



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 7 of 36

Accountability and Integrity

Sessions 19–21

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 1: Foundation — "Know Yourself"

Week 7: Accountability and Integrity

Week 7 Overview

Purpose: Move from skills to character. The first six weeks gave participants tools — cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, communication, conflict resolution. This week asks a harder question: Who are you, really? Accountability and integrity are not skills you learn. They're choices you make — repeatedly, especially when no one is watching. By the end of this week, every participant should have looked honestly at where they fall on the accountability spectrum, confronted the difference between who they want to be and who they've actually been, and begun the difficult work of acknowledging the full impact of their actions.

Sessions This Week: - Session 19 (Tuesday): Personal Accountability - Session 20 (Wednesday): Integrity Under Pressure - Session 21 (Thursday): Making Amends and Moving Forward

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Handout or board display: "The Accountability Spectrum" (denial → full ownership) - Handout or board display: "The 4 Tests of Integrity" - Ethical dilemma scenario cards (4 scenarios — facilitator can read aloud) - Impact awareness letter instructions (1 per participant — or write on board) - Extra pens and paper for Session 21 (some participants may need fresh pages) - Water and tissues available for Session 21 (this session can be emotionally intense)

Connection to Previous Weeks: Weeks 2-6 built self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Week 7 builds character. A man with skills but no integrity is dangerous — he knows how to manipulate. A man with integrity but no skills is limited — he means well but can't execute. FORGE develops both. This week is about the integrity side.

Important Note for Facilitators: This is the most emotionally demanding week so far. Session 21 in particular — the impact awareness letter — can surface deep pain, grief, shame, and remorse. Be prepared for emotional responses. Review the "Common Challenges" section at the end of this document before the week begins.

SESSION 19: Personal Accountability

Day: Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 19 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define personal accountability and distinguish it from self-punishment 2. Identify the 5 levels of the accountability spectrum 3. Honestly assess where they currently fall on the spectrum 4. Explain the difference between guilt and shame and why it matters 5. Write an accountability statement about a past harm without excuses or minimization

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. **Be honest: On a scale of 1 to 10, how accountable are you — really — for the choices that brought you to this place? Don't give me the answer you think I want. Give me the honest number.**"*

Send the talking piece. Don't comment on individual answers. Just listen and note where people are.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you for that. Some of you said high numbers. Some said lower ones. The honest answer is the right answer — wherever you are is where we start.

This week is different from everything we've done so far. We've spent six weeks building skills. This week, we're looking at character. And the foundation of character is accountability."

Instruction: What Accountability Is and Isn't (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Let me start by telling you what accountability is NOT, because most people have a distorted relationship with it. **Accountability is NOT self-punishment.** It's not beating yourself up. It's not 'I'm a terrible person and I deserve everything bad that happens to me.' That's shame wearing a costume. It doesn't help anyone — not you, not the people you've harmed.*

***Accountability is NOT a performance.** It's not saying 'I take full responsibility' in front of a parole board because you know that's what they want to hear, while privately thinking the system is rigged and you got a raw deal. Words without belief are just noise.*

***Accountability is NOT an exchange.** 'I admitted what I did, so now I should get something for it.' That's not accountability — that's a transaction. Real accountability doesn't come with a receipt.*

***Accountability is NOT selective.** 'I take responsibility for the assault, but the stuff that led up to it wasn't my fault.' Accountability means owning your part — ALL of your part. Not just the pieces you're comfortable with."*

Pause.

"So what IS accountability?"

Accountability is the honest acknowledgment that your choices created harm — to yourself, to others, and to your community — combined with a genuine commitment to behave differently.

That's it. Two parts: honest acknowledgment and genuine commitment. Most people get stuck on the first part. Some people can acknowledge the harm but never actually change. Both pieces matter.

*Here's the part nobody tells you: **accountability is liberation.** I know that sounds wrong. How can owning the worst things you've done make you feel free? Because as long as you're denying, minimizing, or blaming, you're carrying the weight of a lie. The lie takes energy to maintain. It distorts how you see yourself and how you see the world. When you finally put it down — when you say 'I did that, it caused real harm, and I'm choosing a different path' — the weight lifts. Not the consequences. The weight.*

You'll still be here. Your time doesn't change. But YOU change. And that changes everything else."

Instruction: The Accountability Spectrum (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Accountability isn't a switch you flip from off to on. It's a spectrum. Most people move along it over time. Let me show you the five levels."

