



PHASE 2 — DEVELOPMENT

Week 13 of 36

# The Mentor Identity

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Sessions 37–39

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

*Dooly State Prison*

# FORGE Curriculum

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## **Phase 2: Development — "Build Others"**

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# Week 13: The Mentor Identity

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## Week 13 Overview

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**Purpose:** This is the first week of Phase 2. Everything shifts now. For 12 weeks, participants have been doing their own work — identifying thinking errors, building emotional regulation, learning conflict resolution, developing empathy. That work was necessary. But it was preparation. Starting this week, the question changes from "How do I grow?" to "How do I help someone else grow?" Week 13 establishes the mentor identity: what a mentor is, what a mentor isn't, and why ongoing self-work is non-negotiable for anyone who wants to serve others.

**Sessions This Week:** - Session 37 (Tuesday): What Makes a Good Mentor - Session 38 (Wednesday): Mentor Boundaries - Session 39 (Thursday): The Parallel Process

**Materials Needed:** - Journals/notebooks (participants should have these from Phase 1) - Pens/pencils (1 per participant) - Talking piece for circle process - Handout: "Elements of Effective Mentoring" summary (1 per participant — can be handwritten on paper if no copier) - Handout: "Mentor Boundaries Quick Reference" (1 per participant) - Handout: "Mentor Wellness Plan" template (1 per participant) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available)

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# SESSION 37: What Makes a Good Mentor

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**Day:** Tuesday **Duration:** 2 hours **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 makes mentoring effective based on research (MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice) 2. Describe the credible messenger model and why lived experience is an asset 3. Distinguish between the roles of mentor, friend, and authority figure 4. Articulate the paradox of mentoring: you give in order to grow 5. Identify qualities of effective mentors they have experienced or observed

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (15 minutes)

**Purpose:** Mark the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2. This is a significant moment — name it.

**Facilitator:**

*"Welcome to Phase 2. I want you to sit with what that means for a minute. You spent 12 weeks doing the hardest kind of work there is — looking at yourself honestly. You identified your thinking errors. You learned to name your emotions instead of being controlled by them. You practiced conflict resolution, active listening, accountability. You passed your assessment. You earned the right to be sitting here.*

*But here's the shift: Phase 1 was about you. Phase 2 is about everyone else.*

*Starting today, you're not just learning for yourself anymore. You're learning to help other men do what you just did. That's a different kind of responsibility. And honestly? It's harder. Because when you're doing your own work, you only have to manage yourself. When you're mentoring someone else, you have to manage yourself AND hold space for another person's struggle.*

*So — opening round. Talking piece. Two questions: **How are you feeling about starting Phase 2? And what's one thing from Phase 1 that changed you?"***

**Send the talking piece around.** Facilitator goes first to model.

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## What the Research Says: Elements of Effective Mentoring (20 minutes)

**Purpose:** Ground the mentor identity in evidence, not just good intentions. Participants need to know that mentoring has been studied and that there are specific practices that make it work.

### Facilitator:

*"Before we get into what makes a good mentor, let me ask you a question: Have you ever had a mentor? Someone — inside or outside — who made a real difference in your life? Not a friend. Not a family member doing their job. Someone who chose to invest in you when they didn't have to."*

**Allow 3-4 responses.** Don't rush this. If someone says they never had one, acknowledge it:

*"That's real. A lot of men in this room never had anyone play that role. That's part of why you're here — so someone else doesn't have to say that."*

### Facilitator:

*"There's an organization called MENTOR — the National Mentoring Partnership. They've studied what makes mentoring actually work versus what makes it a waste of time. They identified what they call the 'Elements of Effective Practice.' Here's what the research shows:*

**One: The relationship is the program.** *It doesn't matter how good the curriculum is or how smart the mentor is. If the mentee doesn't trust you, nothing happens. Trust is built through consistency, reliability, and genuine care — not through techniques.*

**Two: Mentoring requires structure AND flexibility.** *Good mentors have a plan. They show up prepared. But they also know when to throw the plan out because the person in front of them needs something different today. If your mentee just got bad news from home, you don't barrel through a lesson on thinking errors. You sit with him.*

**Three: Training and ongoing support matter.** *The research is clear — untrained mentors can actually do harm. Good intentions are not enough. That's why FORGE doesn't just hand you a certificate and say 'go mentor.' You're going through 12 more weeks of training, then supervised practice.*

**Four: The mentee's needs come first — not the mentor's.** *This is harder than it sounds. A lot of people become mentors because it makes them feel good about themselves. There's nothing wrong with that — but the moment your need to feel helpful overrides the mentee's actual needs, you've stopped mentoring and started performing.*

**Five: Screening and boundaries protect everyone.** *Not everyone should be a mentor. Not every match works. And clear boundaries protect both the mentor and the mentee. We'll dig deep into boundaries on Wednesday."*

**Pause. Check for questions.**

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## The Credible Messenger Model (20 minutes)

**Purpose:** Help participants understand that their lived experience — including incarceration, mistakes, and struggle — is not a liability. It's their greatest asset as mentors.

