



PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

Week 8 of 36

Social Skills and Perspective Taking

Sessions 22–24

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 1: Foundation — "Know Yourself"

Week 8: Social Skills and Perspective-Taking

Week 8 Overview

Purpose: Move from internal work to interpersonal skill. Weeks 1-7 focused on understanding yourself — your thinking, your emotions, your trauma, your communication habits, your accountability. Week 8 turns the lens outward: How do you understand other people? How do you read a room? How do you build relationships that make you stronger instead of pulling you backward? These are the skills that separate someone who has done personal work from someone who can actually live it out with other people.

Sessions This Week: - Session 22 (Tuesday): Empathy Development - Session 23 (Wednesday): Reading the Room - Session 24 (Thursday): Building Pro-Social Relationships

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks (ongoing) - Pens/pencils - Talking piece for circle process - Scenario cards for Session 22 perspective-taking exercise (prepare 4 scenarios on index cards or paper — see Session 22 for details) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available) - Relationship mapping worksheet for Session 24 (a blank sheet with concentric circles works — see Session 24)

SESSION 22: Empathy Development

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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define and distinguish between cognitive, emotional, and compassionate empathy 2. Explain why empathy is a skill that can be developed, not a fixed personality trait 3. View a single scenario from at least four different perspectives 4. Identify how lack of empathy has contributed to harm in their own lives 5. Practice perspective-taking as a deliberate skill

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

*"Check-in round. Two things: **How are you doing today — honestly? And what's one interaction you had this week where you tried to see something from the other person's point of view?***

If you can't think of one, say that. That's useful information too."

Send the talking piece around. Note who engages meaningfully and who struggles to identify a perspective-taking moment — that tells you where they are with this material.

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Last week we closed with accountability — making amends, writing impact awareness letters, understanding the ripple effect of harm. Some of you wrote things last week that were hard to put on paper. That took courage.

Here's the bridge between last week and this week: accountability requires empathy. You can't fully own the harm you've caused until you can see it through the eyes of the people you harmed. That's what this week is about — learning to see through someone else's eyes. Not as a soft skill. As a survival skill. As a leadership skill. As the thing that separates a man who just does his time from a man who changes how he moves through the world."

Quick check (3 min): "Anyone have a thought or question that's been sitting with them from last week's work on amends? Something that's still bothering you or that clicked since then?"

Allow 2-3 responses. Acknowledge without extended discussion.

Instruction: Three Types of Empathy (25 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's start with a question. What does empathy mean? Not the dictionary definition — what does it mean to you?"

Let 3-4 people respond. You'll likely hear things like "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" or "feeling what they feel." Build on whatever they offer.

Facilitator:

"Most people think empathy is one thing. It's actually three different skills, and they work at different levels."

Cognitive Empathy — Understanding what someone thinks:

"Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand what's going on in someone else's head. Not agreeing with them — understanding them. Seeing the logic of their position even when you think they're wrong.

Example: Your bunkmate is angry because he got written up for something he didn't do. You don't have to agree that the write-up was wrong. Cognitive empathy means you can understand WHY he's angry — he feels falsely accused, powerless, disrespected. You get the logic of his reaction even if you would have handled it differently.

This is the empathy that makes you a better problem-solver, a better mediator, and eventually a better mentor. You can't resolve a conflict if you don't understand what both sides actually think."

Emotional Empathy — Feeling what someone feels:

"Emotional empathy goes deeper. It's when you actually feel something of what the other person is feeling. Not just understanding their anger — feeling a version of it yourself. When someone tells you they just found out their mother died and your chest gets tight — that's emotional empathy.

This one is tricky. Too little emotional empathy and you come across as cold, mechanical. People don't trust someone who understands their pain but clearly doesn't feel any of it. Too much emotional empathy and you drown in other people's emotions. You can't help someone if you're falling apart right next to them.

The goal isn't to shut this off or turn it all the way up. The goal is awareness — knowing when you're feeling someone else's emotions, and being able to stay grounded while you do."

Compassionate Empathy — Being moved to help:

"The third level is compassionate empathy. This is where understanding and feeling lead to action. You see someone struggling. You understand what they're going through. You feel something about it. And then you do something — not out of pity, not to look good, but because you recognize their humanity and you choose to respond.

