

Unit 13: Making Amends



Time Required: 2.5 hours

Resources Needed

- Pre-/post-test
- Participant Workbook
- Chalkboard or tear sheets

Prior to the Session

- Review the activities at the end of this unit. Make any necessary preparations for the activities you elect to conduct.

Objectives

- Participants show increased awareness of the impact of crime on victims.
- Participants acknowledge harm they have done and begin to make amends.



Facilitator Tip

The goal of the OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* Curriculum is to prevent further victimization by helping offenders become aware of the impact of crime on victims and entire communities. Once offenders become aware of the harm caused, a secondary goal is to help them take action to “right the wrong” to the extent possible.

It is important for participants to acknowledge their wrongdoing, confront themselves, make amends for the harm they caused, heal unresolved sadness and pain (as best as possible), and make a conscious choice to live a violence-free life.





By the end of this program, some participants will understand the impact of victimization, and they will ask, “What’s the next step?” “What can I do?”

Facilitators are not expected to provide indepth counseling or negotiate behavioral contracts. Ideally, counseling staff are working with offenders in a therapeutic environment as they progress through this curriculum. What facilitators can do is to provide the opportunity for “the next step.” This unit will assist facilitators in providing participants with an introduction to making amends.

Concepts such as making amends, forgiveness, and reconciliation can be controversial and subject to varying definitions and individual perspectives. For crime victims, survivors, and offenders, it is important to stress that making amends does not mean that the offender’s behavior is being excused or condoned. Offenders cannot undo the harm they caused, but they can be expected to make attempts to “right” wrongs to victims and the community.

It’s not easy, and change doesn’t happen overnight or after participating in one program. It requires time, effort, and ongoing commitment. Hopefully, participating in this curriculum will plant seeds that lead to life-long, positive change.

Introduction



10 minutes



Discuss some key characteristics of accountability, as well as how participants define accountability

- You have chosen to do harm, and you have an obligation to repair the harm to the extent possible.
- Serving time is not enough. “Doing time” is legal punishment—it does not fulfill any other obligations.
- It is your responsibility to try to make things “right,” if possible.
- It is your responsibility to make amends, either directly or indirectly.
- It is your choice whether to treat others, and their property, with respect.
- It is your choice to have self-control.
- It is your choice to respect others and respect rules.
- You are responsible for the choices you make.
- Make choices that help, not hurt.



Survey participants for their definitions of “accountability” and write down their answers on a chalkboard or tear sheet. Possible answers include being responsible for their actions and being willing to explain their actions. Ask participants if their thoughts about accountability have changed during the program.

Review Definitions



30 minutes



Write each of the following terms/concepts on a chalkboard or tear sheet. Survey the group for their interpretations. Definitions and possible questions to pose or issues to raise follow each term.

Amends: Something done or paid to make up for the harm you caused.

Ask participants how they and other offenders can make amends.

Apology: To acknowledge and express regret for a fault, wrongdoing, or injury.

Remind participants that apology letters are not to be sent without staff supervision, monitoring, and victim/survivor permission. Ask participants: “Why are apologies important?” “What happens if an apology is not accepted?” “What are you sorry for?” “Does saying ‘I’m sorry’ mean you can repeat that same behavior?”

Changing behavior: Acting in a positive, nonviolent, and noncriminal way.

How do you currently talk about your offense and your victim? Does your family know what you did? Most victims do not want anyone else to go through what they experienced. Victims may be angry, sad, and disappointed when they discover that the offender is still behaving in a criminal or violent way. Express remorse through your actions.

Community service: Meaningful activities and projects performed for the benefit of the local community and/or victim service agencies; helping others.

Offenders may be required to perform community service while in custody or when on probation or parole. Offenders can also volunteer for community service. Community service projects may help reduce crime, fear of crime, and/or assist victims directly.

Forgiveness: To give up resentment or the desire to punish.

Forgiving does not mean that a victim is willing to forget what offenders have done. For some victims, forgiveness has nothing to do with the offender’s remorse or lack of remorse; it is a process they experience in their own time and in their own way.

Restitution: Paying back a victim for loss, damage, or injury.

Offenders should not assume that victims can financially recover because they have a job or insurance. If offenders think they shouldn’t have to pay restitution, ask them why a victim should have to pay for the offender’s harmful behavior.

Victim contact: Direct or indirect communication with the victim.

Offenders may want to contact their victims to apologize or let the victims know they have nothing to fear. Victims may not be interested in or prepared for contact. Offenders should avoid contacting victims while in custody and upon parole unless a victim gives his or her consent, the contact is approved through an appropriate staff member, and the contact is for a specific reason. If your corrections agency offers an Apology/Accountability Letter Bank, read the policy and follow the guidelines provided if you have offenders who want to write apology/accountability letters. Upon parole or probation, the offender must abide by any “no contact” requirements.

Victim/offender dialogue: Supervised discussion between the victim/survivor and the offender.

