



PHASE 2 — DEVELOPMENT

Week 21 of 36

# Restorative Practices

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Sessions 61–63

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 21: Restorative Practices

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## Week 21 Overview

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**Purpose:** Shift from crisis response to culture building. After two weeks of the hardest simulations in the program, participants now learn the tools that prevent many of those crises from happening in the first place. Restorative practices — circle keeping, accountability conversations, and building a restorative dorm culture — are the proactive side of mentoring. This week answers the question: What does a FORGE dorm look like when it's working well?

**Sessions This Week:** - Session 61 (Tuesday): Circle Keeping - Session 62 (Wednesday): Accountability Conversations - Session 63 (Thursday): Building a Restorative Dorm Culture

**Materials Needed:** - Talking piece (or multiple — one per practice circle group) - Circle process reference cards (1 per participant — see template below) - Accountability conversation model handout (1 per participant) - Scenario cards for accountability conversation practice (Session 62) - Community circle planning template (1 per participant — Session 63) - Easel paper or whiteboard - Journals/notebooks

**Tone Shift for Facilitators:** The energy this week should feel different from Weeks 19-20. Those weeks were about surviving the worst. This week is about building the best. Bring warmth. Bring hope. These practices are the heart of what a FORGE mentor does every day — not the crisis moments, but the daily work of building a community where people treat each other with dignity.

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# SESSION 61: Circle Keeping

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

## Learning Objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain the restorative circle process — opening, rounds, and closing 2. Describe the role and significance of the talking piece 3. Identify four types of circles and when to use each one 4. Demonstrate the circle keeper's role — holding space, not directing 5. Plan and facilitate a community-building circle

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in. You've been using circles since Week 1 of FORGE. Every session starts with one. You've experienced what it feels like to sit in a circle, hold a talking piece, and speak your truth.*

*Today, we go deeper. You've been a participant in circles. Now you learn how to keep one.*

*Check-in question: **What has the circle process meant to you since you started FORGE? Has it changed how you listen?**"*

Send the talking piece. Let this round run — the answers will demonstrate the value of what you're about to teach.

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## The History and Philosophy of Circles (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Circles aren't something that got invented in a university. They've been used by indigenous peoples around the world for thousands of years — Native American communities, Maori in New Zealand, First Nations in Canada, tribal communities across Africa. When people needed to make decisions, resolve conflict, heal after harm, or simply connect with each other, they sat in a circle.*

*Why a circle? Think about it physically. No one is at the head. No one is in the back row. Everyone can see everyone. There is no podium, no stage, no hierarchy built into the seating. The shape itself says: we are equal here.*

*In the criminal justice context, restorative circles came from the restorative justice movement — a different way of thinking about harm. The traditional system asks three questions: What law was broken? Who broke it? What punishment do they deserve? Restorative justice asks different questions: Who was harmed? What do they need? Whose responsibility is it to make it right?*

*FORGE uses circles for both. For building community. And for repairing it when it breaks."*

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## The Circle Process (20 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Let me walk you through the structure. Every circle has three parts: opening, rounds, and closing."*

### Opening:

*"The opening sets the tone. It signals that this is different from a regular conversation. The keeper — that's the person facilitating the circle — opens with something intentional. It can be:*

- *A reading or a quote*
- *A moment of silence*
- *A grounding exercise (deep breath, close your eyes, arrive in this space)*
- *A brief statement of purpose ('We're here today to...')*

*The opening should take 1-3 minutes. Its job is to slow people down. In the dorm, people are moving fast, thinking fast, reacting fast. The opening says: we're going to be different in this space. We're going to be present.*

*After the opening, the keeper introduces the talking piece and reviews the circle guidelines."*

### Review circle guidelines:

*"You know these, but let me formalize them:*

- 1. **Speak only when holding the talking piece.** No exceptions. No quick comments. No reactions.*
- 2. **Speak from the heart.** Honest words, not performance.*
- 3. **Listen from the heart.** When someone else holds the piece, your only job is to hear them.*
- 4. **Say just enough.** Don't monopolize. Say what's true and pass it on.*
- 5. **You may pass.** No one is forced to speak. Passing is always respected.*

*The keeper states these at the beginning of every circle. Even if the group has heard them fifty times. Because the guidelines are not just information — they're a ritual that creates the container."*