Write or display the spectrum:

Level 1: DENIAL "I didn't do it.' 'It wasn't me.' 'They've got the wrong guy.'

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge that the event even happened, or that you were involved. Some denial is about legal strategy — you were told not to admit anything. But when denial becomes your internal reality — when you've convinced yourself that you genuinely didn't do what you did — that's a problem. You can't change something you won't admit exists.

How it sounds in the dorm: 'I shouldn't even be in here.' 'The system set me up.' 'My lawyer screwed me.'

Sometimes these things are partially true. The system IS broken. Lawyers DO fail. But if those statements are your entire story — if there's no room for 'and I also made choices that put me here' — you're in denial."

Level 2: MINIMIZATION "It wasn't that serious.' 'Nobody really got hurt.' 'It was just...'

Minimization acknowledges that something happened but shrinks it. It makes the harm smaller than it was. 'I just sold a little weed.' 'We just got into a fight.' 'She was fine afterward.' The word 'just' is the biggest red flag in the English language when it comes to accountability. It's a verbal eraser.

Minimization protects the ego. If the harm was small, then you're not really a person who did something terrible. You're a person who made a small mistake. The problem is, the people who were harmed don't experience it as small."

Level 3: BLAME-SHIFTING "He started it.' 'She made me do it.' 'I had no choice.' 'If he hadn't done X, I wouldn't have done Y.'

Blame-shifting acknowledges the event and even acknowledges harm, but assigns the cause to someone else. 'He disrespected me, so I had to...' No. He disrespected you. That's a fact. What you did in response — that was your choice. He didn't reach inside your brain and move your fist. You decided. Owning the decision is the hardest part, because the moment you own it, you can't hide behind the other person anymore.

In this environment, blame-shifting is a survival strategy. If everything is someone else's fault, then you don't have to face yourself. But you also can't change."

Level 4: PARTIAL OWNERSHIP "I messed up, but...' 'I take responsibility for my part, but he...'

Partial ownership is progress. The person acknowledges their role. But the 'but' takes some of it back. Every word after 'but' erases what came before it. 'I'm sorry, but you made me angry.' That's not an apology. That's a disguised accusation.

Partial ownership is the place where most people get stuck. It's comfortable. You've admitted enough to feel good about yourself without having to fully face what you've done. It looks like accountability on the surface.

Underneath, it's still protecting the ego."

Level 5: FULL ACCOUNTABILITY "I did this. It caused this harm. There is no excuse. I am committed to being different.'

Full accountability has no 'but.' No conditions. No qualifiers. It doesn't mean the other person was an angel. It doesn't mean the system is fair. It doesn't mean your circumstances didn't matter. It means you take ownership of YOUR CHOICES within those circumstances.

'I grew up in violence, I was addicted, I had no support — AND I chose to rob that man. Both things are true. My background explains how I got there. It doesn't excuse what I did. I caused harm. I own that.'

Full accountability is the hardest thing in this program. It's also the most transformative. The men who reach Level 5 — who can say it, mean it, and live it — are the men who become the strongest mentors. Because they've faced themselves completely, and they're still standing."

Pause. Let it sink in.

Facilitator:

"I want you to be honest with yourself right now. Where are you on this spectrum? Not where you want to be. Not where you think you should be. Where you actually are.

Take a minute. Write down the number — 1 through 5 — in your journal. Nobody has to share. This is between you and the page."

One minute of silence while participants write.

"Wherever you are is where you start. There's no judgment in this room for being at a 2 or a 3. There's only judgment if you stay there and pretend it's a 5. Growth means movement. Not perfection."

Instruction: Guilt vs. Shame (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There's a reason people get stuck on the accountability spectrum. And that reason has a name: shame.

Let me explain the difference between guilt and shame, because understanding this distinction might be the most important thing you learn today.

Guilt says: 'I did something bad.' Shame says: 'I am bad.'

Read those again. They look similar. They feel similar. But they are fundamentally different, and they lead to opposite outcomes.

Guilt is about behavior. 'I did something bad.' The focus is on the action. The action is separate from who you are. You did something that caused harm. That action can be owned, repaired, and changed. Guilt is painful — it should be. But guilt motivates change, because it says 'I did something that doesn't align with who I want to be, and I can do differently.'

Shame is about identity. 'I am bad.' The focus is on the self. The harm isn't something you did — it's who you are. If you're a bad person, there's nothing to fix, because you can't fix what you ARE. Shame doesn't motivate change. It motivates hiding, numbing, self-destruction, or more harm. A man drowning in shame doesn't think 'I should do better.' He thinks 'I'm worthless, so it doesn't matter what I do.'