### Facilitator:

*"Now I want to talk about something that makes FORGE different from most mentoring programs. Most programs bring in outside volunteers — good people with good hearts who have never lived a day inside a prison. They have education. They have resources. They mean well.*

*But here's the problem: when a man who's been in a dorm for two years is struggling — when he's angry, when he's thinking about doing something stupid, when he's ready to give up — and a volunteer from the outside says, 'I understand how you feel,' what does that man think?"*

**Allow responses.** The room will likely say something like "No you don't" or "You have no idea."

*"Exactly. You can't hear someone who hasn't walked your road. That's not a knock on volunteers. It's just the truth.*

*Now imagine the same man is struggling — and a mentor who's served time, who's made the same mistakes, who's lived in the same conditions says, 'I know what you're going through. I've been there. And I found a way through it.'*

*That's the credible messenger model. Your experience — all of it, including the parts you're ashamed of — makes you credible. It makes you believable. It gives you access that no outside professional will ever have.*

*Programs across the country are proving this works. In California, the ARC program puts men with lived experience into 33 prisons as mentors. In New York City, credible messenger mentors work with young people in the community — men who've been where those young men are heading, who can say with authority, 'That road leads nowhere. I know, because I walked it.'*

*Your past is not a disqualification. It's a credential. But — and this is critical — only if you've done the work to transform it. A man who hasn't dealt with his own issues has no business trying to help someone else deal with theirs. That's why Phase 1 came first."*

## Exercise: The Mentor I Needed (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Get out your journals. I want you to write for 7 minutes on this prompt:*

*Think of a moment in your life — before or during incarceration — when you needed a mentor and didn't have one. What was happening? What did you need? What would the ideal mentor have done or said in that moment?*

*If you did have a mentor at some point, write about what made that person effective. What did they do that actually reached you?*

*Be specific. Not 'they were a good person.' What did they DO?"*

**7 minutes of writing.** Room is silent. Facilitator writes too.

### Share out (8 min):

*"Who's willing to share? Not the whole entry — just the key thing. What did you need, or what did that mentor do that worked?"*

**Allow 4-5 responses.** Listen for common themes: listened without judging, didn't give up on me, was honest, held me accountable but didn't shame me, showed up consistently, shared their own struggles.

### Facilitator:

*"Listen to what you're describing. Nobody said 'they had all the answers.' Nobody said 'they lectured me until I got it.' What you're describing is someone who was present, honest, consistent, and real. That's what a mentor is. And that's what you're training to become."*

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## Mentor vs. Friend vs. Authority Figure (15 minutes)

**Purpose:** Clarify role distinctions. This is where a lot of new mentors get confused.

### Facilitator:

*"One of the biggest mistakes new mentors make is confusing roles. Let me break down three different relationships, because they look similar on the surface but they're fundamentally different."*

**Write these three columns on the board or easel paper (or present verbally):**

**A Friend:** - Mutual — you both give and receive equally - No formal role or responsibility - You can vent to each other - Loyalty is personal — 'I've got your back no matter what' - No obligation to hold each other accountable - You take sides

**An Authority Figure:** - One-directional — power flows downward - Enforces rules - Tells you what to do - Relationship is defined by the role, not the person - Compliance-based — you do it because you have to - Consequences for disobedience

**A Mentor:** - Purposeful — the relationship exists to serve the mentee's growth - You care, but you're not their friend - You hold them accountable, but you're not their boss - You share your experience, but you don't make their decisions - You have boundaries — you can't be available 24/7 and you can't carry their burdens - You earn trust, but you don't chase approval - When they mess up, you don't take sides — you help them see clearly

**Facilitator:**

*"Here's where it gets tricky in this environment. You live with your mentees. You're in the same dorm, eating the same food, dealing with the same COs. There's no office door to close at the end of the day. The guy you're mentoring might be your bunkmate.*

*So the lines get blurred. Your mentee wants to be your friend. He wants to hang out, talk about sports, play cards. And some of that is fine — you're human. But there has to be a part of the relationship where you're his mentor, not his buddy. Where you can say the hard thing. Where you can hold him to a standard. Where you don't co-sign his excuses because you don't want to damage the friendship.*

*If you become his friend first and his mentor second, you'll lose the ability to help him when it matters most. If you become an authority figure, he'll comply when you're watching and do whatever he wants when you're not. The mentor role lives in between — close enough to be trusted, far enough to be honest."*

**Quick discussion (5 min):**

*"Where do you think the hardest line will be for you? Being too much of a friend, or being too much of an authority? Be honest."*

