



PHASE 3 — PRACTICUM

Week 31 of 36

When Someone Fails

Sessions 91–93

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 3: Practicum — "Lead and Serve"

Week 31: When Someone Fails

Week 31 Overview

Purpose: This is the session many participants have been needing without knowing it. By Week 31, nearly every participant has experienced a mentee who's struggled — missed sessions, caught a disciplinary report, dropped out, relapsed into old patterns, or simply stopped trying. This week confronts the emotional reality of mentoring people through imperfect change. The goal is not to eliminate disappointment, but to process it honestly and build the resilience to keep going. By the end of this week, participants should understand that setbacks are part of the change process — not evidence that the work doesn't matter.

Sessions This Week: - Session 91 (Tuesday): When Someone Fails — Holding Hope Without Breaking - Session 92 (Wednesday): Field work — independent facilitation with periodic observation - Session 93 (Thursday): Field work — mentoring meetings + community circles

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks - Talking piece for circle process - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available)

SESSION 91: When Someone Fails — Holding Hope Without Breaking

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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Identify the emotional impact of a mentee's setback on the mentor 2. Distinguish between taking responsibility for someone's growth and taking ownership of their choices 3. Describe at least 3 strategies for processing disappointment without disengaging 4. Explain the long view of change — why setbacks don't erase progress 5. Articulate when to hold on to a mentee and when to let go

Session Plan

Opening Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Today's topic is one we've needed to have for a while. Some of you have been carrying this quietly. Some of you have mentioned it in case presentations. Some of you haven't said anything but I can see it.

*The talking piece question today is a big one. Take your time with it: **Has one of your mentees disappointed you? What happened, and how did it affect you?***

If you haven't experienced this yet, you can share a time when someone you believed in let you down. But be honest — this isn't a session for performing. This is a session for being real."

Send the talking piece. This round may take longer than usual. Let it. This is the most important part of the session — naming the pain.

Facilitator listens for: - Who is carrying guilt ("I should have done more") - Who is carrying anger ("He threw it all away") - Who is carrying doubt ("Maybe this doesn't work") - Who is numb ("It is what it is")

All of these are valid. Don't correct any of them yet. Just let them land.

Instruction: The Hardest Part of This Work (30 minutes)

Purpose: Normalize the emotional cost of mentoring and provide a framework for sustaining hope without denial.

Facilitator:

*"I want to tell you something that nobody tells mentors until it's too late: **the hardest part of this work is not the skills. It's the heartbreak.***

You will invest in a man. You will sit with him when nobody else would. You will listen to him talk about his kids, his regrets, his plans to change. You will watch him start to grow — show up on time, participate in circles, catch his thinking errors, make better choices. And then one day, he'll get a disciplinary report. Or he'll stop coming. Or he'll get into a fight. Or he'll tell you he's done.

And part of you will break. Not dramatically. Not where anyone can see. Just a quiet crack somewhere inside where you thought you were making a difference.

That crack is the price of caring. And every mentor who's ever done this work — in prison, on the street, in schools, in churches — every single one of them knows exactly what I'm talking about."

Pause. Let the room sit with it.

Facilitator:

*"Now I'm going to tell you something harder: **it is not your fault.***

You did not fail. Your mentee made choices. Those choices are his to own — not yours. The parallel process you learned back in Phase 1? It works in both directions. Just like you had to do your own work before you could help others, your mentee has to do his own work too. You can hold the door open. You can show him what's on the other side. But you cannot walk through it for him."

The Stages of Mentor Disappointment (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me name something you've probably been feeling without having words for it. When a mentee has a setback, most mentors go through a predictable process. Not everyone hits every stage, but see if you recognize yourself in this."

Stage 1: Self-Blame

"The first thing most mentors feel is guilt. 'What did I miss? Was I not checking in enough? Did I push too hard? Did I not push hard enough?' You replay every conversation looking for the moment you could have changed the outcome.

Here's the truth: maybe you could have done something differently. But that doesn't mean the outcome would have changed. People change on their own timeline. You influence the process. You don't control it."

Stage 2: Anger

"After guilt comes anger. Not always — but often. 'I put in all that work and he threw it away.' 'He knew better.' 'He disrespected the program, he disrespected me, he disrespected everyone who believed in him.'

That anger is real, and it's yours to process. But be careful with it. If you carry anger toward a mentee, it will poison every interaction you have with him going forward — and it will leak into your work with your other mentees. Anger tells you something important — that you cared. But it's not a place to live."

Stage 3: Doubt

"This is the dangerous one. After guilt and anger comes the question: 'Does any of this matter? If someone can go through all of this and still mess up — what's the point?'

If you've felt this, you're not weak. You're human. But I need you to stay with me here, because this is where mentors quit. Not because the work is too hard — because the doubt gets too heavy.

