

Icebreakers and Energizers

Icebreakers

The purpose of icebreakers is to reduce anxiety and move people toward the task of the group. To do this, we mix people up, increasing communication within the group by easing participants into different configurations that give them an opportunity to meet new people. It is important that icebreakers are chosen wisely, however. The goal is to open people up, make them more comfortable, and make them look forward to the rest of the workshop/training. An inappropriate icebreaker, on the other hand, could leave participants feeling anxious or threatened. The icebreakers included here were chosen because, for the most part, they are non-threatening and fun.

Who Am I?

Note: Best used at the start of the second or third day of a multiple day training, this activity builds self-esteem, while also giving people an opportunity to get to know each other better.

1. Have these questions written on newsprint, and reveal one at a time:
 - Who am I?
 - What do I do?
 - What do I value about youth? (or some other question that relates to the topic of the workshop)
2. Give all participants 3 small pieces of paper and an envelope.
3. Have everyone find a partner, preferably someone they don't know well.
4. Each person in the pair then has 45 seconds to answer the first question (facilitator should let group know when 45 seconds is up each time).
5. After time is up, have each person write down their first impressions of their partner on one of the pieces of paper and give the paper to their partner. That person then puts the paper into his/her envelope without reading it.
6. Each person then finds a new partner and repeats the process with the second question and the second piece of paper, then finds a new partner and proceeds with third question.
7. At the end of the activity have participants go back to their seats and read what other people have written about them.

Finding Commonalities

Materials:

- One sheet of newsprint for each group
- Markers
- Bell or noisemaker
- Prize

1. Break into small groups of 3-5.
2. Have each group designate a recorder by finding out whose birthday is next.
3. Tell participants that this is a competition among groups to see who can come up with the longest list. The topic of the list is: "Things We All Have in Common."
4. Tell participants that when you ring the bell, they can begin. At that time they need to come up with a list of everything they can discover that they have in common with one another. Give a couple examples: brown eyes, like to read mysteries. Tell them they'll have 5 minutes, and to continue to add to the list until you ring the bell again.
5. Give them 5 minutes.
6. Now find out who's the winner. Ask first, "who had 5 or more?" Then "who had 8 or more?" and so on until you've established a winning group. Give small prizes to the winning group.

Group Résumé

1. Break into small groups of 4-5.
2. Have participants list on newsprint:
 - courses they've taken that are relevant to youth and youth development (or related to the topic of the workshop)
 - previous jobs held
 - years in youth development
 - major skill areas
 - hobbies
 - etc.
3. Have a brief report out.

Large Group Warm-up

1. Have participants form 2 circles, one inside the other, with an equal number of people in each circle. Have people inside the circle face a person in the outside circle.
2. Give the group a topic, such as my favorite food, my favorite movie, etc., or pose a question that has something to do with the topic of the workshop.
3. Each person takes about 30 seconds to tell the other about the topic. After about a minute, ask the inner circle to rotate right (or left) to the third person. Give them a new topic and repeat the procedure.
4. Repeat the process as often as time allows, finding new partners for each question.

Puzzled People

Take 3 x 5 index cards, postcards, or something similar and cut them into two pieces, each cut differently so that each piece pairs with only one other. Distribute half a card to each person, and have each person find his/her other half.

Once two people have made the appropriate connection, have them spend 5-10 minutes getting to know something about each other. If time is short, partners can take just a few moments to find out 2-3 things about each other that each is willing to share.

The “getting to know you” part of the exercise can be a casual conversation or it can be more structured, like a reciprocal interview. The interchange can be extended to include introductions of one another to another pair, within a small group, or to the whole group. This is also a good way to divide participants into pairs.

Two Truths and a Lie

Hand out one colored 3x5 index card to each participant. Ask participants to take a few minutes to come up with two truths and one lie about him/herself and write them (not necessarily in that order) on the index card (with no names on card). The facilitator should give an example to help explain the instructions. When everyone is finished, collect the cards in a basket.

Start by reading one of the cards out loud, asking who the participants think is the person who wrote the statements on the card. After they’ve found the correct person, ask the participants to determine the lie. Read the cards periodically throughout the training.

Note: this activity works best when the participants have become at least a little familiar with each other. This also works well as a method of breaking people into groups. Have a different color of index card for each group you want to form. After reading a few cards, have people group according to the color card they had originally.

Purses and Wallets

Ask participants to look through their purses, wallets, brief cases, etc., to find:

1. an object you are most proud of
2. an object you’ve had the longest
3. the most unique object

After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their objects and why they are significant.