**Allow 3-4 responses.**

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## The Paradox of Mentoring (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"I want to close with something that might not make sense until you experience it.*

*Mentoring looks like giving. You're giving your time, your energy, your attention, your experience. You're investing in someone else's growth. On the surface, you're the one doing the work and the mentee is the one benefiting.*

*But here's what every experienced mentor will tell you: **you will grow more from mentoring than your mentee will.** Not because you're selfish about it. Because the act of teaching something forces you to understand it at a deeper level. Because when you tell a mentee to manage his emotions, you can't afford to lose your own. Because watching someone else struggle with the same things you struggled with gives you perspective on your own journey.*

*This is the paradox: you give in order to grow. Service isn't sacrifice — it's the mechanism of transformation. Think about that this week. Journal on it tonight."*

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## Closing Circle (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Closing round. One sentence: **What kind of mentor do you want to be? Not what you want to do — who do you want to be as a mentor?**"*

### Talking piece goes around.

### Facilitator (closing):

*"Hold onto what you just said. We're going to come back to it at the end of Phase 2.*

*Homework: 1. Journal entry — at least half a page on this prompt: **Think about a time someone tried to help you but made it worse. What did they do wrong? What would a good mentor have done differently?** 2. Read the 'Mentor Boundaries' section in your handbook if one exists. If not, just come ready to think about where your limits are.*

*Tomorrow we talk about boundaries — what mentors do and don't do. That session is going to save you from the mistakes that burn out most new mentors. See you Wednesday."*

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## Session 37 Checklist

- [ ] Room set up in circle

- Opening circle completed — Phase 2 transition acknowledged
- Elements of Effective Mentoring presented (MENTOR research)
- Credible messenger model explained
- Journaling exercise: "The mentor I needed" completed
- Share-out discussion held (4-5 participants)
- Mentor vs. friend vs. authority figure distinctions clarified
- The paradox of mentoring discussed
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal on failed helping + handbook reading)

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# SESSION 38: Mentor Boundaries

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**Day:** Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **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. Describe what mentors do and don't do within the FORGE model 2. Define emotional boundaries and explain "caring without carrying" 3. Explain confidentiality and its limits in the mentoring relationship 4. Identify situations that require referral (safety concerns, mental health, medical) 5. Practice applying boundary decisions in realistic scenarios

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in round. How are you today — really? And what came up for you when you did last night's journal entry about someone who tried to help but made it worse?"*

**Send the talking piece.** Listen for themes — controlling helpers, people who made it about themselves, people who couldn't hold boundaries. You'll reference these later.

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### Review and Bridge (5 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Yesterday we talked about what makes a good mentor. Today we talk about what keeps a good mentor from becoming a burned-out, resentful, ineffective one. The answer is one word: boundaries.*

*Boundaries are not walls. Walls keep people out. Boundaries keep you healthy so you can keep showing up. Every mentor who ever flamed out — who got overwhelmed, who lost themselves trying to save someone else, who crossed a line and made things worse — it started with a boundary failure.*

*Today is about making sure that doesn't happen to you."*

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## What Mentors Do and Don't Do (20 minutes)

**Purpose:** Create a clear reference for the mentor role. This is not about limiting participants — it's about protecting them and the people they serve.

**Facilitator:**

*"Let's build two lists together. I'll start with some, and I want you to add to them."*

**Write on board/easel or present verbally:**

**What Mentors DO:** - Listen without judgment - Share their own experience when it's helpful (not to show off, not to take over the conversation) - Ask questions that help the mentee think, not questions that lead to the answer you want - Hold mentees accountable to their own goals and commitments - Model the behavior they're teaching - Show up consistently — be someone the mentee can count on - Maintain confidentiality within appropriate limits - Celebrate growth — even small progress - Refer when the situation is beyond their scope - Take care of themselves so they can keep doing this work

**What Mentors DON'T DO:** - Give advice on legal matters (you're not a lawyer) - Diagnose mental health conditions (you're not a therapist) - Provide medical advice (you're not a doctor) - Hold onto a mentee's property, contraband, or secrets that involve safety - Intervene in gang dynamics (this is above your scope — always) - Take sides in a mentee's conflicts - Try to "fix" people — you facilitate growth, you don't engineer it - Share a mentee's private information with others (outside of safety exceptions) - Make promises you can't keep ("I'll make sure you get moved" or "I'll talk to the warden") - Put yourself in physical danger to prove a point - Carry a mentee's emotional weight as your own

**Facilitator:**

*"What would you add to either list? What have you seen go wrong when someone tried to help but didn't know their lane?"*

**Allow 4-5 additions from the group.** Add them to the lists.

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## Emotional Boundaries: Caring Without Carrying (20 minutes)

**Purpose:** This is the most important boundary for peer mentors. In a correctional environment, emotional boundaries are constantly tested.

