were escalated and someone — or something — brought you down. What did they do? What worked? If you can't think of a person, what did you do yourself that helped? Tomorrow we learn mediation — how to step into someone else's conflict as a neutral third party. That's the hardest skill of the week. Rest up."*

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## Session 17 Checklist

- Opening circle completed — 5-step model recitation check
- De-escalation science explained (amygdala, nervous system)
- Body language taught and practiced (stance, hands, distance, eye contact, face)
- Tone and pace techniques taught with demonstration
- Tactical empathy explained with examples
- Key phrases provided and discussed
- The redirect explained with examples
- Red lines covered clearly (weapons, violence threats, gang dynamics, self-harm, sexual assault)
- Standing practice completed (3 rounds — body only, body+voice, full scenario)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (posture practice + journal on being de-escalated)

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# SESSION 18: Mediation Skills

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**Day:** Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 18 **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 what a neutral third party means and what it does not mean 2. Distinguish between mediating and taking sides 3. Set and enforce ground rules for a mediation 4. Manage a mediation when both parties are escalated 5. Conduct a basic triad mediation from beginning to end

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in. What did you notice about your own body language since yesterday? Did you catch yourself using de-escalation posture or catch yourself doing the opposite?"*

Send the talking piece.

*"Today's the day you put it all together. You've learned to listen. You've learned to communicate assertively. You've learned the 5-step model. You've practiced de-escalation. Now we add the hardest piece: stepping into someone ELSE'S conflict as a neutral third party. Mediation."*

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## Instruction: The Neutral Third Party (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Let's define what 'neutral' means and what it doesn't mean.*

**Neutral means:** - You don't have a stake in the outcome - You don't decide who's right and who's wrong - You don't impose a solution - You treat both parties with equal respect and equal air time - Your goal is resolution, not judgment

**Neutral does NOT mean:** - You don't care - You have no opinion - You tolerate abuse or threats during the mediation - You pretend both sides are equally valid when one person is clearly doing something harmful - You stay 'neutral' on Code of Conduct violations

*Here's where it gets tricky. Sometimes one person IS more in the wrong than the other. As a mediator, you can see it clearly. The temptation is to take the side of the person who's right and tell the other person they need to fix it. But the moment you take sides, you lose your power as a mediator. The person you sided against stops trusting you. The mediation is over.*

*Instead, your job is to guide the conversation so that the truth becomes visible to both parties. Ask the right questions. Reflect what you're hearing. Summarize. When one person's position doesn't hold up to facts, it usually becomes clear to everyone in the room — including the person holding it — without you having to announce it.*

*That's the art. You're not the judge. You're the mirror."*

*"There's one exception. If someone violates a ground rule during the mediation — threatens, insults, intimidates — you're not neutral about that. You enforce the rules. 'We agreed: no insults. If that happens again, we pause the conversation.' That's not taking sides. That's maintaining the container."*

## Instruction: Mediation vs. Taking Sides (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"One of the biggest risks for a mediator — especially in this environment — is triangulation. Triangulation is when two people in conflict each come to you separately, and each one tries to get you on their side. If you let that happen, you're no longer a mediator — you're a weapon.*

*How to avoid triangulation:*

*If Person A comes to you and says 'I need you to talk to Person B about what he did' — don't go to Person B as Person A's advocate. Instead:*

*'I hear that you're frustrated with B. If you want, I can help the two of you have a conversation about it. But I won't go to him on your behalf — that puts me in the middle in a way that doesn't help either of you. Let's set up a time where all three of us sit down.'*

*If Person B then comes to you separately — same thing:*

*'A came to me about the same issue. I'm not taking sides. What I'd like to do is bring both of you together so we can work through it. Are you willing to do that?'*

*This is hard because people will pressure you. 'Just tell him...' 'Can you just say something to her...' The answer is always: 'I'll help you both, but I won't be a messenger. Let's have the conversation together.'*

*Triangulation destroys trust. Once people realize you can be used as a weapon, everyone stops trusting you — including the person who asked you to take sides."*

## Instruction: Setting Ground Rules (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Before a mediation begins, you set ground rules. Non-negotiable. Both parties agree before a single word about the conflict is spoken.*

*Here are the standard FORGE mediation ground rules:"*

*"1. **One person speaks at a time.** When it's not your turn, you listen. If you interrupt, I'll stop you.*

*1. **No insults, no name-calling, no threats.** Describe what happened and how it affected you. Attack the problem, not the person.*

*2. **Speak for yourself.** 'I felt...' not 'Everyone thinks you...' Don't bring other people into it unless they were directly involved.*

*3. **Be honest.** If we're going to solve this, it starts with the truth. Both of you.*

*4. **Stay until we're done or we agree to pause.** Don't walk out in the middle. If you need a break, say so, and we'll take one. But don't storm off — that just leaves the wound open.*

*5. **What's said here stays here.** This is a private conversation. It doesn't become dorm gossip."*

### Facilitator:

*"How you set these rules matters. You don't hand out a list. You look both people in the eye and say:*

*'Before we start, I need both of you to agree to some ground rules. These aren't optional — they're what make this work. Can I go through them?'*

