



PHASE 3 — PRACTICUM

Week 33 of 36

Sustainability and Self Care

Sessions 97–99

Tuesday • Wednesday • Thursday

FORGE — Facilitating Opportunities for Reentry, Growth & Empowerment

Dooly State Prison

FORGE Curriculum

Phase 3: Practicum — "Lead and Serve"

Week 33: Sustainability and Self-Care

Week 33 Overview

Purpose: Equip emerging mentors with the tools and mindset to sustain themselves over the long haul. Mentoring is not a sprint — it is a way of life. Without deliberate self-care, even the strongest mentors burn out, lose their edge, or begin to harm the people they're trying to help. This week addresses the reality that serving others costs something, and that cost must be managed — not ignored.

Sessions This Week: - Session 97 (Tuesday): Sustainability and Self-Care — Supervision Session - Session 98 (Wednesday): Field work — Independent sessions - Session 99 (Thursday): Field work — Mentoring + community circles + training next cohort

Materials Needed: - Journals/notebooks - Talking piece for circle process - Burnout Self-Assessment handout (1 per participant — see below) - Personal Sustainability Plan worksheet (1 per participant — see below) - Easel paper or whiteboard (if available)

SESSION 97: Sustainability and Self-Care

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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to: 1. Recognize the signs of burnout and compassion fatigue in themselves 2. Distinguish between self-care as a practice and self-care as an event 3. Identify their personal warning signs — the signals that they're running on empty 4. Build a concrete, realistic self-care plan that works within a correctional environment 5. Articulate why sustainability is a service to the people they mentor

Session Plan

Opening Circle (15 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Check-in round. We're going deep today, so I need honesty from the start. Here's the question:

On a scale of 1 to 10 — 1 being completely depleted, 10 being fully charged — where is your tank right now?

And what's draining it?

One number and one sentence. That's it."

Send the talking piece around. Facilitator goes first to model honesty. Pay close attention to answers — anyone below a 4 needs individual follow-up after the session.

Facilitator (after the round):

"Look around this circle. Some of you are running low. That's not failure — that's the reality of doing this work.

Today we're going to talk about what to do about it before it takes you out."

The Cost of Caring (20 minutes)

Purpose: Name the reality that mentoring exacts a toll — and that ignoring the toll doesn't make it go away.

Facilitator:

"Let me say something that nobody told me when I started this work, and I wish they had:

Serving other people will exhaust you if you let it.

Not because the work isn't worth doing. It is. You know it is — you've seen lives change because of what you do. But here's the part that doesn't get talked about enough: every time you sit with a man who is hurting, you absorb some of that hurt. Every time you de-escalate a situation that could have gone sideways, your body pays for the adrenaline whether you realize it or not. Every time a mentee who was doing well falls back into old patterns, something inside you takes a hit.

*That's called **compassion fatigue**. And if you don't acknowledge it, it will turn into burnout. And burnout doesn't just hurt you — it hurts every single person who depends on you."*

Pause. Let it sit.

"Burnout doesn't show up overnight. It creeps in. Let me describe what it looks like, and I want you to be honest with yourself about whether any of this sounds familiar."

Signs of Burnout — Read slowly, one at a time:

"You start going through the motions. The sessions you facilitate feel flat. You're doing the steps, but the heart isn't in it.

You get irritable with people who used to inspire patience in you. A mentee asks a question you've answered before and you feel annoyed instead of compassionate.

You start avoiding. Maybe you find reasons to miss supervision. Maybe you pull back from your mentees without realizing it. Maybe you stop journaling because you don't want to look at what's inside.

You feel cynical. 'These guys aren't going to change.' 'What's the point?' 'Nobody appreciates what I do.' Those thoughts start showing up more often.

You lose your identity outside the mentor role. You don't know who you are when you're not helping someone.

You stop taking care of yourself. Sleep suffers. You withdraw from the people who refuel you. You stop doing the things that used to bring you peace."

Pause.

"I didn't read that list to scare you. I read it because every experienced mentor — every single one — has been somewhere on that list. The question isn't whether it will happen. The question is whether you'll recognize it when it does."

Burnout Self-Assessment (15 minutes)

Purpose: Move from abstract to personal. Each participant evaluates where they are right now.

Facilitator:

"I'm handing out a self-assessment. This is for you — no one else will see it. Answer honestly. There are no wrong answers, and there is no shame in any number you write down."

Distribute the Burnout Self-Assessment handout.

