

Icebreakers and Name Games

Introduce Myself

Participants introduce themselves and tell why they are there. Variations: Participants tell where they first heard about the class, how they became interested in the subject, their occupations, home towns, favorite television programs, or the best books they have read in the last year.

Introduce Another

Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about him/herself to the other, sometimes with specific instructions to share a certain piece of information. For example, "The one thing I am particularly proud of is..." After five minutes, the participants introduce the other person to the rest of the class.

Character Descriptions

Have students write down one or two adjectives describing themselves. Put these on a stick-on badge. Have class members find someone with similar or opposite adjectives and talk for five minutes with the other person.

I've Done Something you Haven't Done

Have each person introduce themselves and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has done. If someone else has done it, the students must state something else until he/she finds something that no one else has done.

Find Someone

Each person writes on a blank index card one to three statements, such as favorite color, interest, hobby, or vacations. Pass out cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce themselves.

Famous Person

People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. Person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her back by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous places instead of famous people.

My Name

People introduce themselves and tell what they know about why they have their name (their mother wanted to name me after her great aunt Helen who once climbed Pike's Peak in high heels, etc.). It could be the first, middle, or nickname.

How do you Feel?

Ask the students to write down words or phrases that describe their feelings on the first day of class. List the responses on the blackboard. Then ask them to write down what they think you, as the teacher, are feeling this first day of class. List them on the blackboard in a second column and note the parallels. Briefly comment on your feelings and then discuss the joint student/teacher responsibilities for learning in the course.

Interview Three Words

Assign each person in the group to another person from the group. Then have them find out as much of the following information about each other as they possibly can in 2-3 minutes; name, hobbies, family, state, school/job, favorite color, favorite food, favorite type of music, etc. They can interview back and forth or each person could be assigned to interview one person while a completely different person is interviewing them. Then have them use 3 words to describe their assigned partner, but 3 words only. (example: Joe Bob was my partner, funny, energetic, verbose)

Variable Names

Choose one of the introductions below. Gather people around and give them the instructions and an example using your own name as an example. Tell the group that you will be passing to your (left or right) and then ask if there are any questions. People should have the right to pass if they can't think of an answer right away, just make sure to get back to them at the end to see if they have an answer.

1. Everyone introduces him/herself as their favorite food. (I had to go around saying, "Hello! I'm Sausage McMuffin with Egg!")
2. Dalke Nash at United Way of King County (Washington) has one where you introduce yourself with your first name and an adjective that begins with the same first letter of your name. (Hi! I'm Nan. I'm feeling nutty today.)
3. Similarly, back in my MYF days (a few centuries ago) we did one where we said our name and something we were thankful for that began with both initials. So Ernie Jones was thankful for eggs and jam. (Hi! I'm Nan Hawthorne. I'm thankful for Netscape Help!)

Interpersonal BINGO

Make up a BINGO style sheet with information in each square that may fit people in your group. (If you know the people, you can actually tailor the information to specifically fit your group). Use a diversity of information regarding hobbies, background experiences, cultural references, etc. (e.g., traveled more than 60 miles to get here; is an only child; didn't see Titanic;... the possibilities are endless). People then play BINGO by meeting other people in the room, introducing themselves and getting prizes.

Poetry in Motion

Instruct each person to write a poem about themselves. It must include their name and something about them, and must be a minimum of four lines. Each person reads their poem to the group as a way to introduce themselves.

Build a Team

Give everyone a slip of paper when they come in that has a famous person, character, or something that could be "grouped" on it. The goal is for people to find other people that are a member of the same "group" and get together. The ways to implement this are numerous. Then, once people find everyone in their

group, they can do something as a group if you wish (typical things are a human knot, making up an introduction for their team and each member in it, etc.).

Mute Line-up

Participants are asked to line themselves up according to their date of birth (not year). For example, someone born on the 16th of January would be closer to the front than someone who was born on the 5th of May.

The rules of the icebreaker are:

- Participants must not talk or use their mouth in any way.
- Pens/pencils, etc, cannot be used.
- Diaries cannot be used.

Encourage participants to use their initiative. Instead of lining up according to birth date, participants could be lined up according to any number of characteristics, such as the first letter of the suburb they live in, etc. Another option would be to blindfold everyone and get them to line up according to their height.

Solemn and Silent

The instructor explains that this exercise will take self-control. Members pair back to back. On the count of three, everyone must face their partner, look each other in the eyes, and then try to remain solemn and serious. No speaking! The first to smile or laugh must sit down. All who remain standing then take a new partner and the activity continues until only one person has not smiled or laughed. (Second round of playing can involve two teams competing to outlast each other.) If you get a pair at the end who are both keeping a straight face, the rest of the group can act as hecklers to disrupt them.