This process gives victims an opportunity to ask offenders questions and share the impact of the crime. The offender has the opportunity to provide answers and potentially express his or her remorse. Only the victim/survivor can ask for this meeting. Ask participants how they would feel if the victim asked for a meeting with them.

Summary



20 minutes

Ask participants to complete the “Summary” page in their workbooks and then discuss their thoughts with other group members. Keep in mind that this page can be assigned as homework.

Group Discussion

Have participants share their thoughts about changing their thinking, beliefs, how they feel about themselves and others, and how they act.



Additional Activities

Choose any of the following activities to complete the class.

Activity A – Crime Impact Statement



30–60 minutes

Instruct participants to write a detailed Crime Impact Statement, including their thoughts and actions before, during, and after they harmed a victim. The statement should include all four areas of impact. Ask for participants to volunteer to read their statements. Look and listen for specific and detailed information.

Activity B – Accountability Letter



30–60 minutes

Have participants write a letter to a person other than the victim (e.g., family member, coach, teacher, counselor, mentor, religious leader) who they hurt through their actions. Participants should include detailed information in the letter about how they harmed the victim and how they harmed the person to whom the letter is addressed. Ask for participants to volunteer to read their statements.

Activity C – Community Service



30 minutes

Discuss the concept of meaningful community service. Divide the class into small groups and have them brainstorm ideas for community service. Have them record their responses on tear sheets and share their ideas with the larger group.

Activity D – Restitution



30–45 minutes

Prior to class, instruct participants to bring a copy of their court order or restitution documents if accessible.

Discuss the concept of restitution. Using the “Restitution” worksheet in their workbooks, participants should write each out-of-pocket expense they know or think their victims had. Then have participants develop a payment plan based on their current financial situation and their projected financial situation 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years after release from custody.

Activity E – Victimizing Behavior



30–45 minutes

Clearly, victimizing behavior happens between a criminal and a crime victim. Other victimizing behaviors are not criminal but still do harm. Words or actions that harm others are victimization, as is the use of physical, verbal, or emotional force to hurt, put down, scare, or control another person and/or take away their property or their rights. Victimizing behavior does not stop because offenders were charged with a crime and either placed on probation or incarcerated. They do not have to wait until they are released back into the community to change their thinking patterns and behaviors.

Have participants read the “Victimizing Behavior” worksheet in their workbooks, and ask them to identify and talk about examples of victimizing behavior. It may be their own behavior or behavior they have seen in others. Have them come up with ideas about how they can stop their own victimizing behavior and safely confront others’ behavior.

Activity F – Victim Empathy



45 minutes

Have participants complete the “Victim Empathy” worksheet in their workbooks.

Activity G – Ripple Effect



30–60 minutes

This role-playing activity will reinforce the impact of victimization.

1. Prepare individual index cards ahead of time, each listing one of the following categories and a specific role in that category (e.g., Teena’s family: Mother); on some of the cards, you also can provide a written prompt. The number of roles will depend on the number of participants. Make sure, however, that one participant receives the “offender” category/role. You may ask for participation from staff members if they would not be disruptive to the group process. Categories, roles, and prompts:
 - Teena’s family
 - Specific roles: mother, father, cousin, brother
 - Prompts:
 - “I’m Teena’s mother and I feel... Because of Teena’s death, I will...”
 - “I’m Teena’s father and I heard about my baby being murdered from a noon hour newscast. I feel... Because of her murder, I will...”
 - “I’m Teena’s cousin, and we had a little argument on the phone last night and I feel...”
 - “I’m Teena’s brother, and I’m in juvenile hall and they won’t let me out to go to the funeral and I feel... Because she is dead, I will...”
 - School community
 - Specific roles: best friend, principal, teacher, student
 - Prompts:
 - “I’m Teena’s best friend. I was supposed to go with her to lunch and I didn’t. I feel... Because of her death, I am quitting school.”
 - “I’m Teena’s principal, and I’m worried about the safety of the other students. I’m worried about the school’s liability and responsibility. I’m worried about her family.”
 - “I’m Teena’s teacher. I didn’t know her that well and now I guess I won’t.”

- “I’m a student at the school; I didn’t know Teena. I feel... Because she was killed, I will...”
- Community
 - Specific roles: businessperson, assemblyperson, community member, parent of a child at Teena’s school, burglar who carries a gun, realtor
 - Prompts:
 - “I own a business next door to where the girl was killed and I feel... Because of the shooting, I will...”
 - “I’m the assemblyperson for the area and I have gotten 15 calls about Teena’s murder and I feel... Because of her murder, I will ask for longer prison sentences for all people who carry guns.”
 - “I live right around the corner. I heard about it on TV and came to the crime scene. I feel... Because a murder happened in my community, I will...”
 - “I’m a parent of a child at that school and I feel... Because of Teena’s killing, I will walk my child to and from school.”
 - “I’m a burglar and sometimes I carry a gun when I break into people’s houses. I feel... Because someone got shot, I will...”
 - “I sell real estate and I have two families that are in the process of buying houses in the area and I feel... Because of the girl’s murder, I will sponsor a community fundraiser.”
- Crime scene observer
 - Specific roles: ambulance driver, TV reporter, elderly person
 - Prompts:
 - “I’m the ambulance driver who was called to the scene. I can still see Teena’s eyes and hear her last words. I feel... Because of her death, I will...”
 - “I’m a reporter and I didn’t really want to say the victim’s name on TV right away but my boss said I had to. I feel... Because of Teena’s murder, I will...”
 - “I live near the restaurant. I heard the shooting and all the noise. I saw the girl laying there screaming for her mom. I want to move now but I’m old and don’t have the money. I feel... Because that poor girl died, I will...”
- Offender
 - Prompt:
 - “I’m the robber. I shot that girl. I feel... Because I murdered Teena, I will...”