### **Rounds:**

*"A round is one trip of the talking piece around the circle. The keeper poses a question or a prompt. The piece goes around. Everyone who wants to speak gets to speak. One round, one question.*

*Most circles have 2-4 rounds. The first round is usually low-stakes — a check-in, a warm-up. 'How are you arriving today?' 'What's one word for how you're feeling?' This gets people talking and builds safety.*

*The second and third rounds go deeper. The questions get harder. The keeper builds toward the purpose of the circle.*

*The final round is usually a closing question — a takeaway, a commitment, a reflection. 'What are you leaving with today?' 'What's one thing you want to carry from this conversation?'*

*The art of circle keeping is in the questions. Good questions open people up. Bad questions shut them down. We'll practice this."*

### **Closing:**

*"The closing mirrors the opening. It brings the circle to a formal end. It can be:*

- A summary by the keeper of what was shared (without naming individuals unless invited to)*
- A moment of silence*
- A group affirmation or shared statement*
- A simple 'Thank you for your honesty. This circle is closed.'*

*The closing matters because it says: what happened here was held. It was honored. It's complete."*

## The Talking Piece (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"The talking piece is not just a prop. It's the mechanism that makes the circle work.*

*When you hold it, the room belongs to you. No one interrupts. No one reacts. No one side-eyes. You get to finish your thought. In a world where most of us have never had that — where we've been talked over, shut down, dismissed — holding the talking piece and being truly heard is powerful.*

*When you don't hold it, your job is singular: listen. Not plan your response. Not judge. Not check out. Listen. That's harder than it sounds. Most of us listen only until we have something to say. The circle trains a different muscle — listening to understand, not to respond.*

*Choosing the talking piece matters. It should be something meaningful. Some groups use a stone, a book, a carved figure, something someone made. What matters is that the group gives it significance. When a man holds that piece, he's holding the group's trust."*

### Facilitator:

*"What have we used as our talking piece in FORGE? Has it felt meaningful to you? If you were going to run a circle in your dorm, what would you choose as the talking piece, and why?"*

Brief discussion — 3-4 responses.

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## Types of Circles (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Not all circles are the same. As a FORGE mentor, you'll use four types. Each has a different purpose and a different energy."*

### 1. Community-Building Circles:

*"These are the most common and the most important. They're not about solving a problem. They're about building connection before a problem happens.*

*You run these regularly — weekly if possible. The questions are simple. 'What's something good that happened this week?' 'What's one thing people don't know about you?' 'Who's someone who believed in you when you didn't believe in yourself?'*

*These circles feel light. People laugh. People share. People start seeing each other as human beings instead of cell numbers. That's the foundation everything else is built on.*

*When you know the man next to you — when you know he has a daughter who sends him drawings, when you know he's working on his GED, when you know he's afraid of going home — it's a lot harder to treat him like nothing."*

## 2. Problem-Solving Circles:

*"When there's a tension in the dorm — not a crisis, but a growing issue — a problem-solving circle brings people together to address it collectively. The questions are structured:*

- *'What's the issue as you see it?'*
- *'How is this affecting people?'*
- *'What options do we have?'*
- *'What can we agree to?'*

*The keeper doesn't solve the problem. The circle solves the problem. The keeper just holds the space."*

## 3. Healing Circles:

*"After something hard happens — a fight, a loss, a violation that shook the dorm — a healing circle gives people space to process. These are slower. The questions are gentler. The room needs to be safe.*

*These circles are the hardest to keep. People may cry. People may sit in silence. People may share things they've never said out loud. The keeper's job is to hold all of it without trying to fix it.*

*You do NOT run a healing circle about something that's still actively dangerous. If the situation is ongoing, it's not a healing circle — it's a problem-solving circle or a referral."*

## 4. Reintegration Circles:

*"When someone is coming back from a setback — disciplinary action, a conflict, time in segregation — a reintegration circle helps them rejoin the community. The questions are direct:*

- *'What happened?'*
- *'How has it affected the group?'*
- *'What does the person need to rejoin?'*
- *'What does the group need from them?'*

*This is restorative justice in action. Not punishment, not pretending nothing happened — but creating a real pathway back in."*