*Here's what I want you to hold: **one setback does not erase growth**. A man who catches a DR after six months of progress has not gone back to zero. He's a man who grew for six months and then stumbled. The growth is still there. It doesn't evaporate. He may not be able to see it right now. That's why he needs you."*

Stage 4: Numbness

"Some mentors protect themselves by stopping caring. 'It is what it is.' 'You can't help everyone.' 'I'm not going to invest like that again.'

I understand that instinct. It's a survival mechanism. But a numb mentor is a useless mentor. If you've stopped caring, you've stopped being able to do this work. And the men you're serving will feel it immediately. They know the difference between a mentor who's present and a mentor who's going through the motions."

Stage 5: Resilience

"And then — if you do the work of processing stages 1 through 4 honestly — you get to resilience. Resilience doesn't mean the disappointment doesn't hurt. It means you can hold the hurt and still show up. It means you can care about someone without needing them to succeed in order for your effort to matter. It means you take the long view."

The Long View of Change (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let me give you the long view, because you need it.

*The research on behavior change says something that sounds discouraging but is actually liberating: **most people who ultimately change their lives permanently fail multiple times first.** Relapse is part of recovery. Setbacks are part of growth. The stages of change model you learned in Phase 2 — precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance — people don't move through those in a straight line. They cycle. They go forward and back and forward again.*

Think about your own journey. How many times did you try to change something about yourself before it stuck? How many times did you know what the right thing to do was and do the wrong thing anyway? Be honest.

Your mentee is doing the same thing. The difference is, this time he has a mentor. This time, when he stumbles, there's someone there who doesn't give up on him. That might be the difference that makes this time the time it sticks.

Or it might not. And that has to be okay too."

Pause.

Facilitator:

*"Here's the sentence I want you to carry with you: **I am responsible for my effort. I am not responsible for his outcome.***

Say it to yourself. Write it down. Tape it inside your journal. Because the moment you make his outcome your responsibility, you will either burn out or shut down. Neither one serves anyone."

Specific Situations and Responses (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Let's get practical. What do you actually do when these things happen?"

When a mentee gets a disciplinary report:

"First — don't react immediately. Let a day pass if you can. Then go see him. Don't lead with disappointment. Don't lead with 'What were you thinking?' Lead with presence: 'I heard what happened. I'm here. What's going on?'

Then help him do what FORGE taught him to do: a thinking report. Walk through the situation-thought-feeling-action-consequence chain. Help him see his own thinking clearly. Don't moralize. Don't lecture. Just help him do the work.

If the DR means he's removed from FORGE, be honest about that. But make clear: 'This doesn't mean I've given up on you. When you're eligible to come back, I'll be here.' And mean it."

When a mentee drops out:

"This one hurts differently because it feels like rejection. He didn't just stumble — he chose to leave. Try to have a conversation before he's gone: 'I respect your decision. I just want to understand why.' Listen to his reasons without arguing. Sometimes the reason is valid — the program isn't right for him right now. Sometimes the reason is fear disguised as something else.

Either way, leave the door open: 'If you ever want to come back, or if you just need someone to talk to, I'm here.' Then let him go. You cannot hold someone who doesn't want to be held."

When a mentee makes the same mistake again:

"This tests your patience more than anything else. You've had the conversation. You've done the thinking report. He understood it. And then he did the exact same thing.

Remember: understanding something intellectually and having it change your behavior are two different things. How many times did you understand your anger was destructive before you actually learned to manage it? Change isn't a switch. It's a process. Your job is to keep the process going — even when it feels like you're going in circles."

When you're losing hope:

"Talk to someone. That's what this supervision group is for. That's what your cohort is for. That's what senior mentors are for. Do not carry this alone. The parallel process means you need the same kind of support you're giving your mentees. If you're struggling, say so. That's not weakness. That's wisdom."

Group Processing (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I want to open the floor. This isn't case presentations. This is processing. If you're carrying something related to what we discussed today — a mentee who's struggling, a disappointment you haven't talked about, a doubt you've been sitting with — this is the space for it.

No one has to share. But the invitation is real."

Hold space. Let people share. Don't rush to fix or reassure. Sometimes the most powerful thing a facilitator can do is sit in the discomfort with the group and not try to make it better with words.

If the room is heavy and quiet, that's okay. Silence after hard truths is appropriate.

If someone shares something particularly raw, acknowledge it: "Thank you. That took something to say. The fact that it hurts means you're doing this right."

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"I want to close with this. The men who are hardest to mentor are the men who need mentoring the most. The ones who test you, disappoint you, push you away, fail publicly — those are the ones the system has given up on over and over again. Every time someone gave up on them, it confirmed what they already believed about themselves: that they're not worth the effort.