**Facilitator:**

*"Here's where most new mentors get in trouble. You're going to work with men who are in pain. Real pain. Men who are grieving, who are angry, who are scared, who are hopeless. And because you've been through your own version of that pain, you're going to feel it when they share it.*

*That's empathy. And it's essential. But there's a line between empathy and absorption. Between caring about someone and carrying their burden as if it's yours.*

*Let me give you a picture."*

*"Imagine a man is drowning. You're on the shore. There are three things you can do:*

**Option one:** *Jump in after him. Now you're both drowning. That's what happens when you carry someone's problems. You go down with them.*

**Option two:** *Stand on the shore and yell instructions. 'Swim harder! Kick your legs!' That's lecturing. It doesn't help.*

**Option three:** *Stay on solid ground, extend a rope, and pull. You're connected to him. You're helping him. But you are not in the water. You are on solid ground.*

*Caring without carrying means staying on solid ground. You feel for the person. You're present with them. But you don't take their pain home with you. You don't lie awake replaying their story. You don't start feeling responsible for their choices.*

*This is not cold. This is sustainable. A mentor who drowns in his mentee's pain can't mentor anyone."*

**Pause. Let it sink in.**

**Facilitator:**

*"How does this play out in real life here? Let me give you some examples.*

*Your mentee tells you his mother is dying and he can't get a compassionate transfer. He's devastated. You sit with him. You listen. You validate his pain. But when you walk away from that conversation, you put it down. You feel for him, but you don't carry his grief into your own night.*

*Your mentee gets a DR he doesn't deserve. He's furious. You hear him out. You help him process. But you don't adopt his anger. You don't storm over to the CO and get in it yourself.*

*A guy in your dorm is self-destructing — picking fights, isolating, making bad choices. You offer support. You show up. But if he keeps choosing destruction, you don't let his failure become your failure. You did your part. You can't want someone's growth more than they want it."*

*"The phrase I want you to remember is this: **I can care about you without being responsible for you.** Say that back to me."*

**Group repeats it.**

*"Again."*

## Group repeats.

"Write it in the front of your journal. You're going to need it."

## Confidentiality and Its Limits (15 minutes)

**Purpose:** Be crystal clear about what stays private and what doesn't.

### Facilitator:

"Confidentiality is the foundation of trust in a mentoring relationship. If your mentee doesn't believe you'll keep his business private, he won't tell you anything real. And if he doesn't tell you anything real, you can't help him. So here's the commitment: **What your mentee shares with you stays between you and him.** Period. It doesn't become conversation in the chow hall. It doesn't get shared with his enemies. It doesn't get brought up in group unless he brings it up himself. His story is his, and he trusted you with it. Honor that.

Now — here are the exceptions. And there are no exceptions to the exceptions."

### You **MUST** break confidentiality when:

1. **Someone has a weapon or is planning to acquire one.** This is a zero-tolerance red line. Weapons endanger everyone. You report this to staff or program leadership. There's no gray area.
2. **Someone expresses intent to harm themselves.** If a mentee says he's thinking about killing himself or hurting himself, this is beyond your scope. You don't handle this alone. You stay with him and you get help. We'll practice this in simulations.
3. **Someone expresses intent to harm someone else.** If a mentee tells you he's planning to hurt another person, you have an obligation to prevent that harm. This doesn't mean you go tell the target — it means you engage the person, try to de-escalate, and involve staff or program leadership.
4. **A child or vulnerable person is being harmed.** If you learn about abuse of a child or vulnerable person, this gets reported. Period.

### Facilitator:

"I know what some of you are thinking. 'If I report something, I'm a snitch.' Let me address that head-on.

There is a difference between snitching and saving a life. Snitching is giving up information to get yourself an advantage — a deal, a favor, a lighter sentence. That's self-serving.

Reporting a safety concern is the exact opposite. You're not gaining anything. You're risking something — your reputation, your comfort, your relationship with the mentee. You're doing it because someone's life or safety is at stake. That's not snitching. That's service. That's exactly what a stakeholder does.

Is this conversation uncomfortable? Yes. Will this be the hardest part of being a mentor? Maybe. But I'd rather you struggle with this now than freeze when it matters."

## Open for questions (5 min):

*"Questions? Pushback? This is the time to wrestle with it — not when someone's in crisis."*

**Address questions honestly.** Common ones: - "What if I'm not sure it's serious?" → When in doubt, err on the side of safety. Talk to program leadership. - "What if the person gets in trouble because I reported?" → You're not responsible for the consequences of their actions. You're responsible for doing the right thing. - "What if it damages my credibility?" → It might, short-term. But the men who matter — the ones doing the work — will respect it. And you'll be able to look at yourself in the mirror.