Most of you have been soaking in shame for years. Maybe since childhood. Messages from parents, schools, the system, society: 'You're no good. You'll never change. You're a criminal. You're a lost cause.' Some of you have internalized those messages so deeply that you can't separate what you DID from who you ARE.

FORGE asks you to make that separation. Not to let yourself off the hook — the opposite. When you separate your actions from your identity, you can hold yourself accountable for the actions without destroying yourself in the process. You can say 'I did terrible things' AND 'I am a human being capable of change.' Both are true.

Holding both truths at the same time is the foundation of real accountability."

"Here's a practical test. When accountability work makes you feel determined — 'I need to be different' — that's guilt doing its job. When accountability work makes you feel worthless — 'What's the point, I'm garbage' — that's shame taking over. If you hit the shame wall, say something. To your cohort, to the facilitator, to your journal.

Don't sit in it alone. Shame thrives in isolation. It dies in the light."

Exercise: The Accountability Statement (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Here's the exercise. You're going to write an accountability statement. Not about everything. About one specific harm you've caused.

It can be the crime that brought you here. It can be something you did to a family member. It can be something you did to someone in this facility. Pick a harm you know you're responsible for.

The rules for your accountability statement:

1. **Name what you did.** Specifically. Not 'I made some bad choices.' What did you actually do?
2. **Name the harm it caused.** Who was affected? How? Be specific.
3. **No excuses. No qualifiers. No 'but.'** Your circumstances are real, but this is not the place for them. This is about ownership.
4. **No shame spiraling.** This is not 'I'm a terrible person.' This is 'I did this, and this is what it caused.'
5. **End with commitment.** What are you committed to doing differently?

The format is: - 'I [specific action].' - 'This caused [specific harm to specific people].' - 'I take full responsibility for this choice.' - 'I am committed to [specific change].'

You have 12 minutes. This is private — you will not be asked to share unless you choose to. Write honestly."

12 minutes of silent writing. Facilitator sits quietly. Don't pace the room — give people space.

After writing, optional sharing (8 minutes):

Facilitator:

"If anyone is willing to share their accountability statement with the group, the floor is open. This takes enormous courage. There's no pressure. But if someone shares, here's how we respond: we listen. No judgment. No commentary. No 'it's okay.' It's not okay — that's the point. We just witness."

If someone shares, the group listens in silence. After they finish:

"Thank you. What you just did — standing in the truth without hiding — is the hardest thing in this program. The group sees you."

If no one shares, that's okay:

"That's fine. This work is yours. You don't owe it to anyone. But I'd encourage you to share it with someone you trust before the end of the program. Accountability that stays inside your head is half-finished. It becomes real when it leaves your mouth."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. What is one area of your life where you're still at Level 2 or 3 on the accountability spectrum — still minimizing or blame-shifting? Be honest. If you're not sure, say so."

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Identify one area of your life where you're still in denial or minimization. Write about it in your journal. Don't try to fix it yet — just see it clearly. 2. Re-read your accountability statement. Does it hold up? Is there a 'but' hiding in it? If so, rewrite it without the qualifier.

Tomorrow we talk about integrity — what it means to live in alignment with the person you say you want to be. It's going to push you. That's the point. See you tomorrow."

Session 19 Checklist

- Opening circle completed (self-rating on accountability 1-10)
- Accountability defined — what it is and what it isn't
- Accountability spectrum taught (5 levels: denial → full accountability)
- Each level explained with concrete examples from prison/dorm context
- Participants privately rated themselves on the spectrum
- Guilt vs. shame distinction taught thoroughly
- Practical test for guilt vs. shame given
- Accountability statement exercise completed (12 min writing)
- Optional sharing facilitated with appropriate guidelines
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (identify an area of minimization + refine accountability statement)

SESSION 20: Integrity Under Pressure

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 20 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define integrity as alignment between values, words, and actions 2. Apply the 4 tests of integrity to their own decisions 3. Explain how pressure reveals character rather than creating it 4. Analyze ethical dilemmas and articulate their reasoning 5. Identify specific areas where their integrity is tested in daily life

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. Did you look at where you're still minimizing or blame-shifting, like we talked about yesterday? What did you find?"