Confusion

Great high energy game to help participants begin to feel more comfortable in a new group. Give each participant a sheet with various tasks and ask them to complete it when you say "GO!"

Here are some samples:

- Get a male to do five push-ups and sign here.
- Stand on one foot with your arms outstretched for 20 seconds. Have someone time you and sign here.
- Leap frog over someone five times.
- Get someone to whisper the pledge of allegiance and sign here.
- Play "Ring around the Rosey" with two other people and have them sign here.
- Get a female to recite a nursery rhyme.
- Shake hands with someone you do not know and continue holding hands while debating the merits of your favorite ice cream flavor.
- Have someone teach you a dance step (even if they make it up).
- First person to complete the entire sheet wins.

Truth or Pretend?

Have each person tell one thing about themselves that is true and one thing that is false, without revealing which is which. Then have all participants try and guess which one is the truth.

Meuume

The basic aim of this activity is to learn the names of others in your group, without forgetting your own!!!

- Participants stand in a straight line. The first person in line (e.g., Jim) turns to the 2nd person (e.g., Penny) and follows the name process of “Meuume” as outlined:

Jim says his own name: *Jim*
Penny says her own name: *Penny*
Jim says Penny’s name: *Penny*
Penny says Jim’s name: *Jim*

- Jim then moves onto the 3rd person in the line, the 4th, and so on.
- The 2nd person then addresses the 3rd person and so on.
- Continue until the last person in line has had their turn at introducing themselves to each person in line.

If you forget the order that the introductions are done, think of the name of the game: Meuume, or Me, You, You, Me.

Toss-A-Name-Game

The objective of this activity is to gradually learn the names of all those in the group. This is achieved by first throwing a soft object (small soft objects, balls, or toys) around/across the circle, with each person saying their name when they catch the object. After a few minutes of this, as well as saying their own name, participants then also say the name of the person they choose to throw to. Participants cannot throw to the person directly beside them. Eventually, the game can be made more difficult by throwing in more objects.

Partners

Prior to the activity, on sticky labels list different animals/people/foods/things and their ‘partners’ or ‘opposites’ on different labels; e.g., ‘Prince’ and ‘Princess’, ‘Cat’ and ‘Dog’, ‘Homer’ and ‘Marge’, etc. Place one sticker on the back of each person. Participants are to find their partner, but first will need to establish who they are. Ask participants to discuss various topics with their partner when they find them: e.g., what is your major aspiration in life (questions will depend on session focus).

Participants can look at the backs of others, but not their own. They can only ask “yes/no” questions to establish their identity.

This activity works best with a large group (at least 10 or 12 people). Names can be selected at random, or can be based on the session focus.

Comic Strip Chaos

Each participant takes a turn at picking a comic frame out of a large container. After the entire group has each chosen one, the participants begin to search for others with the same comic strip sequence. After the participants have found everyone in their group, they must arrange themselves so that the sequence of frames are in chronological order to form the comic strip correctly. Upon completion of sequence, the newly formed group sits down together. Great game to break large group into smaller groups.

Team Builders

Four Pointers

To begin this activity, mark two lines 'A' and 'B', about 10 meters apart. Form groups of 6 or 7 people.

The objective of this activity is to get the team from line 'A' to line 'B', using only four points of contact with the ground.

The group must:

- Cross at one time
- Assist each other
- Be in contact with each other
- Only have four contact points with the ground at any one time
- Complete the task in the required period of time (you decide)

The gap can be widened to make the activity more challenging. It can also be made greater or easier by adding or subtracting the number of points of contact, or changing the group size.

Blind Polygon

The objective of this activity is to get the group to form shapes as requested while blindfolded. Call out shapes for the team to create: circle, triangle, square, octagon, etc. After forming each shape, let them look at the shape, then re-blindfold and call another shape. All participants must be blindfolded (or at least have their eyes closed), and all participants must be holding hands at all times.

Options and additional notes for the activity are as follows:

- You may make it a rule to keep holding hands, or omit the hands in your rules – so they could be creative and just keep touching. You may/may not tell them this!
- Use a long length of rope. The participants hold on with one hand and make the shape with the rope, not themselves.
- Too easy? Don't let them see their results each time, just call out a new shape. It would be useful to sketch the actual shapes formed to show them after.
- The ideal viewing point is from above.
- Water activities? Do it in a pool or the beach as synchronized swimming.
- Increase the group size.

Strike the Funny Bone

Have the group sit in a circle and tell them this exercise is to be done without laughing. Person #1 says, "Ha". The person to his/her right repeats the "Ha" and adds a new "Ha". Person #3 repeats the two "Ha's" and adds another. The exercise ends when all participants, trying not to laugh (which is nearly impossible), have repeated and added the "Ha".