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### **Exercise: 10 Boundary Scenarios (25 minutes)**

**Purpose:** Practice making boundary decisions in realistic situations before they happen in real life.

**Facilitator:**

*"Pair up. I'm going to read 10 scenarios. For each one, discuss with your partner: **Is this within my role as a mentor? If yes, what do I do? If no, what do I do instead?** You have about 90 seconds per scenario."*

**Read each scenario. Give pairs time to discuss. Then get 1-2 responses before moving to the next.**

*Scenario 1: Your mentee asks you to read his legal appeal and tell him if it's good.*

**Answer: Outside your role. You're not a lawyer. You can help him find someone who can review it — a law clerk, legal aid, or fellow inmate with legal knowledge. But you don't give legal opinions.**

*Scenario 2: A mentee tells you he's been having thoughts of hurting himself but says "Don't tell anyone, I just needed to say it out loud."*

**Answer: You cannot keep this confidential. You stay with him, you thank him for trusting you, and you tell him honestly: "I hear you, and I'm glad you told me. But I care about your safety too much to keep this between us. I'm going to help you talk to someone who can help." Then you follow the referral process.**

*Scenario 3: Your mentee's bunkmate asks you what your mentee talks about in your sessions.*

**Answer: Confidential. "That's between me and him. If you want to talk about something yourself, I'm here."**

*Scenario 4: A mentee says he's been feeling depressed for weeks — can't sleep, can't eat, doesn't care about anything.*

**Answer: You can listen and support, but this sounds like clinical depression. Encourage him to request a mental health referral. You're not qualified to treat this, but you can walk him to sick call or help him put in a request. Don't diagnose — just facilitate access to help.**

*Scenario 5: A mentee asks if he can come talk to you anytime, day or night.*

**Answer: Set reasonable boundaries. "I'm here for you, and I mean that. But I can't be available 24/7 and stay healthy enough to do this well. Let's set up regular check-in times, and if something urgent comes up, I'll make time. But I need my downtime too, and that's not me not caring — that's me making sure I can keep showing up for you."**

*Scenario 6: A mentee tells you he has a weapon because he's been threatened by someone in another dorm.*

**Answer: Red line. You empathize with the fear — "I understand you're scared, and that's real." But the weapon has to go. This gets reported to program leadership or staff. No exceptions. You can advocate for his safety through proper channels, but you cannot keep the weapon secret.**

*Scenario 7: Your mentee is making great progress but asks you to tell the parole board how well he's doing.*

**Answer: Discuss with program leadership. You may be able to provide input through proper channels, but you don't make promises about influencing parole decisions. Be honest: "I can share your progress with the program lead, and they may be able to include it in official records. But I can't guarantee anything with the parole board, and I don't want to set you up for disappointment."**

*Scenario 8: A mentee tells you in confidence that another FORGE participant is bullying someone in the dorm.*

**Answer: This involves FORGE community safety. You can keep the mentee's name confidential, but the behavior needs to be addressed. Talk to program leadership. A FORGE participant bullying someone is a Code of Conduct issue.**

*Scenario 9: A mentee breaks down crying during a one-on-one session. He's talking about his children and how he's failed them.*

**Answer: This is within your role. You don't fix it. You don't rush to make him feel better. You sit with him. You let him feel it. You might say: "That pain is real. And the fact that you feel it means you care. That's**

**not weakness — that's the foundation of change." You don't carry it home. You hold space, and then you let it go.**

*Scenario 10: After a session, your mentee hugs you and says, "You're like a brother to me."*

**Answer: This is warm, but be careful. You can acknowledge the connection: "I appreciate that. This relationship matters to me too." But internally, check yourself: Am I becoming his friend more than his mentor? Can I still have the hard conversations? If the friendship is overtaking the mentoring, you need to recalibrate — not by being cold, but by staying purposeful.**

### Debrief (5 min):

**Facilitator:**

*"Which scenario was hardest for you? Which one made you unsure?"*

### Allow 3-4 responses.

*"Good. The fact that some of these are hard means you're thinking about them honestly. The men who think every scenario is easy are the ones who'll freeze when it happens for real. Uncertainty is where learning lives."*

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### Closing Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Closing round: What's one boundary you think will be hardest for you to hold as a mentor? Be honest."*

### Talking piece goes around.

**Facilitator (closing):**

*"I heard a lot of honesty in that round. Good. Knowing your vulnerabilities before you're in the field is what separates a prepared mentor from a well-meaning one.*

*Homework: 1. Journal entry — at least half a page: **What does 'caring without carrying' mean to you? Where in your life have you struggled with this?** 2. Think about this: Who is YOUR support system? When mentoring gets heavy — and it will — who do you go to? Have at least 2 names ready for tomorrow's session.*

*Tomorrow we talk about the parallel process — why you can't give what you don't have, and how to take care of yourself while serving others. See you Thursday."*