Send the talking piece. This round may be heavy — yesterday's session opened things up. Hold space.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Thank you for going there. Yesterday was about looking backward — facing what you've done. Today is about looking forward — who you're choosing to be. The word for that is integrity."

Instruction: Defining Integrity (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Integrity is one of those words people throw around without ever defining it. So let's define it.

Integrity is the alignment between your values, your words, and your actions.

Three things. They have to match.

Your values are what you say matters to you. Respect. Honesty. Family. Service. Your words are what you tell people you'll do. Your promises. Your commitments. Your actions are what you actually do. Every day. When nobody's watching.

When those three things line up — when what you value, what you say, and what you do are the same thing — that's integrity.

When they don't line up — when you say you value honesty but you lie when it's convenient, when you promise to show up but you don't, when you talk about respect but you disrespect people when you're angry — that gap is where trust dies.

Integrity is not about being perfect. It's about being consistent. The man who admits he messed up and works to repair it has more integrity than the man who never makes a mistake but takes no risks.

Here's the thing about integrity in this environment: it's tested constantly. Every day, you face moments where the easy path and the right path are different. Every day, you have opportunities to cut corners, to go along with something you know is wrong, to stay silent when you should speak up. The pressure in here is relentless. And pressure doesn't build character — it reveals it."

Facilitator:

*"Let me say that again because it matters: **Pressure doesn't build character. It reveals character.** The person you are under pressure — when you're scared, when you're angry, when no one is watching — that's who you really are. Everything else is a performance.*

FORGE isn't interested in your performance. We're interested in who you are when it costs you something to do the right thing."

Instruction: The 4 Tests of Integrity (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I'm going to give you four questions — four tests. When you're facing a decision and you're not sure if the choice you're about to make has integrity, run it through these four tests. If it fails even one, reconsider."

Write or display the 4 tests:

TEST 1: THE MIRROR TEST "Can you look yourself in the eye after this choice?"

Tonight, when you're lying in your bunk, will you be able to live with what you did? Not what other people think about it. What YOU think about it. Deep down.

This test cuts through social pressure. It doesn't matter if everyone in the dorm thinks it was the right move. If you can't look yourself in the eye, your conscience is telling you something.

Some of you have spent years avoiding the mirror — not literally, but avoiding honest self-reflection because what you'd see is painful. The mirror test asks you to look anyway."

TEST 2: THE PUBLIC TEST "Would you do this if everyone was watching?"

If this decision was broadcast on a screen in front of the whole facility — staff, inmates, everyone — would you still make it? If your behavior would change with an audience, that tells you something about the behavior.

This test catches the stuff we do in the dark. The things we justify when we think no one is looking. In reality, someone is always watching — and even when they're not, you're watching yourself."

TEST 3: THE CHILD TEST "Would you want your child to see this? Would you want your child to do this?"

This is the one that hits hardest. Many of you have children. Some of you have children who already look up to you despite everything. If your son or daughter could see every choice you make — not just the ones you tell them about in letters and phone calls, but every choice — would you be the example you want to set?

And if you don't have children — imagine a young person who looks up to you. A nephew. A younger brother. A mentee. Someone who will model their behavior on yours. Is this the behavior you'd want them to copy?"

TEST 4: THE LEGACY TEST "Is this the man you want to be remembered as?"

Someday — whether it's in this facility or out there — people will describe who you were. Your family will tell stories about you. The people in this program will remember you. What do you want them to say?

'He talked a good game but never followed through.' 'He was strong on the outside but made excuses when it counted.' Or: 'He changed. He did the hard work. He became someone worth respecting.'

The legacy test isn't about ego or reputation. It's about purpose. Every decision you make is building or destroying the man you're becoming. The legacy test asks you to zoom out and see the bigger picture."

Pause.

"Four tests. Mirror. Public. Child. Legacy. None of them are about what other people think of you. All of them are about who you actually are. Keep them in your pocket. When you face a hard choice — and you will, today, tomorrow, every day — run the tests."

Exercise: Ethical Dilemma Scenarios (40 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now we apply the tests. I'm going to give you four ethical dilemmas. These are situations that have no easy answer. The point is not to find the 'right' answer — the point is to develop your reasoning, test your values, and hear how other men think through hard choices.

Break into four groups. Each group gets one scenario. You have 8 minutes to discuss as a group: 1. What would you do? 2. Run it through the 4 tests. 3. What's at stake? 4. Is there a choice that has integrity even if it has a cost?

Then each group presents to the room. Other groups can push back, ask questions, challenge."

