



The Dibble Institute®

Resources for Teaching Relationship Skills
to Teens and Young Adults

Project WITH Serves Adults in Jail

Organization:

[University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture/Giles County Extension](#)

Program:

Project WITH

Funding:

University of TN Extension grant

What problem is being solved?

Many of the incarcerated men have experienced childhood trauma as well as difficult relationships, substance use, or violence. They have had few opportunities to consider how these experiences continue to shape their choices and relationships. Project WITH gave participants a structured setting for reflecting on their lives and recognizing patterns in their behavior. It also introduced healthier ways to manage emotions and relate to others. These skills may help participants develop supportive connections after release, which could reduce isolation and lower their risk of returning to jail.

Curricula Used:

[Project WITH: Stories about Love, Life, and Relationships](#)

Curricula Benefits:

- Offers a non-clinical, trauma-informed approach.
- Uses literature and media to make difficult topics more approachable.
- Encourages participants to make personal connections without requiring disclosure.
- Builds relationship and emotional regulation skills.
- Promotes peer discussion and shared learning.
- Works well with adults of different ages and life experiences.
- Can be adapted for use within a correctional setting.
- Provides skills participants can continue using after release.
- Layout of curriculum was very user-friendly and easy to implement.

Target Audience:	Incarcerated men who had a history with assault, domestic violence, and drug use. Most of them also had children or grandchildren.
Demographics:	Adult males ranging in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties.
Class Size:	11 students
Program Setting:	Giles County jail
Location of Instruction:	Giles County Sheriff's Department
Length of Instruction:	8-10 weeks- 1.5 hours per session per week.
Instructors:	Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent
Participants Journals:	Participants received Project WITH journals
Participant Incentives:	Participants in the local jail received a completion certificate as well as a letter addressed to the court stating they completed all classes. A graduation party with pizza and ice cream was given at the conclusion of class.
Observable Outcomes:	• Participants became more comfortable with the content as trust was developed with the instructor. • Participants were able to make connections between the lessons and what they experienced growing up and throughout their life up until now. • 100% of participants, when asked if there were improvements to be made to the program, reported they liked the program exactly the way it was delivered and would not make any changes. • Several participants reported they understood how to improve relationships within and outside of their family. • Another participant reported discovering their own self-worth and the importance of accountability.
Challenges:	• One of the greatest challenges was maintaining continuity. Participants were often released or transferred before completing the program.

	• They could also be placed in solitary confinement for up to 30 days because of behavioral issues, which meant they were unable to attend classes during that time. • These interruptions caused participants to miss several lessons, making it difficult for them to complete the curriculum and build consistently on what they learned. • Participants were initially hesitant to discuss relationships or childhood experiences when questions felt too personal. However, poems, folktales, movie clips, and YouTube videos provided a comfortable starting point for exploring difficult topics. As participants discussed the themes or situations in the materials, they began connecting the content to their own lives. This approach encouraged meaningful reflection without requiring them to disclose traumatic experiences.
Tips:	• Consistency was especially important. If the instructor said class would be held that week, following through helped build trust. Participants valued an instructor who kept her word. • Taking time to understand jail and prison culture was also necessary. This included becoming familiar with common language, behaviors, and perspectives within the correctional environment. At times, discussions or activities were adapted to make the content more relevant to participants' current circumstances. • Instructor transparency was important in building trust with the group. Although Project WITH recommends using a facilitator with similar life experiences, the instructor openly acknowledged that her background differed from those of the participants. She shared relevant experiences from her professional work over the past two decades while making it clear that she did not fully understand what it was like to be in their circumstances. She also emphasized that learning was a two-way process. Although she guided the curriculum, the participants' experiences and perspectives added valuable knowledge to each discussion. This helped create an environment in which everyone had something meaningful to contribute. • Instructor gave out business cards and encouraged participants to email or call her if they needed help finding resources, had questions, or wanted to take more classes once they were released.