Burnout Self-Assessment

Rate each statement from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always):

1. I feel emotionally drained at the end of the day. ____
2. I dread interactions that I used to find meaningful. ____
3. I feel like my efforts as a mentor don't make a difference. ____
4. I am more impatient or irritable than I used to be. ____
5. I have trouble sleeping or my mind races at night. ____
6. I avoid thinking about the problems my mentees are facing. ____
7. I feel resentful of the demands placed on me. ____
8. I have stopped doing things that used to bring me peace or joy. ____
9. I feel isolated, even when I'm around other people. ____
10. I carry other people's pain with me long after the conversation ends. ____

Scoring: - 10-20: Healthy range. Keep doing what you're doing. - 21-30: Caution zone. Some wear is showing. Time to be intentional about self-care. - 31-40: Warning zone. Burnout is in progress. Act now — not next week, now. - 41-50: Critical. You need support immediately. Talk to your facilitator or a fellow mentor today.

Allow 5 minutes to complete.

Facilitator:

*"I'm not going to ask you to share your score. But I am going to ask this: **Is anyone surprised by their number?**"*

Allow 3-4 people to respond. Don't push — just listen.

"Here's what I want you to understand: being in the caution or warning zone doesn't mean you're a bad mentor. It means you're a human being who has been giving to others. The problem isn't that you're tired. The problem is if you ignore it."

Self-Care Is a Practice, Not an Event (20 minutes)

Purpose: Reframe self-care from something you do once in a while to something you build into every day — especially within the constraints of a correctional environment.

Facilitator:

"When people hear 'self-care,' they think of spa days and vacations. Obviously, that's not our reality. But self-care doesn't require freedom or money. Self-care is a daily discipline of protecting your capacity to serve.

*Let me say that again: **Self-care is protecting your capacity to serve.***

It's not selfish. It's not soft. It's strategic. A mentor who burns out doesn't just lose himself — he loses everyone who depends on him. So taking care of yourself isn't optional. It's part of the job."

Four Dimensions of Self-Care — Write on board or read aloud:

"Self-care has four dimensions, and you need all four. Not every day, but regularly.

1. Physical — What your body needs. In here, this means: exercise, sleep discipline, eating as well as you can, fresh air when you can get it. Your body absorbs stress. If you don't move it, the stress stays locked in.

2. Emotional — Processing what you carry. Journaling. Talking to someone you trust. Crying if you need to — and yes, I said that in a room full of men in prison. Tears are pressure release valves. Stuffing emotions doesn't make them go away. It makes them come out sideways.

3. Mental — Guarding what goes into your mind. Reading something that feeds you. Avoiding the negativity spiral. Taking breaks from the dorm when you can. Having at least one thing you do that has nothing to do with mentoring — a hobby, a study, a creative pursuit. Something that reminds you that you're more than your role.

4. Relational — Your connections. Who refuels you? Who do you go to when you're struggling? If the answer is 'nobody,' that's the problem we need to fix today."

Group discussion (10 min):

*"Let's get practical. For each of those four dimensions, I want to hear from this group: **What actually works in here?** What have you found that keeps you going? Be specific."*

Facilitate the discussion. Capture ideas on the board or have a participant write them down. Examples that should emerge:

Physical: - Push-ups, burpees, running in the yard - Consistent sleep schedule — same time every night - Stretching or simple yoga before bed - Drinking water instead of coffee all day

Emotional: - Journaling — especially on hard days - Talking to one trusted person (not dumping on everyone) - Music — listening or creating - Prayer or meditation - Letting yourself feel without judging the feeling

Mental: - Reading — especially things that inspire - Studying — staying sharp, learning new things - Setting boundaries on negativity: walking away from toxic conversations - Time alone — even 15 minutes of quiet

Relational: - Regular check-ins with fellow mentors - One person you can be 100% honest with - The supervision session itself — don't skip it - Writing letters to family — maintaining outside connections

Facilitator:

"Notice something about this list: none of it requires permission from anyone. None of it requires special access. Every single thing on here is available to you right now. The question is whether you'll be disciplined enough to do it."

Building Your Support Network (15 minutes)

Purpose: Mentors cannot sustain themselves alone. They need a network of fellow mentors who understand the work and can hold them accountable to their own well-being.

Facilitator:

*"There's one piece of self-care that's more important than all the rest: **having people.***

You cannot do this work alone. I don't care how strong you are, how disciplined you are, how much experience you have. If you try to carry the weight of mentoring by yourself, you will eventually break. Not because you're weak. Because the load is too heavy for one person.