## Session 38 Checklist

- Room in circle formation
- Opening circle completed
- "What Mentors Do / Don't Do" lists created
- Emotional boundaries taught — "caring without carrying"
- Drowning/rope metaphor delivered
- "I can care about you without being responsible for you" practiced
- Confidentiality and its 4 exceptions clearly explained
- "Snitching vs. safety" addressed directly
- 10 boundary scenarios discussed in pairs
- Debrief on hardest scenarios
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (journal on caring without carrying + identify 2 support people)

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# SESSION 39: The Parallel Process

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**Day:** Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **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 the parallel process principle: you can't give what you don't have 2. Articulate why ongoing self-work is required for mentors, not optional 3. Identify signs of secondary stress and compassion fatigue 4. Describe at least 3 self-care practices they can realistically use in their environment 5. Create a personal mentor wellness plan that includes a support system

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in round. How are you today? And who are the 2 people you identified as your support system?"*

**Send the talking piece.** Note who has identified support people and who hasn't. If someone says "nobody" or "I don't need one," don't correct them now — the session will address it.

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### You Can't Give What You Don't Have (20 minutes)

**Purpose:** Establish the non-negotiable connection between personal wellness and effective mentoring.

**Facilitator:**

*"There's a concept in mentoring called the parallel process. It comes from counseling — therapists have known about it for decades. Here's the idea:*

***Whatever is happening inside the mentor shows up in the mentoring.***

*If you're angry and unresolved, you'll bring that into your sessions. If you haven't dealt with your own trauma, your mentee's trauma will either overwhelm you or shut you down. If you're not practicing emotional regulation yourself, you can't teach it with any credibility. If you've stopped doing your own work, you've got nothing left to offer.*

*Think of it like this: you're a well. Your mentees come to you for water. If you never refill the well — if you never do your own work, process your own emotions, take care of your own mind — the well runs dry. And a dry well is useless to everyone, including you."*

**Facilitator:**

*"I want to be blunt about something. Phase 1 is over. You passed your assessment. Congratulations. But that doesn't mean the work of Phase 1 is done. You don't graduate from self-awareness. You don't finish emotional regulation. You don't 'complete' accountability.*

*The thinking errors you identified in Week 2? They're still in there. They'll come back under stress. The emotional triggers you mapped in Week 3? They don't disappear because you named them. The conflict patterns you recognized in Week 6? They'll show up again.*

*Ongoing self-work is not optional for a FORGE mentor. It's required. Not because we're checking on you — because if you stop doing your own work, you will eventually harm someone you're trying to help."*

**Let that sit. Don't soften it.**

*"Let me give you a real example. A mentor in another program — a good man, committed, respected — stopped doing his own work after certification. He was putting all his energy into his mentees and nothing into himself. Six months in, a mentee shared a trauma story that was almost identical to the mentor's own experience. The mentor wasn't just triggered — he was shattered. He lost his composure in front of the mentee, the mentee felt guilty for sharing, and both of them went backward.*

*That's the parallel process. What's unresolved in you will surface in the mentoring relationship. The only prevention is to keep doing your own work."*

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## **Secondary Stress and Compassion Fatigue (20 minutes)**

**Purpose:** Name the real emotional cost of mentoring so participants can recognize it before it takes them down.

**Facilitator:**

*"There's a term in helping professions called 'secondary traumatic stress.' Therapists, social workers, emergency responders — they all deal with it. It's the stress that comes not from your own trauma, but from repeatedly absorbing other people's pain.*

*You are going to experience this. I'm not saying you might. I'm saying you will. When you sit with a man who's lost his family. When you mentor a young guy who reminds you of yourself at his worst. When someone you've invested in makes a terrible decision and throws it all away. When you spend weeks building trust with a mentee and he gets transferred without warning. When the same dorm drama plays out for the hundredth time and you wonder if any of this matters.*

*This is the cost of caring. And if you don't manage it, here's what happens:"*

**Signs of secondary stress and compassion fatigue:**

- *You start feeling numb — you stop caring and you can't figure out why*
- *You get irritable — small things set you off that never used to*
- *You withdraw — you start avoiding your mentees, your cohort, the work*
- *You start feeling cynical — "Nobody's going to change. This is pointless."*
- *Your sleep gets worse*
- *You lose motivation for things you used to care about*
- *You start resenting the people you're supposed to be helping*
- *You stop doing your own journaling, your own self-work*
- *You break small boundaries — and then bigger ones*

**Facilitator:**

*"Does any of this sound familiar? Not from mentoring — from life? Some of you have felt these things just from living in this environment. Now imagine layering the weight of other people's problems on top of that.*

*This is not weakness. This is the natural consequence of doing hard emotional work without refueling. The strongest mentors are not the ones who never feel it — they're the ones who recognize it early and do something about it."*

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## **Self-Care in a Correctional Environment (15 minutes)**

**Purpose:** Be realistic. Self-care advice often sounds like it's written for people with yoga studios and beach access. This needs to work inside a prison.