Scenario 1: The Favor

"Your best friend in the facility asks you to hold something for him overnight. He says it's personal items he doesn't want confiscated during a shakedown he heard is coming. You trust him. He's never lied to you. But you don't know exactly what's in the bag, and you didn't look.

Do you hold it? What if it turns out to be contraband? What if refusing damages a friendship that matters to you?"

Scenario 2: The Witness

"You see a FORGE participant — someone in your cohort — take food from another man's commissary. The victim doesn't know who did it. The FORGE participant sees you watching and says, 'Don't say anything, man. He owes me anyway.'

What do you do? Do you confront the cohort member? Do you tell the victim? Do you bring it up in the FORGE space? Do you stay quiet?"

Scenario 3: The Test

"A group of men you're cool with invites you to participate in something that isn't violent but violates facility rules — maybe a gambling ring, maybe a hustle. They say it's harmless and everyone does it. If you say no, they'll question your loyalty and possibly exclude you from the group. These are men who have your back.

Do you participate? How do you decline without making enemies? Can you maintain integrity and maintain the relationship?"

Scenario 4: The Truth

"You're up for a program that could help your case — a transfer, a job assignment, a recommendation. In the interview, you're asked about an incident from your past. You were involved, but it was never documented. No one would know if you lied. Telling the truth might cost you the opportunity.

Do you lie? Is the opportunity worth your integrity? What happens inside you if you lie and get what you want?"

Groups discuss (8 minutes). Facilitator circulates, listens, asks probing questions to deepen the discussion.

Group presentations (20 minutes — 5 minutes per group): Each group presents: - The dilemma - Their reasoning - What the 4 tests revealed - Their conclusion

After each presentation, open it to the full group for 2-3 minutes of discussion.

Facilitator (after all presentations):

"Notice something: these dilemmas don't have clean answers. In real life, integrity often costs you something — a friendship, an opportunity, comfort, belonging. That's why it's called integrity UNDER PRESSURE. The pressure is the cost. The question is whether you're willing to pay it.

Nobody in this room is going to get it right every time. But here's the difference between a man who has integrity and a man who doesn't: the man with integrity makes the hard choice more often than not. And when he fails, he acknowledges it, learns from it, and recommits. That's the accountability spectrum from yesterday. It all connects."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Which of the 4 tests hits you hardest, and why?"

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework before tomorrow: 1. Journal about the ethical dilemma that was hardest for you. Walk through your thinking. Where did you get stuck? What did the tests reveal? 2. Between now and tomorrow, notice one moment where your integrity is tested. It doesn't have to be dramatic — it can be a small moment. Notice it. Write about what you did and whether it passed the tests.

Tomorrow is the heaviest session of the week. We're going to talk about the people your choices have affected. The ripple effect of harm. And you're going to begin writing an impact awareness letter — not for anyone to read but you. It's going to ask for honesty you may not have given yourself permission to have yet.

Come ready. And come knowing this: the fact that this work is hard is the evidence that you're doing it right. See you tomorrow."

Session 20 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Homework from Session 19 reviewed
- Integrity defined (alignment of values, words, actions)
- "Pressure reveals character" concept taught
- 4 tests of integrity taught (mirror, public, child, legacy)
- Each test explored with depth and personal relevance
- Ethical dilemma scenarios distributed (4 scenarios)
- Small group discussions conducted (8 minutes)
- Group presentations completed with full-group pushback/discussion
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal on dilemma + integrity moment observation)

SESSION 21: Making Amends and Moving Forward

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Session Number:** 21 **Facilitator(s):** Program Lead + Senior Mentor (if available)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain restorative accountability and how it differs from punitive accountability 2. Map the ripple effect of harm — primary victims, secondary victims, community impact 3. Distinguish between an apology and genuine amends 4. Begin drafting an impact awareness letter 5. Articulate how accountability connects to purpose and forward movement

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you feeling coming into today? One word."

Send the talking piece. Keep it brief. Note who seems heavy, withdrawn, or agitated — this session is emotionally demanding and some participants may already be activated from yesterday's homework.

Facilitator (after the round):

"I'm going to be straight with you. Today is the hardest session so far. We're going to look at the impact of your choices on other people — people you may not have allowed yourself to think about in a long time. This is not punishment. This is not about making you feel bad. This is about becoming the kind of man who can face the full truth of his life and still choose to move forward. That's the difference between regret that destroys you and accountability that transforms you."

