The Prison Context: Creating Prison Policy

DURATION: 45 mins

OBJECTIVE: To consider the purpose of prison and how it should work.

KEY LEARNING POINTS:
• Understand the function of prison.
• There are different ways to run prisons, based on the philosophy of why we imprison people.

YOU WILL NEED:
• Whiteboard or flipchart paper
• Marker pens
• Paper and pens for participants
• Prison Context Information and Advice for Young People available to participants

IT’S NICE TO HAVE:
• Access to the internet for participants to undertake research
• Further Information on Women in Prison
• The Prison Context video.
• The Prison Characters videos.

ACTIVITY:
• Depending on your participants you may need to establish or refresh ground rules for conduct during this session. You may want to refer to Henry IV: Creating a Contract for creative, participant led ideas for doing this. It is important to understand your group, if any of these issues may affect them and ensure appropriate support is available. Be aware that this session may prompt disclosures from participants.
• Split the participants into six small groups and ask them to answer the question, “what is the point of prison?” Allow participants a few minutes to discuss and then ask the groups to feed back their discussions. Introduce the ideas of prison as deterrent, public protection, punishment and rehabilitation. Ask participants to consider what sorts of crimes should result in a prison sentence – theft, violent crimes, fraud? You may want to record the participants’ answers.
• Ask participants who decides who goes to prison and what for? In the UK politicians (the Executive) create laws and guidelines for punishment, these are enforced by the courts (the Judiciary) and supported by the police and prisons service. Depending on the nature
and severity of the crime, magistrates, judges or juries decide if a crime has been committed. Notice the importance of context (time and place) – a soldier can kill in battle but not in normal life.

• Ask participants which of the following they think are true or false about prisons in the UK
  o Prisoners can have up to five books in their cell. False – up to 12 are allowed
  o Prisoners can access the internet on communal computers they book time on. False – people in prison are not allowed to access the internet
  o Prisoners are allowed sewing, knitting, musical instruments or painting items. True – if they have earned privileges through good behaviour.
  o Prisoners are allowed one hour outside each day. False – people in prison should have 30 minutes outside each day but this can be cancelled for a number of reasons including bad weather, if there aren’t enough staff etc.
  o Prisoners all have televisions in their cells. False – people in prison can earn the right to have a TV in their cell through good behaviour.

• If you have access to the internet you could encourage participants to undertake some research into what life in prison in the UK is like to inform the next stage. The Further Information on Women in Prison document provides some helpful links for research and information. The Prison Reform Trust has useful information for people who are going into prison that is an excellent source of information.

• Explain that you would like the participants to develop some prison policies. Give each group some paper and pens to make notes. Assign each group a perspective on what prison is for and an issue to make some recommendations about. Explain that groups will have ten minutes to discuss and prepare a short presentation where they share their recommendations and why they have made them.
  o Prison is for punishment: how many hours a day should someone spend in their cell?
  o Prison is for punishment: what work should prisoners do and should they be paid? If so, how much?
  o Prison is for punishment: what educational opportunities should people in prison have access to?
  o Prison is for rehabilitation: how many hours a day should someone spend in their cell?
  o Prison is for rehabilitation: what work should prisoners do and should they be paid? If so, how much?
  o Prison is for rehabilitation: what educational opportunities should people in prison have access to?

• Ask participants to give their presentations, and then lead a short group discussion reflecting on participants’ recommendations and reasoning.

• Ask the participants to return to their groups and answer the question, “What could you do instead of putting someone in prison?” You may want to reference the list of crimes that you discussed at the start and ask participants to make suggestions based on different crimes. You could offer some examples: community service; centres
where you can get advice, training, education, social service support, health care and access to services to support addiction; or curfews at home. Allow the groups five minutes to discuss and then share their ideas back, including the advantages and disadvantages of their proposals.

- Lead a brief group discussion reflecting on the alternatives to prison that the participants have suggested:
  - Who should have a say in what people go to prison for? Why?
  - Should victims of crime have a voice in this process? What might be difficult about this?
  - How effective do you think prison is?
  - What do you think the particular challenges facing women in prison might be?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:
- You could develop this exercise by reading and discussing the Further information on Women in Prison statistics.
- You could do some of the Forgiveness exercises in The Tempest.
- You could ask participants to research and share different countries’ approaches to prison systems. Their research must be evidence based, but they should be encouraged to form an opinion about that country’s approach. The US and Norway make interesting case studies alongside the UK.

KEYWORDS:
**Rehabilitation** – the action of restoring someone to health or normal life through training and therapy after imprisonment, addiction or illness.