## The Keeper's Role (10 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"The circle keeper is not a facilitator in the traditional sense. You're not leading a discussion. You're not teaching. You're holding space. There's a difference.*

*Here's what the keeper does:*

1. **Prepares the space.** *Chairs in a circle. No tables. Talking piece ready. Distractions minimized.*
2. **Opens with intention.** *Sets the tone. Reviews the guidelines. Introduces the talking piece.*
3. **Asks the questions.** *Good questions, in the right order, at the right depth.*
4. **Holds silence.** *When the room goes quiet — and it will — the keeper does not fill the space. Silence in a circle is not a problem. It's often where the deepest processing happens.*
5. **Protects the process.** *If someone speaks out of turn, the keeper gently redirects. If someone is being attacked, the keeper intervenes. If the guidelines are violated, the keeper names it and restores them.*
6. **Does not take sides.** *In a problem-solving or healing circle, the keeper is neutral. Always.*
7. **Closes with care.** *Summarizes without judging. Thanks the group. Formally closes.*

*Here's what the keeper does NOT do:*

- *Give advice during the circle*
- *Share their own opinion on the issue (unless it's a community-building circle and they're participating too)*
- *Side with anyone*
- *Force someone to speak*
- *Analyze what people share*
- *Try to reach a conclusion that hasn't emerged naturally"*

## Practice: Run a Community-Building Circle (25 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Time to practice. I need a volunteer to keep a circle. Right now. In front of everyone.*

*You're going to run a 15-minute community-building circle with this group. Here's what I want you to do:*

- 1. Open the circle — whatever feels right to you. A reading, a moment of silence, a statement of purpose.*
- 2. Review the guidelines.*
- 3. Run two rounds with questions you choose. One lighter, one a little deeper.*
- 4. Close the circle.*

*I'll observe. The group participates genuinely — don't make it hard for the keeper, but don't make it fake either. Be real."*

**Select a volunteer.** If no one volunteers, assign someone who you've seen demonstrate natural facilitation ability.

**The keeper runs the circle (15 minutes).** Facilitator observes. Takes notes. Does not intervene unless the process completely breaks down.

### Feedback (10 minutes):

### Facilitator:

*"Nice work. Let's debrief. [Keeper's name], how did that feel?"*

Let the keeper share first.

Then to the group:

*"What worked? What would you adjust?"*

Provide specific feedback: - Opening: Was it intentional? Did it change the energy? - Questions: Were they open enough? Did they build in depth? - Silence: Did the keeper hold it or fill it? - Closing: Did it feel complete?

### Facilitator:

*"Circle keeping is a skill you build by doing it. You'll get more practice this week and throughout Phase 3. The first one always feels awkward. That's normal. The tenth one will feel natural."*

## Closing (5 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Tonight, I want you to do two things.*

*First — journal: **Design three circle questions you could use for a community-building circle in your dorm.***

***One warm-up question, one deeper question, one closing question.***

*Second — think about what talking piece you would use in your dorm and why.*

*Tomorrow: accountability conversations. Different skill, same heart. See you Wednesday."*

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## Session 61 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Circle history and philosophy taught
- Three-part circle process explained (opening, rounds, closing)
- Circle guidelines formalized
- Talking piece significance discussed
- Four types of circles taught (community-building, problem-solving, healing, reintegration)
- Keeper's role defined — what to do and what not to do
- Practice circle run by a participant
- Feedback on practice circle given
- Journal prompt assigned (design 3 circle questions + choose talking piece)

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# SESSION 62: Accountability Conversations

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

## Learning Objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Explain the difference between accountability and punishment 2. Use the 4-step accountability conversation model 3. Conduct a hard conversation with someone they care about without destroying the relationship 4. Receive accountability from others without becoming defensive 5. Apply restorative principles to everyday interactions

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Check-in. Did you design your three circle questions last night? Give me one of them — the deeper one."*

Send the talking piece. As participants share their questions, note the quality — this tells you who's internalizing circle keeping and who's still on the surface.

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### Accountability vs. Punishment (20 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Let me ask you a question. Think about the worst punishment you ever received — in here, growing up, wherever. What did it teach you?"*

Let 3-4 people respond. Listen for themes. Most answers will fall into one of two categories: "It taught me not to get caught" or "It taught me nothing except that the person with power will use it."