*Then state each one and get verbal agreement: 'Can you commit to that? Both of you?'*

*If someone won't agree to the ground rules — the mediation doesn't happen. It's that simple. You can't mediate without a container."*

**Instruction: Managing Two Escalated Parties (15 minutes)**

**Facilitator:**

*"The hardest mediation scenario is when both people are heated. Not just annoyed — heated. Both feel wronged. Both are activated. Both are looking at you like 'You better fix this.'*

*Here's how to handle it."*

**Step 1: Separate first, mediate second.**

*"If both parties are at a 7 or above on the heat scale, don't start the mediation. Their thinking brains are offline. Nothing productive will happen.*

*'I can see you're both upset, and I want to help work this out. But right now, I think we all need a few minutes before we can have a real conversation. Let's take 10 minutes — I'll come find both of you and we'll sit down.'*

*Separation gives both people time to regulate. Use that time productively — check on each person individually, use tactical empathy, let them vent to you briefly. But do NOT start the mediation one-on-one — that becomes triangulation."*

**Step 2: When you sit down together, acknowledge the heat.**

*"I know you're both still feeling this. That's because it matters. I'm not going to pretend it doesn't. But here's what I need from both of you: give this process a chance. If we can get through the next 20 minutes with honesty and respect, there's a good chance we can resolve this. Are you willing to try?'*

*That question — 'Are you willing to try?' — is powerful. It gives them agency. They're choosing to participate, not being forced. That small sense of control helps people regulate."*

**Step 3: Go to the person who's MORE escalated first.**

*"Counter-intuitive, but effective. The person with more heat needs to go first, because they're the bigger risk. If you make them wait while the other person talks, they'll be boiling over internally and won't hear anything.*

*'I want to hear from both of you. [Name of more escalated person], tell me what happened from your perspective. Remember the ground rules — no insults, just what happened and how it affected you.'*

*Let them speak. Reflect and summarize. Then turn to the other person: 'Now I need to hear your side. Same rules.'"*

**Step 4: Find the overlap.**

*"After both sides have spoken, find the common ground — even if it's small:*

*'Here's what I'm hearing from both of you. You both feel disrespected. You both want this resolved. You just see what happened differently. Let's start with what you agree on and work from there.'*

*The overlap is the foundation for resolution. Build on it."*

**Step 5: If it stalls, take a break.**

*"If the conversation goes in circles or re-escalates, call a pause. It's not failure.*

*'I think we've made some progress, but we're starting to go in circles. Let's take a break and come back to this at [specific time]. Both of you think about what resolution would look like for you. I'll check in with both of you before we meet again.'*

*Breaks are strategic. They give people time to process, consult their better judgment, and calm down. Many conflicts are resolved between mediation sessions, not during them."*

## Exercise: Triad Mediation Practice (30 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Get into groups of three. Each group needs a mediator and two parties in conflict. Here's your scenario:*

**Scenario: The Shared Space** *Person A and Person B share a common area in the dorm. Person A likes to work out in the space in the early morning. Person B says the noise wakes him up and he's asked Person A to stop multiple times. Person A says the space is for everyone and he has a right to use it. Last night, Person B moved Person A's workout stuff out of the area without asking. Person A found it and they got into a loud argument that woke up the whole dorm. Other people are now mad at both of them.*

*Both parties are at about a 5-6 on the heat scale. Nobody's about to swing, but they're frustrated, and this has been building for weeks.*

*Mediator: Run the full mediation. Set ground rules. Hear both sides. Find the overlap. Guide toward a resolution. Agree on a specific solution and plan a check-back.*

*Parties: Play it real. Don't make it too easy, but don't be impossible either. You want a solution — you just can't see one right now.*

*You have 10 minutes. Go."*

**Run the exercise.** Facilitator moves between groups, observing and noting strong moments and coaching opportunities.

**After 10 minutes, rotate roles. New scenario:**

**Scenario: The Rumor** *Person A heard from someone else that Person B has been telling people on the yard that Person A isn't trustworthy. Person A confronted Person B about it. Person B says it was taken out of context — he was telling someone else about a situation, not attacking Person A's character. Person A doesn't believe him. The tension has been building for three days, and mutual friends are starting to feel uncomfortable.*

*Both parties are at about a 6 on the heat scale.*

**10 minutes. Then rotate one more time with a third scenario:**

**Scenario: The Debt** *Person A lent Person B two books of stamps three weeks ago with an agreement that Person B would pay back when his commissary came in. Commissary came and went. Person B hasn't paid. Person A is saying Person B is dishonest. Person B says he had unexpected expenses and planned to pay next week. Person A says 'that's what you said last week.'*

*Heat scale: 5. But trust is broken, and this is about more than stamps — it's about integrity.*

**Debrief (8 minutes):**

**Facilitator:**

*"Mediators — what was hardest about staying neutral?"*

Allow responses.

*"Parties — what did your mediator do that actually helped you? What didn't work?"*

Allow responses.