**Facilitator:**

"I know what 'self-care' sounds like to a lot of you. Bubble baths and meditation apps. Let me be clear — I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about survival strategies that keep you functional, healthy, and effective in an environment designed to wear you down.

Here's what's actually available to you:"

**Physical self-care:** - Exercise — it's the most effective stress management tool you have. Use it. Consistently. - Sleep hygiene — as much as your environment allows, protect your sleep. No heavy conversations right before lights out. Have a shutdown routine. - Nutrition — eat as well as you can with what's available. Your body fuels your mind.

**Mental self-care:** - Journaling — you've been doing this for 12 weeks. Don't stop. This is your processing tool. - Reading — feed your mind something other than stress. - Thinking reports on yourself — when you feel off, run a thinking report. You know how. Use the tool.

**Emotional self-care:** - Talk to someone — not as a mentor. As a human. Your support system exists for this. - Allow yourself to feel without judgment — sadness, frustration, doubt. They're not signs of failure. - Set emotional boundaries on your day — you don't have to respond to every crisis around you. Some things are not yours to carry.

**Social self-care:** - Your FORGE cohort — these men know what you're going through because they're going through it too. Use each other. - Check in with your support people regularly, not just when you're in crisis. - Protect relationships that recharge you. Limit time with people who drain you when you can.

**Purpose-based self-care:** - Reconnect with WHY you're doing this. Read your commitment statement from Week 1. - Remember a mentee who grew because of your investment. Let that fuel you. - Service itself can be self-care — but only when it comes from fullness, not depletion.

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## Exercise: Mentor Wellness Plan (25 minutes)

**Purpose:** Each participant creates a concrete, personal plan for maintaining their own health while mentoring.

**Facilitator:**

"Get out your journals. We're going to build your mentor wellness plan. This isn't an exercise you complete and forget — this is a document you live by. When you start mentoring in Phase 3, this plan is what keeps you on solid ground.

Write down each category and fill it in with specifics — not 'I'll take care of myself.' Specific actions."

**Write the template on the board or read it aloud:**

### **My Mentor Wellness Plan**

- 1. My ongoing self-work commitment:** (What will you do to keep working on yourself? How often? Example: "I will complete at least 2 thinking reports per week and journal every night.")
- 2. My physical health practices:** (What will you do consistently? Example: "I will exercise at least 4 times per week. I will maintain a sleep routine.")
- 3. My emotional regulation tools:** (What techniques will you use when stress builds? Example: "4-4-4 breathing. Grounding exercises. Walking the yard to decompress before reacting.")
- 4. My support system:** (Name at least 2 people. What role does each play? Example: "[Name] — I can be honest with him about how I'm really doing. [Name] — he'll call me out if he sees me slipping.")
- 5. My warning signs:** (What are the early signals that you're burning out? Be specific to you. Example: "I stop journaling. I start snapping at people over small things. I stop wanting to go to sessions.")
- 6. My reset plan:** (When you notice the warning signs, what will you do? Example: "Talk to my support person within 24 hours. Take one day to step back from mentoring if possible. Do a full thinking report on what's going on. Talk to the facilitator.")

**15 minutes of writing.** Facilitator circulates, asks questions, pushes for specificity.

*"If your support system section is blank or you wrote 'nobody,' we need to talk about that right now. A mentor without a support system is a mentor heading for a wall. If you genuinely don't have someone you trust enough, then building that is your first priority. Start with this cohort — the men in this room have been through 12 weeks of hard work together. That's a foundation."*

**Share out (10 min):**

*"I want 3-4 volunteers to share one part of their plan — whichever section you want. Not because it has to be perfect, but because saying it out loud makes it real."*

**Allow sharing.** Affirm specificity. Push vagueness:

*"When you say 'I'll take care of myself,' what does that actually look like at 9 PM on a Tuesday when your mentee just told you something heavy and you can't sleep? Get specific."*

## Building the Support System (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Before we close, I want to address the support system piece directly. In here, asking for support can feel like weakness. You've survived by being self-sufficient. You've handled your problems alone because trusting people got you burned.*

*But mentoring changes the equation. You're asking other people to be vulnerable with you. You're asking mentees to trust you with their pain. If you won't let anyone do the same for you, you're being a hypocrite. Not a harsh one — a well-meaning one. But still.*

*A support system for a FORGE mentor looks like this:*

**Person 1:** *A peer — someone in the program who understands the work. You can process a hard session with them. You can say 'I'm struggling' without it becoming gossip.*

**Person 2:** *Someone who will be honest with you. Not someone who tells you what you want to hear. Someone who'll say, 'You're slipping and here's what I see.' You need that more than you think.*

**Person 3 (if possible):** *The facilitator or program lead. This is what supervision is for. In Phase 3, you'll have weekly supervision sessions for exactly this reason. Use them.*

*Right now — turn to someone in this room who you trust. Not your best friend. Someone you respect. And say this: 'Will you be one of my support people? Here's what I need from you.' Have a 2-minute conversation."*

**Allow pairs to connect (2-3 min).** Some people will do this easily. Others will struggle. That's fine — the act of trying matters.