This is Service Over Self in action. Compassionate empathy is the engine of everything FORGE is building.

*Here's the key point: **empathy is not a personality trait.** You're not born with it or without it. It's a skill. Like any skill, it can be developed through practice. Some of you had empathy trained out of you — by your environment, by trauma, by survival. That doesn't mean it's gone. It means it needs rebuilding."*

Pause. Let it land.

"Let me ask you something directly: Where has a lack of empathy cost you? Don't answer out loud yet — just think about it. Think about a time when you couldn't see what someone else was going through, or didn't care, and it led to a bad outcome. For you or for them."

Silent reflection (1 minute).

"Now — where has empathy, even a small amount of it, saved you? A moment when you paused, saw the other person as a human being, and it changed what you did next?"

Open discussion (5 min). Let 3-4 people share. Don't push — these can be heavy reflections.

Facilitator (transitioning):

"Most of the harm in this world — most of the harm in this building — happens because someone temporarily stopped seeing another person as fully human. They became an obstacle. A target. A means to an end. Empathy is the thing that prevents that. It's the thing that says, 'This person in front of me has a story, has people who love them, has fears and hopes — just like me.'

That doesn't mean you become a pushover. It means you deal with people as people. That's the standard."

Practice Exercise: Perspective-Taking — Four Viewpoints (40 minutes)

Purpose: Practice seeing a single situation through multiple sets of eyes. This is the core empathy-building exercise.

Preparation: Before the session, prepare 4 scenario cards. Each scenario describes a situation in a correctional environment. Participants will examine each scenario from four perspectives: the person who caused harm, the person who was harmed, a bystander, and a family member.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do an exercise that will stretch your thinking. I'm going to give each group a scenario. Your job is to get inside the heads of four different people in that situation and answer three questions from each person's perspective:

- 1. What is this person thinking?*
- 2. What is this person feeling?*
- 3. What does this person need?*

The four perspectives are: the person who caused the harm, the person who was harmed, a bystander who witnessed it, and a family member of one of the people involved.

This is not about right and wrong. It's about seeing the full picture. The ability to do this — to step outside your own viewpoint and genuinely understand someone else's — is one of the most powerful skills you will ever develop."

Scenario 1: A man steals another man's commissary items while he's at a visit. When the victim confronts him, the thief denies it. Witnesses saw it happen but say nothing.

Scenario 2: A newer resident accidentally disrespects someone with status in the dorm — sits in his chair, changes the channel without asking. The man with status responds by threatening the newer resident loudly in front of everyone.

Scenario 3: A man who has been in FORGE for three months gets into a heated argument with a CO and curses at him in front of the dorm. He gets written up and sent to the hole for 10 days.

Scenario 4: A man finds out his wife is leaving him through a letter. He goes quiet for three days — stops eating, stops talking to anyone. His bunkmate tells other guys to leave him alone because "he just needs space."

Process:

1. Break into 4 groups. Assign one scenario to each group. (8 min)
2. Each group discusses and writes down thoughts/feelings/needs from all four perspectives. (12 min)
3. Each group presents their scenario and all four perspectives to the full group. (12 min — 3 min per group)
4. Full group debrief. (8 min)

Facilitator circulates during small group work. Push groups to go deeper: - "You said the bystander is thinking 'it's not my business.' What else? What's underneath that?" - "You've got the victim's anger. What's under the anger? What's he really feeling?" - "What about the family member who hears about this on the phone? What does that conversation sound like?"

Debrief questions:

Facilitator:

"Which perspective was hardest to get into? Why?"

Let several people respond. Common answers: the person who caused the harm (because they don't want to relate to that person) or the family member (because it's painful to think about the ripple effects).

"Did seeing the situation from all four angles change how you would respond to it? How?"

"Here's the thing about perspective-taking: it doesn't mean everyone is right. In some of those scenarios, someone clearly did wrong. But understanding WHY they did it — what they were thinking and feeling — that's what lets you respond effectively instead of just reacting.

A mentor who can see all four perspectives in a conflict is a mentor who can actually help. A man who can only see his own perspective is a man who will keep making the same mistakes."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence: 'The person in my life I most need to understand better is __, and one thing I've never considered about their perspective is __.'"

