

## Session 10

### “Violence Prevention: Anti-Gang” – 1

#### Activity 2: My Letter To Incarcerated Youth

Read Tookie William’s letter to an incarcerated youth. Allow the students to discuss the questions that follow.

My Letter To Incarcerated Youth, No. 1

I've been on San Quentin's death row for more than 21 years. I hope that this brief message will provoke thoughts of change among you.

Across this nation, countless young men and women, like you, are vegetating in juvenile halls and in youth authorities. More and more prisons are being constructed to accommodate your generation when you grow to adulthood. **The question is, can you become motivated enough to defy the expectations that many people have of you?**

For those of you who are fortunate enough to regain your freedom. Prepare an agenda to survive outside the walls of incarceration. Learn about computer technology, politics and the sciences.

On the other hand, if some of you are facing a lot of time, **I suggest that you strive to educate and discipline your mind.** If you have access to a library, read every relevant book that you can get your hands on. Educate yourselves about history, world religions, math, English, spirituality and your culture.

It's time to flip the script. You or I can complain 24x7 about the problems of poverty, drugs, violence, racism and other injustices, but unless we choose to initiate a personal change, we will remain puppets of unjust conditions. **Unless we change, we will be incapable of changing the circumstances around us.**

In conclusion, there are two ways to view your incarceration: either your present situation will convince you to straighten up your life or it will be the beginning of a wasteful future behind bars. Or worse - you'll end up on death row.

#### Questions For Discussion

1. Can you become motivated enough to defy the expectations that many people have of you?
2. Why do you think he thought education was so important? “I suggest that you strive to educate and discipline your mind.”
3. What kind of change do you think Mr. Williams was writing about?
4. What do you think the incarcerated youth wrote back to Mr. Williams?

## Session 10

### “Violence Prevention: Anti-Gang – 2

#### Activity 1: Tookie Williams

Read the short biography of Tookie William’s life. Discuss as a class how his early life parallels the life of so many young boys in your neighborhood. Write a letter to a 5<sup>th</sup> grader encouraging them to avoid gang activity.

In the spring of 1971, when Tookie was 17, he was in a very different situation. He was a high school student from South Central Los Angeles. He had a fearsome reputation as a fighter and as a "general" of South Central's west side. And, around that time, Tookie, along with Raymond Lee Washington, created what would one day be a super-gang, the Crips.

Back in the day when Tookie and Raymond founded the Crips, many of the young people of South Central Los Angeles were involved with small gangs. Those gang members roamed South Central taking property from anyone who feared them, including women and children. To protect the community, Tookie and Raymond organized the Crips.

By 1979, the Crips had grown from a small Los Angeles gang to an organization with membership spread across the State of California. By this time, Crips had also become just like the gang members they had once sought to protect themselves from -- Crips had become gangbangers who terrorized their own neighborhoods.

Soon the Crips lost both their leaders: in 1979, Raymond was murdered by a rival gang member, and, that same year, Tookie was arrested. He was charged with murdering four people. In 1981, Tookie was convicted of those crimes and placed on death row.

In 1987, Tookie began what became a 6 1/2-year stay in solitary confinement. After two years there, Tookie began to look at himself. He focused on the choices *he* had made in his life and then committed himself to make a drastic change. The long, difficult process he undertook to rebuild his character put him in touch with his true spirit, his own humanity. Only then could Tookie finally begin to care about the many children, mothers, fathers and other family members of this country hurt by the Crips legacy and by its explosive growth. The gang is now in 42 states and on at least one other continent: South Africa. Youngsters in Soweto and other South African cities have formed the Crips copycat gangs.

Tookie greatly regrets the violent history of the Crips -- particularly how so many young black men have hurt each other -- and he wants to do what he can to stop it. The *Tookie Speaks Out Against Gang Violence* book series for elementary-school-age children is the first fruit of his longing to prevent young people of every color from becoming gangbangers, from ending up in prison, crippled by bullets, or killed.

Tookie is determined to make amends for having been a co-founder of the Crips. He intends to try in every way he can to guide those youngsters who have imitated him away from the road that led him to death row where he faces State execution. "Don't join a gang," he tells children in his books, writing from his San Quentin cell. "You won't find what you're looking for. All you will find is trouble, pain and sadness. I know. I did."

## Session 10

### Violence Prevention: Anti-Gang –3

#### Activity 3: The Apology

Twenty-five years ago when I created the Crips youth gang with Raymond Lee Washington in South Central Los Angeles, I never imagined Crips membership would one day spread throughout California, would spread to much of the rest of the nation and to cities in South Africa, where Crips copycat gangs have formed. I also didn't expect the Crips to end up ruining the lives of so many young people, especially young black men who have hurt other young black men.

Raymond was murdered in 1979. But if he were here, I believe he would be as troubled as I am by the Crips legacy.

So today I apologize to you all -- the children of America and South Africa -- who must cope every day with dangerous street gangs. I no longer participate in the so-called gangster lifestyle, and I deeply regret that I ever did.

As a contribution to the struggle to end child-on-child brutality and black-on-black brutality, I have written the *Tookie Speaks Out Against Gang Violence* children's book series. My goal is to reach as many young minds as possible to warn you about the perils of a gang lifestyle.

I am no longer "dys-educated" (disease educated). I am no longer part of the problem. Thanks to the Almighty, I am no longer sleepwalking through life.

I pray that one day my apology will be accepted. I also pray that your suffering, caused by gang violence, will soon come to an end as more gang members wake up and stop hurting themselves and others.

I vow to spend the rest of my life working toward solutions.

Amani (Peace),

Stanley "Tookie" Williams, Surviving Crips Co-Founder,  
April 13, 1997

#### Questions For Discussion

Tookie Williams was charged with murdering four people. In 1981, Tookie was convicted of those crimes and placed on death row. Tookie always insisted that he was innocent of the crimes for which he was arrested. He was however, apologetic about his role in the founding of the youth gang called the Crips. This apology and his crusade for peace was not enough to keep him from being executed in 2005.

1. What are your reactions to Tookie's apology?
2. Tookie and Raymond began a gang in 1971 that is now 35 years old. How much of the gang's violence should we hold the two founders responsible for?
3. What are your reactions to Tookie's Anti-gang efforts later in his life?