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## Closing Circle (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Final round for Week 13. Complete this sentence: 'The biggest thing I'm taking from this week is...'"*

**Talking piece goes around.**

**Facilitator (closing):**

*"This week we laid the foundation of your mentor identity. You learned what effective mentoring looks like. You learned where the boundaries are. And you confronted the truth that you can't pour from an empty cup.*

*Homework for next Tuesday: 1. Finalize your mentor wellness plan. Make it specific enough that you could hand it to someone and they'd know exactly what you committed to. 2. Journal entry: **'What scares me most about being a mentor — and what gives me the most hope?'** At least half a page. 3. Read ahead in the handbook on facilitation and teaching if material is available.*

*Next week, we shift gears. Week 14 is about teaching and facilitation — how to actually run a session, design a lesson, and manage a room full of people. You're going to practice, and by the end of Week 15, every one of you will have delivered a 30-minute lesson.*

*Service Over Self. See you Tuesday."*

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## Session 39 Checklist

- Room in circle formation
- Opening circle completed — support system question asked
- Parallel process principle explained with concrete example
- Ongoing self-work requirement stated clearly
- Secondary stress and compassion fatigue signs taught
- Self-care practices presented — realistic for correctional environment
- Mentor wellness plan exercise completed (all 6 sections)
- Share-out of wellness plan elements
- Support system building exercise completed
- Closing circle completed
- Homework assigned (finalize wellness plan + journal on fears and hopes + reading)

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# FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 13

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## What to Watch For

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**The "I'm ready" overconfidence:** Some participants will come into Phase 2 feeling like they've graduated. They passed the Phase 1 assessment, they've done the work, they know the material. Watch for men who are too confident too early. Mentoring is humbling — and the overconfident ones are usually the first to struggle when a real situation tests them. Don't crush the confidence. Just keep pushing them to go deeper.

**The "I'm not ready" doubt:** Other participants will feel imposter syndrome. "Who am I to mentor anyone? I'm still in here. I still mess up." This is actually healthy doubt — but it needs to be managed so it doesn't become paralysis. Remind them: readiness is not perfection. It's willingness to keep growing while serving others.

**Boundary resistance:** The confidentiality limits — especially the obligation to report safety concerns — will cause friction. Some men will push back hard on this. Let them push. This conversation needs to happen in a classroom before it happens in a crisis. Don't shortcut the wrestling.

**Emotional reactions to the credible messenger content:** Telling participants that their worst experiences are now assets can be powerful — and painful. Some men will get emotional when they realize their suffering has purpose. Others will resist: "Don't tell me my pain was 'for a reason.'" Both responses are valid. Give space.

**Isolation:** Watch for participants who don't have anyone to put on their support system list. These men need extra attention — not just for the exercise, but as a genuine concern. A man without support people is carrying everything alone, and that won't survive the weight of mentoring.

## Common Week 13 Challenges

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**"I don't need self-care — I've survived this long without it."** Response: "You've survived. The question is whether you've been living or just enduring. And the question for mentoring is whether survival mode is enough to help someone else grow. It's not. Surviving is about you. Thriving is what lets you serve."

**"What if my mentee doesn't trust me because I'm an inmate too?"** Response: "That's actually your advantage — but only if you've earned credibility through your actions, not just your sentence. Trust in here is built the same way it is everywhere: consistency, honesty, and showing up when it's hard."

**"The confidentiality thing feels wrong."** Response: "I understand that. This goes against the code most of us were raised on. But think about it this way — if your little brother told you he had a weapon and was planning to

use it, would you keep that secret? Or would you do whatever it took to keep him alive? Being a mentor means extending that same protective instinct to the men you serve. It's not easy. It shouldn't be."

"**What if I burn out and want to quit?**" Response: "Then you talk to your support people and you talk to me. Burning out isn't failing — ignoring it is. Every mentor hits walls. The ones who last are the ones who ask for help before the wall falls on them."

## Preparation for Week 14

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- Review adult learning principles (Knowles) — be ready to teach them simply and concretely
- Prepare examples of good facilitation questions vs. lecture-style delivery
- Have a list of Phase 1 topics ready for participants to choose from for their practicum lessons
- Create or print the observation rubric for teaching practica (from Part IV of Program Design)
- Prepare the 4-part lesson plan template (Hook → Content → Practice → Debrief)
- If possible, identify 2-3 short examples of different learning styles in action that are relevant to the prison context