

Understanding the Culture in the Jail/Prison

“It’s all about the game” is a saying within the culture of inmates. Each inmate is defined by his/her ability to survive inside or outside the jail/prison. Here are some of the elements that make up “the game”:

Role Models

- Most inmates are childish and immature.
- Their role models are those of children: athletes, rock stars – people that have fame and make lots of money.
- Their role models are not usually people of high moral, ethical, or Christian standards.

Lack of Self-Esteem

- Females, especially, suffer from low self-esteem.
- Because of it, they tend to over-react to cover up their insecurities.
 - Example: They may verbally ridicule you or say you are picking on them if you ask them to read aloud. This is to cover up the fact that they are insecure about their reading abilities.
- The minister needs to offer positive reinforcement and encourage them to do more.
- They may have come from an environment that does not believe they can do more.
- Let them know they have options in life.
 - When you suspect insecurity, privately suggest classes available (reading, pregnancy prevention, birth control, anger management, job skills, etc.).
 - Believe it or not, they may not know about such options or believe that they are worthy of such options.

“Frenimies”

- Inmates do not use this term, but it describes part of “the game.”
- They will use people inside that they would not even consider associating with outside.
 - They will buddy-up with people of different cultures or races or gangs.
 - They use these “frenimies” to protect them in jail.
 - As soon as they are released, the “frenimies” go back to being enemies.
- They give witness to the statement: “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”

Record

- A criminal record is highly valued to the inmate; it gives them status, validity.
- Oddly enough, some inmates will purposely commit crimes to gain status.
- The longer the record, the more validity they have inside.
- In jail, an inmate that has served prison time is of importance.

Retribution

- Inmates do not like to be put down or embarrassed.
- They will look for ways to get even.
- They live by the code: “If you one-up me, I HAVE to one-up you.”
- Very simple statements can injure them, and they will look for retribution.
 - Example: “That was a stupid thing to do.”
 - That statement will induce the inmate to look for an opportunity to verbally put you down or embarrass you.
 - And, if this happens between inmates, the cycle will continually go back and forth.
 - Remember: inmates can be childish and immature.