That's why FORGE is built on a community of mentors — not individual mentors operating solo. You need people who understand what you're going through. People who can look you in the eye and say, 'You're not okay right now, and that's okay — let's talk about it.'"

Exercise: Your Support Network Map (10 min)

"In your journal, I want you to draw a simple map. Put yourself in the center. Then answer these questions:

- 1. **Who is your go-to person?** The one person you can call on when you're struggling. Write their name closest to yours.*
- 2. **Who are your 2-3 fellow mentors** who understand this work and can support you? Write their names.*
- 3. **Who do you support?** Who comes to you? Write their names.*
- 4. **Where is the gap?** Is there a type of support you're missing? A person you need but don't have?*

If you looked at your map and your name is sitting alone with nobody around it — that's the most important thing you learn today. Fix that. This week."

Brief share-out (5 min): 2-3 volunteers share what they noticed about their map. No pressure.

Facilitator:

"This group — right here, the men in this circle — is your primary support network. Use it. When you're certified, that doesn't change. You still come to supervision. You still check in with each other. You still have each other's backs. That's how FORGE works. Not lone wolves. A pack."

Maintaining Boundaries Long-Term (15 minutes)

Purpose: The boundaries taught in Phase 2 don't maintain themselves. Over time, boundaries erode — especially when you care deeply about the people you serve.

Facilitator:

"Let's talk about something that happens to every mentor eventually: boundary erosion. In Phase 2, we taught you where the lines are. What you do and don't do. Who you are and who you're not. But here's what nobody tells you: boundaries don't stay in place by themselves. They erode over time. Slowly. Invisibly. Until one day you realize you're carrying things that aren't yours to carry. Let me give you some examples."

Boundary Erosion Warning Signs:

"You start checking on a mentee at all hours because you're worried about him. That's caring — but it's also losing the boundary between your time and their time. A mentee starts coming to you for every problem, big and small, and you let it happen because it feels good to be needed. That's not mentoring — that's dependency. And you're feeding it. You take it personally when a mentee makes a bad decision. You feel like you failed. That's boundary confusion — their choices are not your responsibility. Your job is to equip them to choose. The choosing is on them. You start bending rules for people you're close to. 'It's okay this one time.' 'He's different.' 'I know he didn't mean it.' That's the beginning of the end of your credibility. You stop going to supervision because you think you've got it figured out. That's the most dangerous boundary erosion of all — because supervision is what keeps you honest."

Group discussion:

"Have any of you experienced boundary erosion in the last few weeks? Where have your lines started to blur?"

Allow honest discussion. This is a supervision session — treat it like one. Address real situations from the field.

Personal Sustainability Plan (15 minutes)

Purpose: Each participant creates a concrete, written plan for maintaining their well-being as a mentor.

Facilitator:

"Before we close, I want each of you to write a Personal Sustainability Plan. This goes in your portfolio — it's a requirement for certification. But more importantly, it's for you."

Distribute the Personal Sustainability Plan worksheet.

Personal Sustainability Plan

My warning signs (how I know I'm approaching burnout): 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

My daily practices (things I do every day to stay healthy): 1. _____ 2. _____

My weekly practices (things I do each week): 1. _____ 2. _____

My go-to person (who I talk to when I'm struggling): Name: _____

My backup (if my go-to person isn't available): Name: _____

My boundaries that are most at risk of eroding: 1. _____ 2. _____

What I will do when I notice a warning sign:

My commitment: I understand that self-care is not optional. It is part of my service. I commit to following this plan and to asking for help when I need it.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Allow 10 minutes to complete. Facilitator circulates and checks in individually — especially with anyone whose burnout score was high.

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

Facilitator:

"Closing round. Complete this sentence:

'One thing I'm going to do differently this week to take care of myself is...'

Make it specific. Not 'I'll try to relax more.' Something concrete."

Send the talking piece around.

Facilitator (closing):

"You are three weeks from certification. Three weeks. Some of you are going to cross a finish line that most people didn't think you'd reach. But I want you to hear this:

The finish line is not the end. It's the beginning. Certification means you're ready to serve — for real, for good, for a long time. And the only way you can do that is if you protect the person doing the serving. That person is you.

Service Over Self does not mean self-destruction. It means giving from a place of health — not from a place of emptiness. Take care of yourselves. The people you serve need you whole.