Kindergarten Relived

Have a group finger-painting session. Stretch a large piece of poster paper over the table(s) and allow each person to have their own little section of the paper. Instruct them to paint their feelings towards the group, a particular project they foresee the group accomplishing, or what they feel the group represents. Hang the completed project in your office or cubicle.

Team Goal Setting

You can also end a “find your team” or some sort of icebreaker with a goal setting exercise where people set their own expectations/goals for the training. Then small groups (mixed with folks from different offices) can present their ideas to everyone.

Alternatively, you can split people into groups interactively and then have them do some creative problem solving.

The Farmer and the Bunny

Have one person teach the group how to do the bunny hop. Instruct the group to do the bunny hop while they all sing “The Farmer in the Dell.” This gets people laughing and increases energy for the meeting as well.

Hobby Huddle

The group sits in a circle. Person #1 says his/her name and favorite hobby. Person #2 (to Person #1’s right) repeats Person #1’s name and hobby, then states his/her own. Person #3 states Person #1’s and Person #2’s names and hobbies, then adds his/her own. Go around the entire circle. Encourage people to help each other when needed.

Food and Fun

Each member gets two saltine crackers. The leader randomly selects someone and instructs him/her to eat the two crackers and then introduce him/herself. The leader then selects another member to do the same thing. Continue until each member of the group has eaten their crackers and has introduced themselves.

Create-A-Name

Give each member a piece of paper and several crayons or markers. Have each person write his/her name (large letters) and, with each letter, draw something that is of interest to him/her. For example, the letter “O” can easily be turned into a smiley face for someone who is happy, or a “W” could be turned into a person waving his/her arms with pompons to signify a cheerleader.

Phrases that Fit

Every person writes three slogans or sayings that seem appropriate for describing his/her life or job (e.g., “The early bird catches the worm” for an early riser). Each person then introduces him/herself and shares his slogans with the group with an explanation.

Mumble Jumble

Before the activity begins, the leader will cut up a few pictures into puzzle pieces. Each group member will grab a piece of a puzzle from a bag. The group members will keep their puzzle piece to themselves until the leader says, “GO!” At this point, the group members will try to locate the other members of the group with the pieces to form the appropriate pictures. Whichever group does it first, wins. Good activity for breaking into retreat/activity groups.

Thread the Needle

Participants form a circle at arm's length, but not initially holding hands. One person is designated as the cat and another as the mouse. The mouse begins inside the circle and the cat outside. The mice aim to protect themselves by 'stitching up' the circle and trapping the cat either inside or outside the circle (obviously with themselves on the opposite side). The cat aims to catch the mouse before this can occur.

The rules are as follows:

- The mouse is given a ten second head start.
- When the mouse passes between two people in the circle they must join hands, effectively 'stitching up' that part of the circle.
- Neither the cat nor the mouse can travel between two people who have joined hands.
- If the game comes to a stand still where neither the cat nor the mouse are prepared to move (compromise their position), it is the cat who must make the first move.

Keep it Up

The players form two or more teams with 10-12 players on a team. Each team gets into a circle. Each team is given a volleyball (or similar type ball of any size). The players attempt to keep their ball in the air the longest. When a team wins, they get a point. The team with the most points, wins. Do not allow players to catch the ball during play. Note: To vary, change the way you score...say the ball must be hit in the order of the participants in the circle.

Lap Sit

The group will start in a circle. Every group member will turn, placing their left leg towards the inside of the circle. Everyone will take one giant step into the middle of the circle. With hands on the person's shoulders in front of you, the group will sit on each other. The group will need to work together to communicate. Once this has been completed, the group may wish to try to walk in this formation. This is a dynamic activity – and one that will make the group feel a great sense of accomplishment when successfully completed!

Levitation

One person will lie on the ground on his/her back, with eyes closed (if they feel comfortable). The rest of the group will place their hands underneath the person lying down. One person will be designated to be the captain, and therefore should place him/herself at the person's head. Once everyone is ready, the captain will softly count to three. At his time, the group will pick the person up to the waist. The captain will again softly count to three, and the group will bring the person to shoulder height. The captain will softly count to three, and the group will bring the person overhead. Finally, the captain will count to three, and the group will gently rock the person (forward and backward) down to the ground. It is the volunteer's responsibility to stay stiff as a board. It is the rest of the group's responsibility to take this activity very seriously, not to talk, and to keep the head higher than the feet at all times.

Lifelines

Each member draws a line on paper to represent the highs, lows, significant events, turning points, etc., of his/her life to date (can also project into the future). Members share their lifelines with other members. Members ask questions about each other's lifelines. This exercise also can be done with pipe cleaners and verbal explanations.