**Facilitator:**

*"Now think about a time someone held you accountable — not punished you, held you accountable. Someone who cared about you looked you in the eye and said, 'What you did hurt people, and I expect more from you.' What did that teach you?"*

Let 3-4 people respond.

**Facilitator:**

*"Hear the difference? Punishment is about pain. It's about making someone suffer for what they did. It's backward-looking. The only question is: How much do they deserve to suffer?"*

*Accountability is about responsibility and repair. It's forward-looking. The questions are: What happened? Who was hurt? What needs to change? How do we move forward?"*

*Punishment says: 'You're bad.' Accountability says: 'You did something that caused harm, and I believe you're capable of doing better.'*

*That's a fundamentally different message. One destroys. The other builds.*

*As a FORGE mentor, you will need to hold people accountable regularly. Your mentees will make mistakes.*

*They'll break commitments. They'll fall short of what they said they'd do. And your job is not to punish them — there are enough people in their lives doing that. Your job is to hold them accountable in a way that maintains the relationship and invites growth.*

*That's one of the hardest skills in mentoring. Caring about someone AND telling them the truth. Most people can do one or the other. FORGE mentors do both."*

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## **The 4-Step Accountability Conversation Model (20 minutes)**

**Facilitator:**

*"Here's a model you can use. Four questions. In order. Every time."*

**Write these where everyone can see them:**

**Step 1: What happened?**

*"Start with facts. Not accusations. Not interpretations. Facts. 'You missed the last three sessions.' Not 'You obviously don't care about FORGE.' 'You said something in the dorm that hurt Marcus.' Not 'You're a bully.' The person you're talking to needs to agree on the facts before you can move forward. If they deny or distort, gently redirect: 'I'm not asking why yet. I'm asking: did this happen?'"*

**Step 2: Who was affected and how?**

*"This is where empathy comes in. You're asking the person to look beyond themselves. 'When you missed those sessions, who was affected? Your cohort was short a member. Your partner in the exercise didn't have a partner. The facilitator had to adjust. How do you think that landed?'"*

*Or: 'When you said that to Marcus, what do you think he felt? What about the people who heard it?'"*

*You're not telling them how people felt — you're asking them to see it. There's a difference. When someone discovers the impact on their own, it sticks deeper than when you lecture them about it."*

**Step 3: What needs to happen to make it right?**

*"This is the repair step. And it comes from THEM, not from you. You ask: 'What do you think needs to happen to make this right?'"*

*If their answer is weak ('I'll just say sorry'), push: 'What would a real apology look like? What would actually repair the trust that was broken?'"*

*If their answer is nothing ('I don't owe anyone anything'), slow down. Use MI. Reflect their words back. 'So you're saying that what happened didn't affect anyone. Is that really what you believe?'"*

*Sometimes the repair is an apology. Sometimes it's a changed behavior. Sometimes it's a conversation with the person who was harmed. The key is that the person takes ownership of the repair — you don't impose it."*

**Step 4: How do we move forward?**

*"This is the commitment step. 'What are you going to do differently? What can I count on from you going forward?'"*

*And then the follow-up: 'I'm going to check in with you about this on Thursday. Not to hover. Because I care enough to follow through.'*

*This last step is what separates accountability from a one-time lecture. If you don't follow up, the conversation didn't happen. The follow-up IS the accountability."*

**Summarize:**

*"Four steps. What happened? Who was affected? What needs to happen to make it right? How do we move forward?"*

*Notice what's not in this model: shame. Threats. Punishment. Power plays. The goal is not to make someone feel bad. The goal is to help them see the impact of their actions and choose to do better. That's restorative accountability."*

## Practice: Accountability Conversations in Triads (35 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Time to practice. Get into groups of three. Here's how it works:*

- *Person A is the mentor having the accountability conversation*
- *Person B is the person being held accountable*
- *Person C is the observer — watching, taking notes, coaching*

*You'll rotate through all three roles. Each round takes about 8 minutes — 5 minutes for the conversation, 3 minutes for observer feedback.*

*I'm going to give each group a scenario card. These are realistic FORGE situations."*

**Distribute scenario cards.** Here are six scenarios — print enough so each group gets at least two different ones across rotations:

**Scenario 1:** A FORGE participant has been talking behind another participant's back, undermining his credibility in the dorm. When confronted, he says, "I was just being honest about what I think."