*"What did you notice about how it felt to have someone guide the conversation instead of it being a free-for-all?"*

**Facilitator:**

*"Mediation is a craft. You're not going to master it in one session. But here's what I want you to take away: the structure works. Ground rules. Hearing both sides. Finding the overlap. Moving toward a specific agreement. Check-back. Every time you follow that process, you give a conflict the best chance of resolution.*

*And here's the deeper truth: when you mediate, you're not just solving one problem. You're teaching both parties that conflicts can be resolved without violence, without retaliation, without grudges. You're changing the culture one conversation at a time. That's what a FORGE mentor does."*

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## Closing Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Final round for the week. Complete this sentence: 'The most important thing I learned about conflict this week is...'"*

Send the talking piece.

**Facilitator (closing):**

*"Homework for next week: 1. Write a reflection in your journal: What is the hardest part of staying neutral for you personally? Where does your bias show up? 2. Practice the 5-step model mentally. When you see a conflict this week — even a small one — walk through the steps in your head. What would you do at each step? 3. Review your journal entries from the past 5 weeks. Next week we shift gears. We move from skills to character — accountability and integrity. That's a different kind of challenge. It's not about what you can do. It's about who you are.*

*Good work this week. This was hard material and you showed up for it. See you Tuesday."*

## Session 18 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Neutral third party defined (what it means and doesn't mean)
- Triangulation explained and prevention strategies given
- Mediation ground rules taught (6 rules)
- Process for setting and enforcing ground rules modeled
- Managing two escalated parties covered (5-step process)
- Triad mediation exercise completed (3 rounds with role rotation)
- Debrief discussion held
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (neutrality reflection + mental practice + journal review)

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# FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 6

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## What to Watch For

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**Escalation in exercises:** Role-play can get real fast. Some participants will tap into actual frustrations during the exercises. That's okay — it makes the practice more authentic. But monitor closely. If you see someone losing the "play" aspect and getting genuinely activated, pause the exercise: "Let's stop here for a second. I want to check in. Are you still in the exercise, or is this hitting something real? Both are okay — I just want to make sure we're taking care of you."

**Natural mediators vs. natural escalators:** You'll identify both this week. Some participants will show a natural gift for staying calm and finding resolution. Others will struggle to stay neutral and will default to taking sides or getting involved in the conflict's energy. Both need coaching. The natural mediators need to be pushed on their weak spots (they often avoid hard truths to keep the peace). The natural escalators need patient skill-building, not criticism.

**Physical safety during standing exercises:** When participants practice de-escalation standing up, ensure no one actually makes physical contact. Set the rule clearly: "No touching. No grabbing. This is about voice and body language, not physical intervention. If someone touches you, step back and say 'We don't do that here.'"

**Red line resistance:** Some participants will resist the idea that there are situations they can't handle. This often comes from a place of genuine care — they don't want to "abandon" someone by referring. Address it: "Referring is not abandoning. Referring is getting someone the help they actually need instead of the help you wish you could give. If your friend was having a heart attack, you wouldn't try to perform surgery — you'd call for help. Same principle."

## Common Week 6 Challenges

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**"The 5-step model is too structured for real life."** Response: "You're right that real conflict doesn't pause while you go through steps on a checklist. But that's not how the model works. The model lives in your head. You internalize the steps so they become instinct. In the moment, you're not thinking 'Step 3: Facts greater than Stories.' You're thinking 'I need to understand what actually happened before I can help.' The model gives your instincts a structure to follow."

**"Staying neutral is impossible when one person is clearly wrong."** Response: "Your job isn't to pretend both sides are equal. Your job is to guide the conversation so the truth becomes visible to both people. If one person is clearly in the wrong, the facts will show that — you don't have to announce it. When you take sides, you lose the

person who needs to hear the truth most. They stop listening to you because you've become the other person's advocate."

**"What if de-escalation doesn't work?"** Response: "Sometimes it doesn't. Some people are beyond the reach of de-escalation in the moment — they're too flooded, too committed to their course of action, or they have decided violence is happening regardless. If your best de-escalation effort isn't working — leave. Get help. You cannot de-escalate someone who has already decided. Your safety matters. FORGE needs you whole."

**Participants who are too aggressive in role-play:** Some men will enjoy playing the escalated person a little too much. If the role-play stops being productive and starts being about domination, redirect: "Remember — the goal of this exercise is to practice de-escalation, not to prove you can't be de-escalated. If you make it impossible for your partner to practice, nobody learns anything."

## Preparation for Week 7

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- Review the MRT (Moral Reconciliation Therapy) framework for accountability content — this informs Session 19
- Prepare the accountability spectrum visual (denial → minimization → blame-shifting → partial ownership → full accountability)
- Prepare the 4 ethical dilemma scenarios for Session 20 — make them relevant to prison life, not abstract philosophy
- Read through the impact awareness letter instructions carefully — Session 21 involves heavy emotional work
- Consider whether a Senior Mentor is available to share their own accountability journey as a model in Session 19. Personal testimony from someone who's done the work is more powerful than any lecture.
- Have extra tissues and water available for Session 21. The impact awareness letter can be emotionally activating.
- Review each participant's engagement level over the past 6 weeks. Week 7 asks for deep honesty — participants who haven't built trust with the group may struggle. Consider individual check-ins before Tuesday with anyone you're concerned about.