You don't have to name the person by name if you don't want to. Just the relationship — 'my son,' 'my cellmate,' 'my victim.'"

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

*"Homework for tomorrow. Tonight, I want you to journal on this question: **Think about someone you've harmed — anyone, any time in your life. Write half a page from their perspective. Not your perspective on what happened. Theirs. What were they thinking? What were they feeling? What did they need that they didn't get from you?**"*

This will be uncomfortable. That's how you know it's working. See you Wednesday."

Session 22 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Talking piece placed
- Scenario cards prepared (4 scenarios)
- Opening circle completed
- Review of Week 7 connection to empathy
- Three types of empathy taught (cognitive, emotional, compassionate)
- Discussion on where lack of empathy has cost participants
- Perspective-taking exercise completed (4 groups, 4 viewpoints each)
- Debrief discussion — which perspective was hardest
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal from the perspective of someone you've harmed)

SESSION 23: Reading the Room

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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Define social awareness and explain why it matters for mentors 2. Identify at least 5 nonverbal cues and what they communicate 3. Describe how group dynamics and power structures operate in a dorm 4. Recognize how their own presence and energy affects a room 5. Practice deliberate observation of social dynamics

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in. How are you today, and did you do the homework — writing from the perspective of someone you've harmed? If you did it, one word on how it felt. If you didn't, just say that."

Send the talking piece. Track who completed the journal assignment. For those who describe it as difficult or painful, acknowledge that directly:

"If it was hard, you probably did it right."

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Yesterday we talked about empathy — understanding what other people think, feel, and need. Today we're going to build on that with a specific application: reading the room.

Let me ask you something. When you walk into the dayroom, how long does it take you to know something is wrong? Be honest."

Let 2-3 people respond. Most will say they know immediately — seconds.

"Exactly. Most of you walk into a space and within 10 seconds you've already assessed the temperature. You know when something is off. You know when there's tension. You know who's angry, who's nervous, who's about to make a move. You've been doing this your entire life — probably since childhood.

That skill — that radar — is called social awareness. You already have it. What we're going to do today is make it conscious. Because when you can name what you're picking up on, you can respond to it with intention instead of just reacting on instinct."

Instruction: Social Awareness and Nonverbal Cues (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Research tells us that 55% or more of communication is nonverbal. That means more than half of what people are telling you has nothing to do with their words. It's their body, their face, their tone, their posture, their distance. In an environment like this, where people don't always say what they mean — or can't — reading nonverbal cues isn't optional. It's essential."

Key nonverbal cues to read:

"Let's go through the big ones.

Eye contact. *Someone who holds eye contact is engaged — or challenging you. Someone who avoids eye contact may be uncomfortable, ashamed, afraid, or hiding something. Context matters. In a conversation, dropped eye contact when you ask a direct question usually means something.*

Posture. *Closed posture — arms crossed, shoulders turned away, body angled toward the exit — means someone is guarded or wants to leave. Open posture — facing you, arms uncrossed, leaning in slightly — means they're present. Watch for posture shifts. Someone who was open and then crosses their arms? Something just changed.*

Hands. *Clenched fists, fidgeting, hands in pockets, hands behind the back. In a conflict situation, always watch the hands. As mentors, you keep your hands visible — that's de-escalation 101. But you also watch other people's hands for signals about their state.*

Proximity. *How close someone stands tells you something. Getting closer can mean trust or aggression — you have to read the context. Someone who backs up is creating distance, either physically or emotionally. A group that tightens its circle is closing ranks.*

Facial micro-expressions. *A flash of anger, a tightened jaw, a brief look of contempt, a flicker of fear. These happen fast — fractions of a second. Most people miss them. Start paying attention.*

Tone and pace. *Someone who speaks faster is usually agitated or anxious. Someone who gets very quiet and slow may be either controlled or about to explode. A change in someone's normal speech pattern is a signal.*

Breathing. *Shallow, rapid breathing means stress. Someone who takes a deep breath and holds it is bracing for something. This is one most people never consciously notice — start noticing."*

Discussion (5 min):

"Think about the dorm. Think about the last time you read a situation correctly — you picked up on something nonverbal that told you what was really going on. What did you notice?"