**Scenario 2:** A mentee promised he would complete three thinking reports this week and completed zero. This is the third week in a row. When you bring it up, he says, "I've been busy."

**Scenario 3:** A FORGE member got into a verbal altercation in the dorm — raised his voice, used threatening language. No physical contact, but the dorm was shaken. He says, "He came at me first."

**Scenario 4:** A mentor has been showing up late to sessions repeatedly. Not egregiously — 5-10 minutes. When asked about it, he says, "I was handling something in the dorm. I'm still here, aren't I?"

**Scenario 5:** A FORGE participant made a joke at another participant's expense during a session. The group laughed, but the target clearly felt humiliated. The joker says, "It was just a joke, he needs thicker skin."

**Scenario 6:** A mentee has been telling you he's been practicing regulation techniques. You learn from another mentor that the mentee had two anger blowups this week that he didn't tell you about. When you bring it up, he says, "Those weren't real anger, I was just frustrated."

**Round 1 (8 minutes):** Assign roles. Start.

Facilitator circulates. Listen for: - Are they starting with facts or accusations? - Are they asking about impact or telling? - Are they letting the person own the repair? - Are they planning follow-up?

**Round 2 (8 minutes):** Rotate roles. New scenario if available.

**Round 3 (8 minutes):** Rotate again.

## Debrief (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"Come back together. Let's debrief. I've got three questions."*

**Question 1:** "Which role was hardest — the mentor, the person being held accountable, or the observer? Why?"

Let 3-4 people respond. Common answers: Being the mentor is hard because you have to balance care and directness. Being held accountable is hard because it triggers defensiveness. Observing is hard because you can see what's not working but can't intervene.

**Question 2:** "What happened when the mentor led with facts vs. when they led with judgment? What was different?"

### Facilitator:

*"When you say 'You missed three sessions' — that's a fact. The person can engage with it. When you say 'You obviously don't take this seriously' — that's an interpretation. The person gets defensive. Facts open doors. Judgments close them."*

**Question 3:** "What's the hardest step of the four? Where do most conversations break down?"

Common answer: Step 2 (Who was affected) — because getting someone to see beyond themselves requires patience and skill. And Step 4 (How do we move forward) — because follow-through is where most people drop the ball.

### Key teaching point:

### Facilitator:

*"Let me leave you with this. The reason accountability conversations are so important is that the alternative is worse. If you don't hold someone accountable, one of two things happens:*

*One — the behavior continues and gets worse. The harm grows.*

*Two — resentment builds. You start avoiding the person. The relationship dies quietly.*

*An accountability conversation — done with care, done respectfully, done with the 4-step model — is an act of love. You're saying: 'I care about you enough to have this uncomfortable conversation. I believe you're capable of better.'*

*That's not easy. But it's what mentors do."*

## Closing (5 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Journal tonight: Think about someone in your life you need to have an accountability conversation with. It could be here, it could be outside. Write out the 4 steps. What happened? Who was affected? What needs to happen? How do you move forward? You don't have to have the conversation yet — just plan it.*

*Tomorrow — the big picture. Building a restorative dorm culture. How do you take circles, accountability conversations, and everything you've learned and create an environment where these practices are normal — not special occasions, but the way things work.*

*See you Thursday."*

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## Session 62 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Accountability vs. punishment distinction taught thoroughly
- 4-step accountability conversation model introduced
- Each step explained with examples and coaching language
- Triad practice completed — all three rounds
- Facilitator observed and coached during practice
- Debrief discussion held — hardest role, facts vs. judgment, where conversations break down
- Key teaching point delivered (accountability as an act of care)
- Journal prompt assigned (plan a real accountability conversation)

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# SESSION 63: Building a Restorative Dorm Culture

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

## Learning Objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Describe the difference between a reactive culture and a proactive/restorative culture 2. Explain how regular community circles prevent conflict 3. Plan how to introduce restorative practices to a dorm that has never experienced them 4. Anticipate and respond to resistance from dorm members 5. Design a 30-minute community circle for their housing unit

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## Session Plan

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### Opening Circle (10 minutes)

**Facilitator:**

*"Last session of Week 21. Check-in: What is one thing you've learned this week that you want to take into your dorm?"*

Send the talking piece.