Instruction: Restorative Accountability (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Most of you have experienced only one kind of accountability your entire lives: punitive accountability. Someone does something wrong, and they get punished. You break a rule, you go to the hole. You commit a crime, you go to prison. The focus is on the offender and the punishment. The person who was harmed? Often an afterthought.

Restorative accountability is different. It asks three questions that punitive accountability never asks:

- 1. **Who was harmed?** — Not 'what rule was broken,' but who actually suffered?*
- 2. **What do they need?** — Not 'what does the offender deserve,' but what does the harmed person need to heal?*
- 3. **Whose obligation is it to meet those needs?** — And how can the person who caused harm contribute to that healing?*

Restorative accountability doesn't replace consequences. You're still here. Your sentence is still real. But it adds a dimension that punishment alone never provides: understanding. When you truly understand the harm you've caused — when you feel it, not just know it intellectually — something shifts inside you. Accountability stops being something done TO you and becomes something you carry WITH you. It becomes purpose.

The men I've seen go through this process — really go through it, not perform it — come out different. Not lighter. Not absolved. Different. They carry the weight of what they've done, but they carry it like a responsibility, not like a death sentence. They say: 'I caused this harm. I can't undo it. But I can spend the rest of my life making sure it means something — that I became someone better because of what I now understand.'"

Instruction: The Ripple Effect (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"When you throw a stone into water, it doesn't just make a splash. It creates ripples that spread outward — wider and wider — affecting water that was perfectly still before the stone hit. Your choices work the same way. The harm doesn't stop with the person directly in front of you. It ripples out."

Primary Victims *"The person or people directly harmed by your actions. The person you robbed. The person you assaulted. The person you sold drugs to. The person you cheated. The person you abused."*

These are the faces most of us try not to see. Because seeing them means feeling the full weight of what we did. But they're real people. They had a life before you entered it. They have a life after — but it's a life shaped by what you did."

Secondary Victims *"The people connected to your primary victims. Their family. Their children. Their parents. Their friends."*

The woman you robbed — she has a daughter who saw her come home shaking. That daughter is now afraid of strangers. The man you assaulted — he has a wife who no longer feels safe. A brother who wants revenge. A mother who cries.

Secondary victims are real. They carry harm they didn't choose and didn't cause."

Your Own Family *"This is the ripple that hits closest to home. Your children growing up without a father. Your mother aging while you're gone. Your partner holding everything together alone. Your brothers and sisters carrying your name into rooms where it's been tainted."*

Your family didn't commit your crime. But they're serving time too. Different kind of time. In some ways, harder time — because they're out there, visible, answering questions, making excuses, explaining to your kids where Daddy is."

Community Impact *"The neighborhood that became a little less safe because of what you and people like you did. The store that closed because of too many robberies. The park kids don't play in anymore. The fear that keeps people locked in their homes at night. The distrust between neighbors. The property values that dropped. The tax dollars spent on your prosecution, your incarceration, your supervision."*

None of this is said to crush you. It's said because it's true. And you cannot become a man of integrity without facing the truth — all of it."

Pause. The room will be heavy. Let it be heavy.

Facilitator:

"Take a breath. This is hard to hear. If you're feeling something right now — sadness, shame, anger, numbness — that's a normal response. Don't fight it. Don't shove it down. Let it be there."

Remember what we talked about yesterday and the day before: guilt says 'I did something harmful.' Shame says 'I am worthless.' The ripple effect can push you toward shame if you let it. Don't let it. You did cause harm. You are also here, doing the hardest work of your life. Both things are true."

Instruction: Amends vs. Apology (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"There's a difference between an apology and making amends, and it matters.

*An **apology** is words. 'I'm sorry.' It has its place. But an apology alone, without change, is just a sound. How many times have you said 'I'm sorry' and then done the same thing again? How many times has someone said it to you and you knew it meant nothing?*

***Making amends** is action. It's living differently. It's demonstrating through your behavior — over time — that you understand the harm and you're committed to a different path.*

For some of you, direct amends — talking to the person you harmed, apologizing face-to-face, making restitution — may never be possible. The person may have moved on. They may not want to hear from you. They may have passed away. You may never leave this facility.

That doesn't let you off the hook. It changes the form of amends, not the obligation.

***Living amends** means: you can't undo the harm, but you can ensure that the rest of your life stands in contrast to the harm you caused. Every act of service. Every conflict you de-escalate. Every young man you mentor away from the path you took. Every day you choose integrity under pressure. That's amends. Not because it erases the past — it doesn't. Because it means the past doesn't get the last word."*

Exercise: The Impact Awareness Letter (35 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This is the central exercise of this week — and one of the most important assignments in the entire program.