Let 3-4 people share examples. Validate their existing awareness and push them to name specifically what cue they picked up on.

Instruction: Group Dynamics and Power Structures (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Reading individuals is one thing. Reading a room — understanding the dynamics of a group — is another level. Every group of people has structure, whether it's official or not. In a dorm, there's no org chart on the wall. But everyone knows who has influence, who makes decisions, who the enforcers are, who the connectors are, who the loners are. That structure shapes everything — how conflicts play out, who gets tested, who gets protected, what behavior is acceptable.

As a future mentor, you need to be able to read group dynamics the way you read an individual. Here's what to pay attention to."

Key dynamics:

***"Who do people look at when a decision needs to be made?"** That person has influence, regardless of whether they have any official role. In a meeting, in a disagreement, in a moment of uncertainty — watch where eyes go. That's the real leader.*

***Who talks and who listens?** In any group, some people dominate airtime. Some people barely speak. The quiet ones are not necessarily disengaged — they may be observing, processing, or feeling unsafe. A mentor's job is to notice who's not being heard.*

***Who sits with whom?** Seating and proximity reveal alliances, cliques, and exclusion. If someone sits alone consistently, that tells you something. If a group always clusters together and others keep their distance, that tells you something too.*

***What happens when someone breaks a norm?** Every group has unwritten rules. Someone plays music too loud. Someone takes someone's seat. Someone shows vulnerability. Watch the response — that's where you see the group's real values.*

***Where is the tension?** Not every room has active conflict. But most rooms have tension points — unresolved issues, competing interests, underlying resentments. A skilled mentor can feel where the fault lines are before anything breaks."*

Facilitator:

"Here's why this matters for FORGE: when you're deployed as a mentor in a dorm, your first job isn't to fix anything. Your first job is to read the room. Understand the dynamics. Know who the players are. Know where the tension lives. Know what's spoken and what's unspoken. If you try to intervene without understanding the landscape, you'll make things worse."

Instruction: How Your Presence Affects Others (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Now let's flip the lens. We've been talking about reading other people. Let's talk about what other people read when they look at you.

Every person in this room brings energy into a space. You walk into the dayroom and you change the room — whether you know it or not. The question is: what do you change it to?

Some men walk into a room and people relax. The energy gets lighter. People feel safer. Other men walk into a room and people tense up. Conversations go quiet. People watch their words.

Which one are you? Be honest with yourself."

Pause. Let them sit with it.

"A FORGE mentor needs to be the first kind. Not because you're soft — because you're safe. People need to be able to come to you. If your energy says 'don't approach me,' you're useless as a mentor.

This is not about personality. It's about choices. The way you carry yourself, the expression on your face, how you greet people, whether you make eye contact, whether you acknowledge people or walk past them — these are all choices. And they communicate something about who you are before you ever open your mouth.

Your body language speaks before you do. Make sure it's saying what you want it to say."

Quick go-around (5 min):

"Real quick — no talking piece, just popcorn. What energy do you bring into a room? And is it the energy you want to bring?"

Let several people respond honestly. This should be a moment of self-awareness, not performance.

Practice Exercise: Silent Observation (30 minutes)

Purpose: Develop the habit of deliberate, conscious observation of social dynamics.

Facilitator:

"We're going to do something different now. This exercise is about watching — really watching — what's happening in a social space. Here's the setup:

I'm going to split you into two groups. Group A is going to have a discussion in the center of the room. I'll give you a topic. Just talk naturally — argue, agree, joke, whatever comes up. Group B is going to sit around the outside and observe. You're not participating in the conversation. You're watching.

Group B, here's what you're looking for:"

Write or read the observation checklist:

"1. Who spoke the most? Who spoke the least? Who didn't speak at all? 2. Who did people look at when they wanted agreement or support? 3. What nonverbal cues did you notice — posture shifts, facial expressions, gestures? 4. Was there a moment when the group's energy shifted? What caused it? 5. Was anyone excluded — intentionally or unintentionally? 6. What was the overall mood of the group? Did it change?"

Round 1 (8 min): Group A discusses in the center. Topic: "What's the most important quality in a leader?" Group B observes silently.

Debrief Round 1 (5 min): Group B shares what they observed. Group A responds — "That's accurate" or "I didn't realize I was doing that."