You have the power to break that cycle. Not by fixing them. Not by saving them. By being the person who doesn't leave. That's it. That's the whole job some days. Just don't leave.

*Closing round: **One word** — what are you feeling right now?"*

Send the talking piece. One word each. No explanation needed.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Whatever you're feeling is right. Take care of yourselves this week. Write in your journals tonight — even if it's just a few sentences about what came up today. Use your coping strategies. Talk to each other. That's what the brotherhood is for.

Wednesday and Thursday — field work continues. If you've got a mentee who's struggling, don't avoid him this week. Go find him. Show up.

See you out there."

Session 91 Checklist

- Room set up in circle
 - Extended opening circle completed — mentee disappointment stories shared
 - Instruction delivered: emotional cost of mentoring
 - Five stages of mentor disappointment discussed
 - "Long view of change" framework presented
 - Specific situations addressed: DR, dropout, repeated mistakes, losing hope
 - "Responsible for effort, not outcome" principle established
 - Group processing held — open space for sharing
 - Closing circle completed — one-word check-out
 - Self-care and journaling emphasized
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SESSION 92: Field Work — Independent Facilitation

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours (in assigned area)

Field Work Plan

Participants facilitate sessions independently. Periodic observation continues.

Observation Focus This Week: - How is the participant's energy after an emotionally heavy supervision session? Is he present or depleted? - If a participant is working with a mentee who has recently struggled, how does he approach the interaction? - Is there evidence of burnout or emotional withdrawal?

Participant Expectations: - Facilitate planned session in assigned area - If you're working with a mentee who has had a setback, make contact this week — don't avoid the conversation - Self-reflection in journal: "After Tuesday's session, I'm thinking about... The mentee I'm most worried about right now is... because..."

SESSION 93: Field Work — Mentoring Meetings and Community Circles

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours (in assigned area)

Field Work Plan

Participants conduct one-on-one mentoring meetings and/or facilitate community circles.

Mentoring Meeting Guidance: - Prioritize mentees who are struggling — they need contact this week - Use OARS and the long view approach discussed in Session 91 - If a mentee has had a recent setback, walk through a thinking report together - Document all meetings in mentoring logs — note mentee's emotional state and your own

Community Circle Guidance: - This week's suggested circle theme (optional): "What keeps you going when things get hard?" or "Tell about a time you failed and what you learned from it" - Keep circles to 45-60 minutes - Document attendance, themes, energy level

Self-Reflection Prompt (journal): "The mentee relationship that's hardest for me right now is... What makes it hard is... What I'm going to keep doing anyway is..."

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 31

What to Watch For

Emotional fallout from Session 91. This is one of the heaviest sessions in the entire program. Some participants will be energized by it — relieved to finally name what they've been carrying. Others will be depleted. Check in informally with anyone who seemed particularly affected during the session.

The "I don't care" response. Watch for participants who respond to this session by hardening — deciding they won't invest emotionally in mentees anymore. That's a protective response, not a genuine one. It needs to be addressed, but gently: "I hear you saying you're not going to get attached. I understand why. But the whole reason FORGE works is because you do get attached. That's not a flaw — it's the feature. The question isn't whether to care. It's how to care sustainably."

Mentee avoidance. After a setback, the natural instinct — for both the mentor and the mentee — is to avoid each other. Check mentoring logs. If a participant hasn't made contact with a struggling mentee this week, ask about it directly.

Peer support activation. Watch whether the cohort rallies around members who are struggling. This is the normative culture at work. If participants are checking on each other after this session, the program is working at the deepest level.

Your own processing. This session may activate your own experiences of disappointment and loss. If you're carrying your own version of what participants shared, take care of yourself. Model what you're asking of them.

Common Challenges This Week

"How many chances does someone get?" This is a legitimate question. The honest answer: "There's no formula. Some people need three chances. Some need ten. The question isn't how many chances to give — it's whether the person is still trying. As long as someone is genuinely working at it, even imperfectly, they deserve another chance. When someone has completely checked out and is using FORGE as a shield without doing the work — that's a different conversation."

"What if I'm the one who's failing?" Some participants will turn this session inward and start questioning their own adequacy as mentors. Normalize this: "If you're asking that question, you're probably doing better than you think. The mentors who should worry are the ones who never question themselves."

Preparation for Week 32

- Ask all participants to come to Session 94 with a real situation from their field work that they need help with — the harder, the better
- Review the simulation scenario bank (Part III) as a reference for the types of situations that might come up
- Prepare to facilitate a session that is entirely participant-driven — you are the guide, not the instructor
- This is the most advanced problem-solving session in the program. Trust the group. They're ready.