You are going to begin writing an impact awareness letter. This letter is not sent. It's not for a parole board. It's not for your victim. It's for you. Its purpose is to force you to see — fully see — the ripple effect of your actions.

Here's the format:"

Write or display the instructions:

The Impact Awareness Letter

Part 1: What I Did Describe what you did — the action, the crime, the harm — in clear, specific terms. No minimizing. No legal language. Plain truth. "I [did this] to [this person]."

Part 2: The Impact on My Primary Victim(s) Write to them — not as a letter you'll send, but as an exercise in empathy. What did your actions do to their life? Their sense of safety? Their trust? Their body? Their mind? What did they lose? What changed for them? If you don't know the specific details, imagine them honestly. Don't make it better than it was.

Part 3: The Ripple — Who Else Was Affected? Map the ripple. Their family. Their community. Your family. Your community. Name each person or group and describe the impact.

Part 4: What I Understand Now That I Didn't Then What do you see now that you couldn't or wouldn't see at the time? What has changed in your understanding?

Part 5: Who I Am Becoming Not who you wish you were. Who you are actively working to become. What does living amends look like for you? What will you do with the rest of your life that stands in contrast to the harm you caused?

Facilitator:

"You have 20 minutes to begin this letter. You will NOT finish it today — this is a draft. You'll have the rest of the week to complete it as homework. But I need you to start now, while the truth is close to the surface.

A few important things:

This will be emotional. Some of you may cry. Some of you may feel angry. Some of you may go numb. All of those responses are okay. If you need to stop writing and just breathe, do that. If you need to step away from the circle for a minute, do that. If you need to talk to me or a cohort member after, do that.

What you should NOT do is write something performative. Don't write what you think I want to read. Don't write a version that makes you look better than you were. The only person this letter needs to be honest with is you.

Start writing."

20 minutes of silent writing. Facilitator sits quietly in the circle. If someone is visibly struggling, a brief hand on the shoulder or a glass of water is appropriate. Don't interrupt the writing unless someone is in distress.

After 20 minutes:

Facilitator:

"Stop writing. Take a breath. Look up.

What you just did — whatever you managed to get on paper — takes more courage than most people show in a lifetime. This is real work. This is the work that changes men.

I'm not going to ask anyone to share today. This letter is yours. You'll have until next Tuesday to complete it. Take your time. Let it be messy. Let it be honest.

When it's done, you'll have a document that represents the truth of your life — the harm you caused and the man you're becoming. You'll keep it in your portfolio. In 6 months, you'll read it again and see how much you've grown."

Closing Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Final round for the week. This one's important. Take a moment before you speak.

Complete this sentence: "This week, I learned that accountability means..."

Send the talking piece. Give people time. This round will be deeper than usual.

Facilitator (closing):

"I want to say something to this group. What you did this week — looking at where you fall on the accountability spectrum, facing the integrity tests, starting the impact awareness letter — this is the work that most people avoid for their entire lives. Not just people in prison. People everywhere. Most human beings never sit with the full weight of the harm they've caused. You did. That doesn't make you good. It makes you courageous. And courage is the foundation that everything else is built on.

Homework for next week: 1. Complete the impact awareness letter. All five parts. Take your time. Be thorough. Be honest. 2. Journal reflection: 'What is one thing I can do this week — one specific act — that represents living amends?' 3. Read ahead in your handbook on empathy and perspective-taking. Next week we shift from looking inward to looking outward — at the people around us and how to truly see them.

This was a hard week. You showed up for it. That matters.

Service Over Self. See you Tuesday."

Session 21 Checklist

- Opening circle completed (one-word check-in)
- Restorative accountability explained and contrasted with punitive accountability

- [] Three questions of restorative accountability taught
- [] Ripple effect taught (primary victims, secondary victims, family, community)
- [] Emotional responses monitored and supported
- [] Amends vs. apology distinction made
- [] Living amends concept introduced
- [] Impact awareness letter instructions given (5 parts)
- [] Writing exercise completed (20 minutes minimum)
- [] No forced sharing — voluntary only
- [] Closing circle completed
- [] Homework assigned (complete letter + living amends journal + handbook reading)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 7