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## Reactive vs. Proactive: Two Dorm Cultures (20 minutes)

### **Facilitator:**

*"I want you to picture two dorms. Same facility. Same type of men. Same COs. Same rules. But completely different cultures.*

### **Dorm A — the reactive dorm:**

*In Dorm A, problems get handled after they blow up. Someone steals, someone retaliates. A conflict simmers for a week until it becomes a fight. When someone has a bad day, they take it out on the nearest person. The mood of the dorm is set by whoever is having the worst day. People keep to themselves. Trust is low. Everyone is watching their back.*

*Staff responds to incidents after the fact — write-ups, separations, lockdowns. The cycle repeats. Nothing changes. The culture reproduces itself because no one is doing anything proactive.*

### **Dorm B — the restorative dorm:**

*In Dorm B, there's a check-in circle every week. Fifteen minutes. People go around and say how they're doing. That's it. But over time, people start actually knowing each other. When someone's struggling, others notice before it becomes a crisis.*

*When conflict happens — and it still happens — someone intervenes early. Not with threats, but with a conversation. 'Hey, what's going on between you two? Let's talk about it before it gets worse.' If it's serious, a problem-solving circle.*

*When someone makes a mistake, the response is accountability, not punishment. 'What happened? Who was affected? How do you make it right?' The person stays in the community. The harm gets repaired.*

*The mood of the dorm is set by the men who've decided to lead. Not by the worst day, but by the steady presence of people who care."*

### **Pause.**

### **Facilitator:**

*"Which dorm do you live in right now? Be honest."*

Let 3-4 people respond. Most will describe something closer to Dorm A.

*"And which dorm do you want to live in?"*

Let 2-3 respond.

*"Here's the thing: Dorm B is not a fantasy. It's what FORGE dorms in other programs look like after 6-12 months of mentors doing exactly what you're learning. It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen because someone gives a speech. It happens because mentors show up, day after day, and do the small things — the circles, the conversations, the check-ins — that slowly change what 'normal' looks like.*

*That's your job. Not to fix the dorm in a week. To start a process that changes it over time."*

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## Regular Check-In Circles as Prevention (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

*"The single most powerful prevention tool you have is a regular check-in circle. Here's why it works:*

***It catches problems early.*** *When someone shares that they're stressed, that they got bad news, that they're having trouble with someone — that information lets you act before things escalate. Most crises don't come out of nowhere. They build. A regular circle is an early warning system.*

***It builds relational capital.*** *Every time men sit in a circle and listen to each other honestly, trust grows. Not dramatically. Incrementally. But it accumulates. And when a conflict comes, that accumulated trust is what allows you to intervene. The person trusts you because you've been showing up, week after week, in the circle.*

***It normalizes vulnerability.*** *In a dorm, admitting you're struggling is usually seen as weakness. In a circle, it's participation. Over time, the circle teaches men that being honest about what they're carrying is not weakness — it's strength. And that changes everything.*

***It creates shared ownership.*** *When the dorm has a regular circle, it stops being 'the FORGE mentor's thing' and becomes 'what we do here.' That's normative culture — the group owns the standard."*

### Practical considerations:

*"Here's what a weekly check-in circle looks like in practice:*

- ***When:*** *Same time every week. Consistency is everything. If you do it on Sundays at 7 PM, it's always Sundays at 7 PM.*
- ***Where:*** *Common area. Wherever people can sit in a rough circle. It doesn't have to be perfect.*
- ***How long:*** *15-30 minutes. Don't make it an ordeal. People have short patience at first. Keep it tight.*
- ***Who:*** *Open to anyone. Voluntary. No pressure. But consistent.*
- ***What:*** *Simple check-in questions. 'How was your week?' 'What's on your mind?' 'What do you need from this group?'*

*For the first few weeks, maybe 3-4 people come. That's fine. The key is: you keep doing it. You show up even if only two people come. Because the consistency is the message. It says: this isn't a program. It's a practice. It's not going away."*

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## Introducing Restorative Practices to a Skeptical Dorm (20 minutes)

### **Facilitator:**

*"Now the hard part. You walk into a dorm and say, 'Hey, I want to start a circle where we sit and talk about our feelings.' What happens?"*

Let the group respond. They'll be realistic: laughter, mockery, suspicion, refusal.