As the Wild Wind Blows/Thunder

Have participants arrange chairs in a circle with plenty of room in between them. There should be one less chair than there are people playing the game. One person starts off being “it” in the center of the circle. They start off with the statement: “The wild wind blows _____,” filling in the blank. For example, somebody may say “...anyone who’s wearing white socks.” Then anyone in the group who is wearing white socks has to get up and find another chair to sit in. The person who is “it” must find a chair as well, and no one can sit in a chair that was immediately to their right or left. The person who ends up without a chair is “it” next and makes the next “The wild wind blows...” statement.

If the person in the middle cannot think of anything to say, they can also call “Thunder” and everyone in the circle must get up and find another chair.

The exercise can be geared toward more serious questions such as

- anyone who speaks another language
- anyone who has been on the job for more than 5 years
- anyone who plans to get a higher degree.

Energizers

Energizers do just that – they energize the group! After lunch, after a particularly serious discussion, or when the energy in the training room seems low are all great times to introduce an energizer. These activities give participants an opportunity to laugh, have some fun, move around, give their brains some “time off” from the intensity of a serious topic. Again, as with icebreakers, energizers should be fun, not threatening. Here are a few examples:

Group Juggling

Instructions: In a circle, ask participants to begin with hands in the air until they have caught the ball (nerf or koosh work well) from someone. Ask them to say the name of the person to whom they’re throwing the ball. They should remember both who tosses the ball to them and to whom they toss the ball. Once everyone has received the ball, have him/her return it to you. Tell the group that they have just established a group juggling pattern. Have them repeat the pattern at least once then add two or three more balls until it looks like juggling. (Suggestion: use different size or types of balls to make it more interesting).

Usual/Unusual

Also a good team building activity.

1. Break into small groups of 3-6.
2. Have each group think of an ordinary object, then list 5 unusual and 5 common uses for the object.
3. Give groups about 10 minutes to complete the task.
4. Bring groups together. Have each small group, in turn, start listing their unusual uses – one at a time - for the object and have other groups guess what the object is. If no one can guess from the unusual uses, start going through the usual uses.
5. Give prizes to the team with the most correct answers.

Build a Youth Activity

Purpose: to get people to think about collaboration, communication, and how it is most effective when people make a plan together to accomplish something

1. Give everyone a card with a body part and a dot (optional, based on dividing into small groups) on it.
2. Give everyone a small can of Play-Doh.
3. Tell them to make the object on their card.
4. Without changing anything, have everyone place their “part” on a piece of newsprint placed on a table and try to put the parts together.
5. What did they come up with?
6. Does this tell us anything about youth development? – Everyone has to work together to get the best results and communication is vital.
7. When finished, have them get into groups according to the color dot on their card.

Hint: Start with body, head, 2 legs (one leg/card), 2 arms (one arm/card), hat. Then add body parts depending on how many people will be in the group. You can either have one big group with lots of body parts or smaller groups, each building their own youth with the same body parts.

Is It a Plane or Is It Superman?

Number of people: 5 -15

Time required: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Drawing paper; timer; markers, crayons, colored pencils, or paints

Purpose: to get people to think about planning, collaboration, communication

Instructions: Give each participant a piece of paper. Set the timer for 1 minute. Tell the participants to start a drawing. When timer rings, tell participants to pass their drawings to another person in their group. Pass 5-10 times (depending on group size). Stop. Have each participant evaluate/interpret the drawing they now have in front of them. Person who started drawing can be asked to contribute what her/his plans were for the drawing. Did it turn out that way?

Debrief: What lessons did they learn? (The drawings would have worked better if the participants had been able to talk to each other. If they had planned together before they had begun to draw, the drawings would have utilized all their ideas in a cohesive, organized fashion.)

Morning Person or Night Owl activity

Instructions: Have participants form 2 facing lines. One side represents the first part of each statement, the other side represents the second part of the statement. Read each statement and have people move to the side that best represents their preference. Add or delete statements as appropriate for your participants.

- Morning person or night owl
- Pepsi or coke
- Big picture or detail-oriented
- Craves sweets or salty foods
- DVD or Netflix
- Bath or shower
- Jazz or country music
- Communicate by email or texting
- Ideal vacation – city or country
- Comedies or dramas
- Day off – go for a hike or read a book
- Work in the garden or have a gardener
- Ideal car – SUV or Hybrid
- Loner or people person
- \$1000 – save it or spend it

- prefer spring or fall
- In school – prefer science or history
- Swim or bike
- Go out for breakfast or dinner
- Read the newspaper or watch the news on TV
- Under stress – more likely to get physical or get chocolate
- Preferred international destination – Paris or Tokyo

Ask at end of activity what people got out of activity. Do they know something about others in the group they didn't already know?

Relaxation Activity

Ask participants to form a circle. Then ask them to turn to their right and put their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Ask them to massage that person's shoulders until you tell them to stop. After stopping, ask them to turn to their left and massage the shoulders of that person. After stopping, ask them to shake out their hands and return to their seats.

Note: since some people are uncomfortable with this type of activity, allow people to opt out.