Facilitator:

"This is what it looks like to read a room with intention. You noticed things in 8 minutes of watching that most people miss in months of living together."

Round 2 (8 min): Switch. Group B discusses in the center. Topic: "What's the hardest thing about being honest in here?" Group A observes.

Debrief Round 2 (5 min): Same process.

Full group debrief (4 min):

Facilitator:

"What did you learn from watching that you wouldn't have learned from participating?"

Here's the takeaway: as a mentor, you need to develop a dual awareness. You're in the conversation AND you're observing it at the same time. You're participating AND you're reading the room. That's a skill. It takes practice. Start practicing it now — in every room you're in."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Name one thing you observed about the group today — during the exercise or during the whole session — that you wouldn't have noticed two months ago."

Send the talking piece.

Facilitator (closing):

*"Homework for tomorrow: Tonight and tomorrow, I want you to do a **15-minute silent observation** in a common area — dayroom, chow hall, wherever you can sit and watch. Don't interact. Just observe. In your journal, answer the same six questions we used in today's exercise. Who spoke? Who listened? What nonverbal cues did you catch? Where was the tension? What was the mood? How did it shift?*

You're training your eyes the way a musician trains their ears. The more you practice seeing, the more you'll see. Tomorrow we talk about how to use all of this — empathy, awareness, observation — to build relationships that actually make your life better. See you Thursday."

Session 23 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
- Opening circle completed with homework check
- Connection made between empathy (Session 22) and social awareness
- Nonverbal cues taught (eye contact, posture, hands, proximity, micro-expressions, tone, breathing)
- Group dynamics instruction (influence, voice, seating, norms, tension)
- Discussion on how personal presence affects a room
- Silent observation exercise completed (both rounds with debriefs)
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (15-minute silent observation in common area + journal)

SESSION 24: Building Pro-Social Relationships

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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Distinguish between healthy (pro-social) and toxic relationships using specific criteria 2. Define personal boundaries and explain why they are essential, not optional 3. Describe the FORGE brotherhood model — support without enabling 4. Hold someone accountable without destroying the relationship 5. Map their current relationships and identify which support growth and which don't

Session Plan

Opening Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. How are you doing today? And what did you notice during your silent observation homework? Share one thing you saw that stuck with you."

Send the talking piece. Listen for whether participants are developing sharper observation skills. Highlight specific, concrete observations:

"Good — you noticed that when one man raised his voice, three people physically shifted away from him. That's reading the room."

Review and Reflection (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"This week we've built a progression. Tuesday: empathy — understanding what other people think and feel. Wednesday: reading the room — observing social dynamics and recognizing your own impact. Today: applying all of that to the thing that matters most in your daily life — your relationships.

Let me start with a hard truth. If you look at what got most of us here — to this facility, to this situation — relationships were a factor. The people we surrounded ourselves with. The people we were loyal to. The people we tried to impress. The people who encouraged our worst instincts.

And if you look at what's going to determine whether we stay on a different path — when we get out, or even right now in here — relationships are going to be the biggest factor. The right people will hold you up. The wrong people will pull you back down. Learning to tell the difference — and having the courage to act on what you know — is one of the most important things you'll ever do."

Instruction: Healthy vs. Toxic Relationships (20 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's get clear on what makes a relationship healthy or toxic. I'm not just talking about romantic relationships — I'm talking about every relationship. Your cellmate. Your crew. Your family. Your FORGE brothers. Anyone you spend time and energy with."

Healthy relationships — characteristics:

"A healthy relationship has these qualities:

Mutual respect. *Both people treat each other with dignity, even during disagreements. Neither person controls the other. Neither person tears the other down to feel bigger.*

Honesty. *You can be real with this person without fear of being used or mocked. They tell you the truth even when it's uncomfortable — and you do the same for them.*

Support for growth. *This person wants you to get better. When you're working on yourself, they encourage it. They don't mock your efforts or try to keep you where you were.*

Accountability. *This person calls you out when you're wrong — not to humiliate you, but because they care enough not to let you slide. And you can do the same for them without the relationship breaking.*

Boundaries. *Both people understand where one person ends and the other begins. You don't owe each other everything. You can say no. You can have limits.*

Safety. *You feel safe — not just physically, but emotionally. You don't have to perform. You don't have to watch your back. You can be vulnerable."*

Toxic relationships — characteristics:

"A toxic relationship has some or all of these:

Control. One person dictates what the other does, thinks, or feels. It might be overt — threats, demands. Or it might be subtle — guilt trips, manipulation, 'if you really cared about me you would...'