### **Facilitator:**

*"Right. So how do you actually do this? Let me give you some strategies — learned from people who've done it before."*

### **Strategy 1: Don't use jargon.**

*"Don't walk in talking about 'restorative circles' and 'accountability frameworks.' That's program language. Use regular language. 'I want to get a few guys together once a week just to check in. See how everybody's doing. 15 minutes. No program stuff. Just real talk.' That sounds different than 'I want to facilitate a restorative community-building circle.'"*

### **Strategy 2: Start with the willing.**

*"You're not going to convert the whole dorm on day one. Start with 3-4 people who are open to it. Maybe other FORGE members. Maybe guys who you've already built trust with. Run the circle with them. Let it grow organically. When someone who's not in the circle sees that the guys who are in it seem calmer, more connected, more together — curiosity will bring them."*

### **Strategy 3: Lead by example, not by lecture.**

*"Don't tell people about restorative practices. Live them. When a conflict comes up, mediate it restoratively — facts, impact, repair, forward. When someone's struggling, check in. When someone makes a mistake, hold them accountable without destroying them. People will notice. And when they ask, 'How do you do that?' — that's your opening."*

### **Strategy 4: Use natural moments.**

*"You don't always need a formal circle. After something happens in the dorm — a fight, a lockdown, some bad news — gather whoever's willing: 'That was intense. Anyone want to talk about it?' That informal circle plants the seed. People experience the value before they hear the theory."*

### **Strategy 5: Expect resistance and don't take it personally.**

*"Some people will never come to a circle. Some will mock it. Some will attend once and never come back. That's fine. You're not trying to save everyone. You're building a culture. Culture is set by the committed few, not the entire population. Focus on depth, not breadth."*

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## **Resistance and Patience (10 minutes)**

### **Facilitator:**

*"Let me talk about patience for a minute. Because most of you — being the kind of men who sign up for a 9-month program — are action-oriented. You want results. You want to see change.*

*Culture change is slow. Painfully slow. You will run circles that feel pointless. You will have accountability conversations that seem to bounce off. You will model restorative practices and watch people go right back to destructive patterns.*

*And you have to keep going anyway.*

*Here's what I want you to hold onto: you are not responsible for outcomes. You are responsible for effort. You cannot control whether someone changes. You can control whether you show up, whether you're consistent, whether you treat people with dignity, whether you keep the circle going when nobody else seems to care.*

*The programs that work — GRIP, PEP, RSVP — they all say the same thing: the culture shift takes 6-12 months of consistent effort. Not a week. Not a big event. Months of small, unglamorous, repeated actions.*

*That's the work. And it's worth it. Because the alternative is Dorm A. And you know what Dorm A feels like."*

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## **Exercise: Plan a Community Circle for Your Housing Unit (25 minutes)**

### **Facilitator:**

*"Enough theory. Let's build something real.*

*I'm handing out community circle planning templates. You're going to design a 30-minute circle that you could actually run in your dorm. Not hypothetical. Real. Something you could do this weekend if you wanted to.*

*Here's what your plan needs to include:"*

## Template elements:

"1. **Purpose:** What is this circle for? (Community building? Addressing something specific?) 2. **Who:** Who will you invite? How will you invite them? 3. **When and where:** Specific day, time, location. 4. **Talking piece:** What will you use? 5. **Opening:** How will you open? (Reading, silence, grounding, statement of purpose — write it out) 6. **Round 1 question:** (Warm-up) 7. **Round 2 question:** (Deeper) 8. **Round 3 question:** (Closing/takeaway) 9. **Closing:** How will you close? (Write it out) 10. **Anticipated challenges:** What resistance might you face? How will you handle it?"

**Individual work (15 minutes).** Facilitator circulates, reviews plans, asks questions, pushes for specificity.

## Share out (10 minutes):

"Who wants to share their plan? I want to hear at least 3. Tell us: what's your opening, what's your deep question, and what's the biggest challenge you're expecting."

Let 3-4 participants share. Group provides feedback and suggestions.

### Facilitator:

"Keep these plans. In Phase 3, you'll actually run them. This isn't homework — it's preparation for the real thing."

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## Week 21 Closing Circle (15 minutes)

### Facilitator:

"This has been a different week. After two weeks of crisis simulations — weapons, suicidal statements, gang pressure — we spent this week learning how to build something. Circles. Accountability. Culture.