2. Place strings on the floor in circles that are increasingly larger, symbolizing a ripple effect.

3. Read the following scenario to participants:

Teena is a 16-year-old student. She leaves her school and goes off campus to have lunch at a fast food restaurant, as she has many times before. While Teena is waiting for her order, the restaurant is robbed. Teena is shot by the robber and dies at the scene.

Just as a rock thrown into a pond creates a widening ripple on the water [Have someone in the back of the room or offstage pop a balloon or brown bag or make a loud sound], so too, crime and victimization create a ripple effect...sometimes more than we all know.

4. Hand out the index cards. Tell participants not to show or tell anyone what role they are playing until you ask them to step forward.

5. Ask each group to step forward into the correct circle, starting with the smallest circle first. Follow this script in doing so:
 - Would **Teena's family** please step into the very inside of the circle? Please identify yourself and tell us what you are feeling and what you will do because of Teena's death.
 - Would **members of the school community** please step into the circle just outside of Teena's family? Please identify yourself and tell us what you are feeling and what you will do because of Teena's death.
 - Would **members of the community** please step into the circle, just outside of the school community? Please identify yourself and tell us what you are feeling and what you will do because of Teena's death.
 - Would the **crime scene observers** please step into the circle, just outside of the community? Please identify yourself and tell us what you are feeling and what you will do because of Teena's death.
 - We have **one more person** who has something to say. Please step into the circle and identify yourself. Tell us what you are feeling and what you will do because of Teena's death. [This is the person who received the "Offender" index card.]

Pre-/Post-Test



60 minutes

Administer the pre-/post-test.

Unit 13 Participant Worksheets

Activity D – Restitution

Using this worksheet, write each out-of-pocket expense your victims had. Then, develop a payment plan based on your current financial situation and your projected financial situation 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years after release from custody

Total victim restitution obligation: \$ _____

Victim’s Out-of-Pocket Costs

\$ _____

\$ _____

\$ _____

\$ _____

Current Financial Situation	
Income	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Payment plan	
Amount per month	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Financial Situation: 6 Months After Release	
Income	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Payment plan	
Amount per month	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____

Financial Situation: 1 Year After Release	
Income	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Payment plan	
Amount per month	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Financial Situation: 5 Years After Release	
Income	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
Payment plan	
Amount per month	Source
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____

Activity E – Victimizing Behavior

Victimizing behavior does not stop because you were charged with a crime and either placed on probation or incarcerated. You do not have to wait until you are released back into the community to change your thinking patterns and your behavior.

You continue to be a victimizer if you—

- Lie.
- Con.
- Cheat.
- Steal.
- Damage property on purpose.
- Verbally abuse other offenders.
- Verbally abuse staff, volunteers, or guests.
- Physically abuse offenders.
- Physically abuse staff, volunteers, or guests.
- Sexually abuse offenders.
- Sexually abuse staff, volunteers, or guests.
- Disrupt classes or group sessions.
- Intimidate others.
- Verbally threaten others in person, over the phone, or in writing.
- Set up another person.
- Blame others for what you did.
- Label a person in a negative way.
- Make a weaker person a target.
- Take advantage of others.
- Gossip about others.
- Start problems between others.
- Encourage someone to harm another person.
- Fail to be responsible for your behavior when another person is hurt.

Identify other examples of victimizing behavior:

Come up with ideas for changing your own behavior:

How can you safely confront someone else’s victimizing behavior?

Activity F – Victim Empathy

Name: _____

Date: _____

Recall the crime you committed. With this crime in mind, answer the following questions. The purpose of this exercise is for you to consider how your behavior affected your victims.

Describe the crime you committed.

Who was your victim? How would you describe him or her?

Did you know the victim before the crime? Yes No

If yes, how?

What did your crime cost the victim?

Financially?

Emotionally?

What effect do you think this crime had on your victim?

How did your crime affect the victim's family, friends, and community?

How would you feel if the crime had been committed against you?

How would you feel if the crime had been committed against a member of your family?

What do you think should happen to people who commit this type of crime?

Are you paying too much or too little for this crime? Why?

Source: Denver Community Accountability Program