What to Watch For

Emotional activation: This week will activate people. Session 19 asks participants to locate themselves on the accountability spectrum — some will realize they've been in denial for years. Session 21's impact awareness letter can surface grief, shame, and deep remorse. Watch for: - **Withdrawal:** A participant who goes quiet and checked out may be flooding internally. Check in individually after the session. - **Anger:** Some participants will get angry — at themselves, at you for making them face this, at the system. Anger is often a cover for pain. Acknowledge it: "I can see this is stirring something up. That makes sense. Do you want to talk about it, or do you need some space?" - **Performative accountability:** Some participants will write accountability statements that sound good but lack genuine emotion. They've learned the words. The words are empty. Don't call this out publicly — address it individually: "I read your statement and I noticed something. The words are right, but I want to check in with you. Are you feeling this, or are you writing what you think I want to see? Both are okay — I just want to know where you really are." - **Shame spiral:** If a participant starts spiraling — "I'm a monster," "I can't be forgiven," "What's the point" — intervene. This is the guilt-to-shame crossover. Redirect: "You're going from 'I did something harmful' to 'I am bad.' Those are different. Can you come back to the specific action and stay there? You're not a monster. You're a human being who did monstrous things. The difference matters."

Participants with life sentences or very long sentences: The accountability and amends work hits differently for men who may never leave prison. "Living amends" and "becoming a different man" can feel hollow when release is not on the horizon. Address this directly if it comes up: "Living amends doesn't require release. The man who mentors a younger person in here, who prevents a fight, who teaches someone to read, who runs a circle that keeps a dorm peaceful — that man is making amends every single day. Your impact isn't measured by your address. It's measured by your actions."

Group safety: The trust built over the first 6 weeks is tested this week. If someone shares something deeply personal — especially in the impact awareness letter — the group's response will either deepen trust or destroy it. Brief the group before any sharing: "If someone shares something painful, our job is to witness. Not to fix. Not to comfort with cliches. Not to judge. Just to witness. And what they share stays in this room."

Common Week 7 Challenges

"I've already been held accountable — I'm in prison." Response: "Prison is the state's response to your actions. It's a consequence. Accountability is YOUR response. They're different things. Plenty of people serve 20 years and

never become accountable. They just become bitter. Accountability is an internal process. It's about understanding, owning, and changing. Prison doesn't make that happen. You do."

"My victim isn't innocent either." This comes up often, especially in cases where the victim and the offender had a complicated relationship. Response: "Maybe your victim isn't perfect. Most people aren't. But your accountability isn't conditional on their perfection. You're not owning THEIR choices. You're owning YOURS. Whether they were an angel or a mess, your actions are still your actions. When you make accountability conditional — 'I'll be accountable when they are' — you've just handed your growth to someone else."

"I can't write to my victim because I don't know what happened to them." Response: "The letter isn't for them — it's for you. You don't have to know exactly what happened to imagine the impact honestly. You know what you did. You can imagine the fear, the pain, the violation, the aftermath. If your imagination is uncomfortable — good. That discomfort is empathy developing."

"This feels like the program is trying to break us down." Response: "I understand why it feels that way. Let me be clear about the intent: this isn't about breaking you down. It's about helping you see clearly. Most of us have survived by NOT looking at the full impact of our choices. That numbness protected us. But numbness isn't strength — it's avoidance. What we're doing this week is building the capacity to hold the truth and still stand up. That's real strength."

Participants who refuse to write the impact awareness letter: Don't force it. You cannot mandate genuine accountability. Say: "I hear you. You're not ready, and I'm not going to make you do something you're not ready for. But I want you to think about why you're not ready. Is it because the exercise is unfair? Or because it asks you to face something you've been avoiding? When you're ready, the exercise will be here. I'll check in with you next week."

Preparation for Week 8

- Review empathy development content — Week 8 shifts from self-focused work to other-focused work
- Prepare perspective-taking scenarios (multiple viewpoints: harmed person, person who caused harm, bystander, family member)
- Plan the "silent observation" exercise — identify a common area participants can observe for 15 minutes safely
- Review each participant's trajectory over the first 7 weeks. By this point, you should have a clear picture of each person's growth areas, strengths, and readiness for the deeper work ahead.
- Follow up individually with any participant who was significantly activated during the impact awareness letter exercise. Don't let someone sit in pain alone for a week.
- Consider scheduling brief individual check-ins (5-10 minutes each) with every participant before Week 8 begins. Seven weeks in, a personal touch reinforces that FORGE sees each man as an individual, not just a member of a cohort.