One-way loyalty. You're expected to be loyal, but the other person operates by different rules. They take but don't give. They expect support but don't provide it.

Enabling. This person supports your worst behavior. They cover for you. They don't challenge you. They make it easy to stay the same. That might feel good in the moment, but it's poison.

Keeping score. Everything is transactional. Favors are debts. Help comes with strings attached. Nothing is given freely.

Drama and instability. The relationship is a rollercoaster — intense highs, destructive lows. You never know which version of this person you're going to get.

Discouragement of growth. When you try to change, this person resists. They mock your efforts. They say things like 'you think you're better than me now?' or 'this program has changed you — and not in a good way.' They need you to stay the same so the dynamic doesn't change."

Pause.

Facilitator:

"Here's the uncomfortable part. Some of you — maybe most of you — have people in your life right now who fit the toxic description. People you're loyal to. People you care about. People you've known for years. And I'm not going to stand here and tell you to cut them off tomorrow. That's not realistic, and it's not always the right answer. But I am going to tell you this: you need to be honest with yourself about which category your relationships fall into. Because a man who is trying to change while surrounded by people who benefit from him staying the same is fighting with one hand tied behind his back."

Discussion (5 min):

"Without naming names — what are the signs you've learned to recognize that tell you a relationship is pulling you backward? What are the warning signals?"

Let 3-4 people share.

Instruction: Boundaries (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Boundaries. This is a word that gets misused and misunderstood, so let's be clear about what it actually means. A boundary is a line you draw that defines what you will and won't accept — from others and from yourself. It's not a wall. It's not a weapon. It's a statement of self-respect that also respects the other person.

In here, boundaries are complicated. The environment pushes against them constantly. People ask you for things. People test you. People expect you to prove loyalty by crossing your own limits. And the culture often says that having boundaries is a sign of weakness — that a real one doesn't say no.

That's backwards. Having boundaries is strength. Knowing where your lines are and holding them — especially when there's pressure to cross them — that's composure. That's integrity. That's exactly what a FORGE mentor has to model."

Types of boundaries:

***Physical boundaries.** Your personal space, your property, your body. 'Don't touch my stuff' is a boundary. It's not disrespect — it's a line.*

***Emotional boundaries.** What you're willing to listen to, absorb, or be responsible for. You can care about someone without carrying their emotional weight. 'I hear you, but I can't take that on right now' is a boundary.*

***Behavioral boundaries.** What behavior you'll accept around you. 'I'm not going to be around that conversation' is a boundary. Walking away from something that violates your values is a boundary.*

***Time and energy boundaries.** You have finite resources. Saying 'I can talk to you about this tomorrow, but not right now' is a boundary. You are not obligated to be available to everyone at all times.*

***Relational boundaries.** What role you play in someone's life — and what role they play in yours. 'I'm your mentor, not your errand runner' is a boundary. 'I care about you, but I'm not going to lie for you' is a boundary."*

Facilitator:

"Here's what makes boundaries hard in this environment: setting a boundary can feel like you're disrespecting someone or breaking loyalty. It's not. A boundary, delivered with respect, is one of the most honest things you can do in a relationship. It says: 'I value this relationship enough to be straight with you about what I can and can't do.'

As mentors, you will need boundaries constantly. Mentees will test them. They'll ask you to do things outside your role. They'll want you to take sides. They'll want you to carry their problems. If you can't hold boundaries, you'll burn out in a month — or worse, you'll cross a line that costs you your position and your credibility."

Instruction: The FORGE Brotherhood and Accountability (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about what FORGE relationships are supposed to look like. We call it brotherhood — but not in the way that word usually gets used in here.

Brotherhood in the streets or in the dorm usually means unconditional loyalty. 'I've got your back no matter what.' That sounds good. But think about where that leads. 'No matter what' means you're riding with someone even when they're wrong. You're co-signing their bad decisions. You're putting yourself at risk for their mistakes. That's not brotherhood — that's a pact to stay stuck together.