Wednesday — independent sessions. Thursday — field work and training the next cohort. Bring your sustainability plans. Bring your honesty. See you out there."

Session 97 Checklist

- Room in circle formation
- Opening circle completed with energy-level check
- Compassion fatigue and burnout defined and discussed
- Burnout Self-Assessment completed individually
- Four dimensions of self-care taught and discussed
- Practical self-care strategies generated by the group
- Support network mapping exercise completed
- Boundary erosion discussed with real examples
- Personal Sustainability Plan completed and signed
- Closing circle completed with specific self-care commitments
- Individual follow-up planned for anyone scoring in warning/critical range

SESSION 98: Field Work — Independent Sessions

Day: Wednesday **Duration:** 2 hours **Format:** Independent practice in assigned areas

Session Plan

Participants conduct independent facilitation sessions in their assigned dorms or units. This is one of the final independent sessions before certification assessment.

Pre-Session

Each participant should: - Review their session plan (prepared in advance) - Check in briefly with their support person or fellow mentor before heading out - Ground themselves using a regulation technique

During Session

Participants deliver their planned session independently. Periodic observation by the facilitator or a senior mentor for assessment purposes.

Post-Session

- Complete a session reflection in their journal:
- What went well?
- What would I do differently?
- How am I feeling after this session? (Apply the burnout self-assessment lens)
- Did I maintain my boundaries?
- Note any situations that need to be brought to Tuesday supervision

Facilitator Note

Use this session for scheduled observations of participants who still need independent session assessments for their portfolio. Score using the teaching demonstration rubric from Part IV.

SESSION 99: Field Work — Mentoring, Community Circles, and Training Next Cohort

Day: Thursday **Duration:** 2 hours **Format:** Field work in assigned areas

Session Plan

Mentoring Meetings

Participants meet with assigned mentees for one-on-one or small group mentoring. Focus areas this week: - Check in on mentee progress and challenges - Practice sustainability conversations — model self-care by discussing it openly with mentees - Document all interactions in mentoring logs

Community Circles

Participants who are scheduled to run community circles this week should do so. Suggested circle prompt for this week:

"What does it look like to take care of yourself in here — honestly? Not what you think I want to hear. What do you actually do?"

Training Next Cohort

Participants who are assisting with the next cohort's Phase 1 sessions should co-facilitate as assigned. This week's focus: model the sustainability principles you just learned. Don't just teach the curriculum — show the next cohort what a healthy mentor looks like.

End of Day

- Update mentoring hours log
 - Update mentee progress notes
 - Note any concerns or situations for next Tuesday's supervision session
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Session 99 Checklist

- Mentoring meetings completed with assigned mentees
- Mentoring logs updated
- Community circle conducted (if scheduled)
- Next cohort training session co-facilitated (if assigned)
- All field work hours documented
- Concerns noted for next supervision session



FACILITATOR NOTES FOR WEEK 33

What to Watch For

Who is struggling. The burnout self-assessment will surface people who are running on fumes. Don't wait for them to come to you — check in individually after the session. A mentor who is depleted needs support, not criticism.

Resistance to self-care. Some men will see self-care as weakness or selfishness. This is the prison culture talking. Address it directly: "The toughest thing you can do is admit you need something. That's not weakness. That's the same honesty we demand in every other part of this program."

Boundary erosion in real time. During the discussion, listen for specific examples of boundaries being crossed. These are supervision issues — follow up on them. If a participant has gotten too enmeshed with a mentee, help them re-establish the line this week.

Isolation. Anyone whose support network map showed them alone needs immediate attention. Pair them with a fellow mentor. Build the connection. No one in FORGE operates solo.

Common Week 33 Challenges

"I don't have time for self-care." Response: "You don't have time not to. Every minute you spend on self-care extends the months and years you can serve. Ignoring burnout doesn't save time — it steals it."

"I'm fine." The most dangerous words in mentoring. Push gently: "I'm glad you feel that way. But 'fine' is not an assessment — it's a deflection. What does your self-assessment actually say?"

"My mentees need me too much for me to take a break." Response: "If you collapse, who helps them then? The best thing you can do for your mentees is make sure you're still standing next month. And the month after that."

Preparation for Week 34

- Review servant leadership pipeline materials
- Prepare discussion questions on developing other mentors
- Have examples ready of feedback models appropriate for mentor-to-mentor development

- Think about which participants show potential for future senior mentor roles — this week's content will plant those seeds