Both are necessary. You need to know how to handle the worst. And you need to know how to build the best. The mentor who can do both — who can de-escalate a crisis on Tuesday and run a community circle on Wednesday — that's a FORGE mentor.

Final circle for this week. I want you to think about this carefully.

**Complete this sentence: "The dorm culture I want to build is one where..."**

Send the talking piece. Facilitator goes last.

**Facilitator (after the round):**

*"Write that down. Tape it inside your journal. That's your vision. Everything you do from here on — every circle you keep, every accountability conversation you have, every time you choose patience over reaction — is in service of that vision.*

*Journal this weekend: **Write out your plan for the first month as a FORGE mentor in a dorm. What would you do in Week 1? Week 2? Week 3? Week 4? Be specific.***

*Next week we shift to life skills facilitation — you'll practice teaching topics like financial literacy, reentry planning, and health. Different content, same facilitation skills. You're getting close to Phase 3. Keep building.*

*See you Tuesday."*

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## Session 63 Checklist

- Opening circle completed
- Reactive vs. proactive dorm culture contrasted
- Regular check-in circles explained as prevention tool
- Five strategies for introducing restorative practices to a skeptical dorm taught
- Resistance and patience discussed honestly
- Community circle planning exercise completed (individual plans)
- At least 3 plans shared with group for feedback
- Closing circle completed — dorm culture vision statement
- Weekend journal prompt assigned (first month plan as a FORGE mentor)
- Preview of Week 22 given

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# FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 21

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## What to Watch For

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**Energy shift:** After the intensity of Weeks 19-20, some participants may initially disengage from the more constructive tone of Week 21. This is normal — crisis scenarios are adrenaline-producing, and circle keeping feels quiet by comparison. Reframe it: "The hardest simulations test your courage. Circle keeping tests your consistency. Both are forms of strength."

**Natural circle keepers:** Pay attention to who gravitates toward this work. Some participants will take to circle keeping naturally — they have the calm, the patience, the ability to hold space. Note these individuals. They may be your strongest cultural ambassadors in Phase 3.

**Participants who struggle with accountability conversations:** Some men will have difficulty with the 4-step model because they default to either avoidance or aggression. If someone consistently slips into lecturing, shaming, or making threats during practice, coach them individually. The accountability conversation requires the integration of nearly every Phase 1 skill — emotional regulation, active listening, assertive communication, empathy. If someone's struggling here, identify which underlying skill needs strengthening.

**Cynicism about culture change:** Some participants will push back on the idea that a weekly circle can change a dorm's culture. Honor the skepticism: "You're right that one circle doesn't change anything. But fifty circles — a year of showing up — changes everything. The question is whether you're willing to do the unglamorous work for long enough to see the results."

## Common Questions and Responses

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**"What if a CO shuts down our circle?"** — "This is why FORGE's relationship with administration matters. Before you run a circle in a dorm, make sure the program lead has cleared it with the facility. If a CO doesn't understand what you're doing, don't argue — stop, explain calmly, and follow up through proper channels. Never run a circle in a way that puts you or the participants at risk."

**"What if someone uses the circle to air grievances against a specific person who isn't there?"** — "The keeper redirects. 'We don't talk about people who aren't here. If you have an issue with someone, I can help you have that conversation directly. But this circle isn't the place for that.' Protect the process."

**"What if someone breaks the talking piece rule and I can't control the room?"** — "First — don't panic. Gently interrupt: 'Hold on — the talking piece is with [name]. Let them finish.' If the disruption continues, you

may need to close the circle early and have a private conversation with the disruptor. A circle that gets overrun teaches the group that the guidelines don't matter. Better to end early and try again next week than to let chaos rule."

## Preparation for Week 22

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- Review life skills content areas (financial literacy, reentry, health/wellness)
- Prepare mini-lesson assignment for participants (Session 64)
- Each participant should choose one financial literacy topic to prepare a 15-minute lesson on
- Have a reentry checklist template ready for Session 65
- Identify sensitive topics that may arise during Session 66 (health, relationships, parenting) and prepare ground rules for those discussions
- Begin thinking about Phase 2 assessment scheduling — the graded simulations are coming in Week 23