FORGE brotherhood is different. It means: **I care about you enough to tell you the truth. I support your growth, not your comfort. I have your back — which means I won't let you destroy yourself without saying something.** That's harder than blind loyalty. It takes more courage. And it leads somewhere better."

Holding accountable without destroying the relationship:

"This is a skill you're going to need as a mentor, and it's one of the hardest things in human relationships: telling someone a truth they don't want to hear without making them your enemy.

Here's how you do it.

Step 1: Lead with care. Before you say the hard thing, make it clear that you're saying it because you care, not because you're judging. 'I'm saying this because I respect you and I want to see you succeed' is not a script — it has to be genuine. If you don't actually care about the person, don't give the feedback. It'll come across as an attack.

Step 2: Be specific. Don't say 'you're messing up.' Say 'I noticed you've missed three sessions and you've been spending time with [people who pull you backward]. I'm concerned about where that's heading.' Specific and observable. Not assumptions about their character.

Step 3: Ask before you tell. Instead of lecturing, ask a question. 'What's going on with you?' 'How are you feeling about the program?' 'Where do you see this leading?' Give them room to reflect before you deliver your take.

Step 4: Own your perspective. Use 'I' language. 'I'm worried about you.' 'I've seen this pattern before and it concerns me.' Not 'you're being an idiot' — which is judgment, not accountability.

Step 5: Respect their choice. After you've said what you need to say, let them decide what to do with it. You can hold someone accountable and still respect their autonomy. You don't control them. You've done your part by being honest.

Step 6: Stay in the relationship. Here's the key — accountability is not rejection. After the hard conversation, you don't ice the person out. You stay present. You let them know the relationship didn't break because you told the truth. That's what separates accountability from punishment."

Facilitator:

"In FORGE, we call people in — we don't call them out. Calling out is public, shaming, about showing everyone that YOU have standards. Calling in is private, caring, about showing the person that YOU see them and believe they can do better. The goal is never to humiliate. The goal is to help."

Practice Exercise: Relationship Mapping (25 minutes)

Purpose: Participants honestly assess their current relationships and identify which support their growth and which work against it.

Facilitator:

"Get out your journals. We're going to do an exercise that requires real honesty — and this stays in your journal. I'm not going to ask you to share anything you're not comfortable sharing.

Draw three concentric circles — like a target. The center circle is you. The first ring around you is your inner circle — the people closest to you. The outer ring is people who are in your life but at more distance.

Now — write names. Put people where they actually are, not where you wish they were. Family, friends, cellmates, people in this program, people in the dorm, people from before you came in.

Once you've placed everyone, I want you to put a mark next to each name:

*A **plus sign (+)** next to people who support your growth — who challenge you, encourage you, hold you accountable, and want to see you succeed.*

*A **minus sign (-)** next to people who work against your growth — who enable your worst habits, discourage your efforts, pull you toward old patterns, or whose presence makes it harder for you to be the man you're trying to become.*

*A **question mark (?)** next to people you're not sure about — the relationship could go either way depending on choices that haven't been made yet.*

Be honest. No one is looking at your page."

Individual work (10 min). Facilitator is quiet during this. Let them work.

Pair share (8 min):

*"Find a partner — someone you trust. Share what you're comfortable sharing. The question to discuss: **What did you notice about the balance? Are there more plus signs or minus signs? What does that tell you about the environment you've built around yourself?**"*

Full group debrief (7 min):

Facilitator:

"You don't need to share names or specifics. But I want to hear: what did you learn from looking at this map?"

Let 3-4 people share.

"Here's what I want you to take from this. You have more control over this map than you think. You can't always remove people — especially in here, where you don't choose who you live with. But you can choose how much access and influence someone has. You can choose to spend more time with the plus signs and less with the minus signs. You can choose to set boundaries with people who pull you backward. You can choose to invest in relationships that make you stronger.

And here's the FORGE piece: every man in this circle should be a plus sign for every other man in this circle. That's the commitment. Not blind loyalty. Not 'I've got your back no matter what.' The commitment is: I will support your growth, I will tell you the truth, and I will hold you accountable — because that's what real brothers do."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. This week we covered empathy, social awareness, and relationships. Here's today's closing question:

Name one relationship in your life — in here or out there — that you commit to strengthening this week through intentional service, honesty, or boundary-setting. What specifically will you do?"

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

Facilitator (closing):

"Homework for this weekend — two things:

- 1. **Strengthen one pro-social relationship this week through intentional action.** Whatever you just committed to — do it. Write about it in your journal.*
- 2. **Review your relationship map.** Identify one person in the minus column and write about what a healthy boundary with that person would look like. You don't have to act on it yet — just get clear on what the boundary would be.*

Next week we move into problem solving and decision making — how to think clearly when things get complicated, how to make decisions under pressure, and how to think about consequences before they happen. That's Weeks 9. The work keeps building. See you Tuesday."

Session 24 Checklist

- [] Room set up in circle

- [] Opening circle completed with observation homework check
- [] Week 8 progression reviewed (empathy → awareness → relationships)
- [] Healthy vs. toxic relationship characteristics taught
- [] Boundaries defined and types explained
- [] FORGE brotherhood model explained (support without enabling)
- [] Accountability without destruction — 6 steps taught
- [] Calling in vs. calling out distinction made
- [] Relationship mapping exercise completed (individual + pair share + debrief)
- [] Closing circle completed
- [] Homework assigned (strengthen one relationship + write about one boundary)

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 8

What to Watch For

Empathy resistance: Some participants will resist the empathy material — especially writing from the perspective of someone they've harmed. This is normal and often indicates that the exercise is hitting exactly where it needs to. Don't force it, but don't let them skip it either. If someone says "I can't do that," respond with: "I hear you. Try. Even two sentences. You might surprise yourself."

Performative empathy vs. real empathy: Watch for participants who talk a good game about empathy but don't actually demonstrate it in the room. The man who gives a great answer about perspective-taking but then dismisses another participant's comment five minutes later — that's a coaching moment. Don't call it out publicly in Week 8. Note it and address it individually.

Relationship map reactions: The relationship mapping exercise can surface grief, anger, and anxiety. Some men will realize they have very few plus signs. Some will confront the fact that their closest relationships are the most toxic. Be prepared for emotional responses. Normalize them: "This exercise is designed to show you what is, not to make you feel bad about it. Now that you see it, you can change it."

Group dynamics shifting: By Week 8, the cohort has been together for nearly two months. Cliques have formed. Some relationships have deepened. Some tensions may have developed. Use the social awareness material as an opportunity to name dynamics you're seeing in the cohort itself — not to embarrass anyone, but to demonstrate that reading the room includes reading THIS room.

Common Week 8 Challenges

"**Empathy is weakness.**" If this comes up: "Tell me about a time someone understood what you were going through — really understood it. How did that feel? Did it make them weak? Empathy isn't agreement and it isn't submission. It's intelligence. You can understand someone completely and still hold a firm line."

"**I already know how to read people.**" True — many participants are highly skilled at reading people for survival. The difference: "You've been reading people to protect yourself. Now you're learning to read people to help them. Same skill, different purpose."

"**My people are my people — I'm not going to turn on them.**" This usually comes up during the relationship mapping or boundaries discussion. Response: "Nobody's asking you to turn on anyone. Setting a boundary isn't

betrayal. Telling someone the truth isn't disloyalty. The question isn't whether you're loyal — it's whether your loyalty is helping both of you grow or keeping both of you stuck."

Difficulty writing from a victim's perspective. Some participants will struggle genuinely with the homework of writing from the perspective of someone they've harmed. This is often because the reality is painful. Others may struggle because they've been in victim stance themselves and haven't fully separated their own pain from the pain they've caused. Don't push too hard on this in one week — it's a muscle that develops over time.

Preparation for Week 9

- Review the 6-step problem-solving model (T4C-based) — be prepared to teach it step-by-step with prison-specific examples
- Prepare decision-making scenarios for Session 26 (pressure situations common in correctional settings)
- Review the 10-10-10 rule and pre-decision concepts
- Prepare "ripple effect" mapping materials for Session 27 (large paper or whiteboard if available)
- Have real-world examples ready of consequential thinking — both good decisions and bad ones