Highs: Birth Teenager College First Job

Lows: Childhood High School Grad School Future

Affirmative Fold-Ups

Have group comfortably sit in a circle. Give each participant a sheet of paper and ask them to write their name on the top of the paper. Place all of the papers in the center of the circle. Have each participant draw a sheet from the center (not their own) and ask them to write one (or a sentence) positive word about that person at the bottom of the sheet. They then fold the paper up to cover up the word. Have them place the sheet back in the center and repeat on another sheet. Participants will continue to select other's sheets from the circle to write affirming words on, until the name is the only thing showing on the paper. The leader can then distribute the papers to the owners. This is a great game to do at the end of a retreat, the end of a year for an organization, at a staff meeting, etc.

Back to Back

Every group member must find a partner of approximately equal height and weight, if possible. The partners will lock arms with their backs to one another. With arms remaining locked at all times, the partners sit down on the ground, kick their legs out straight, and try to stand back up. Then groups of four will try the same thing. Then groups of eight, sixteen, and eventually, the entire group together. This is the perfect activity to begin a trust sequence.

Machine Game

The object of this game is to create a machine out of a group of people (i.e., ceiling fan, hot air balloon, watch, etc.). You might want to split your group into two or three smaller groups. Each person is required to be accountable for one noise and one motion of the machine. The group members should then put their motions and sounds together to create the machine. Give each group about five minutes to work together and prepare, and then have the groups present to everyone. Ask the other groups to guess what machine the group is.

Piece of the Puzzle

Facilitator should cut a puzzle out of poster paper ahead of time. (There should be one piece for each member of the group.) Have participants decorate their piece to represent who they are and what they feel they can contribute to the group. Once participants are done, have them share what they have on their piece. Participants should assemble the puzzle. Facilitator should initiate a discussion on the power of everyone coming together, how much more of an impact a put together puzzle can have than separate pieces, and how a final

product could not be reached without a contribution from every piece of the puzzle.

Touchstones

This activity is best done at the end of a group experience. All participants are asked to choose a touchstone (marble or rock if location permits) from a jar, bag, etc. The facilitator then reads the following and gives all participants a copy to take with them to remember their experience:

We all came here as individuals, bringing our own personal styles and characteristics. We have each given a part of ourselves to the group. This is what being an individual is all about. We have learned about others and also about ourselves. We all are unique pieces of the puzzle, with our thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and dreams. We are valuable because of this and what we have to offer to others.

No one else is exactly like us. We need to look in at ourselves, see who we are and recognize our potential. We have the ability to accomplish whatever we start out to do. Know that we have no limits and only we can make things happen.

I want you to take all you have experienced here and keep it with you. These Touchstones represent the experience we have shared together. Take one, look at it, and remember who you are. Each stone is different – as each of us is our own person. But, they are similar too – each with hope, desires, and ambitions. Dig deep inside and always have the courage to be yourself. You are a wonderful individual just as you are.

Keep this Touchstone and know the power and energy you feel here will always be within you. Do not forfeit your potential to fulfill all you set out to do. Listen to the voice inside you, think about all there is for you to accomplish, and challenge yourself to do it. Go on...the power lies within.

(Adapted from Springfield College)

Values Discussion

Have participants find two people who are wearing the same color as them. Have them find a spot where they can talk together. Instruct them they will be talking about some issues and you will give them new topics every few minutes. Here are some samples:

- Talk about the most important thing you learned this year.
- What are the easiest and hardest emotions for you to express and why?
- What is something that few people know about you?
- What do you value in a friend?
- What do you want to be doing in five years?
- What is one goal you have for next year?
- What is a motto you try to live by?
- What is the greatest challenge you are facing?
- What do you like most about yourself?
- What do you value in a loving relationship?
- What do you value most in life?

Web We Weave

The group stands in one large circle. The facilitator begins the game by asking a question such as, "What is your favorite place to be when you are happy?" The facilitator answers the question and tosses a yarn ball across to another person, while holding onto the end of the yarn. The person answers the question, holds a piece of the yarn, and then tosses it to someone else. Game continues in the same fashion, until everyone has shared. By tossing the yarn (or twine) around the group, participants weave a web that connects all of the members of the team in some manner. The facilitator can ask as many questions as appropriate. The facilitator then asks two or three of the team members to "drop" their string. The web begins to sag and appears to be very weak and vulnerable. The facilitator then can discuss how important each participant is to the team and the effect that low levels of involvement and commitment has on the entire team. At the end, the group can kneel down and place the web on the ground. Works well to have a discussion on teamwork. Group members can cut a piece of the string from the web to keep as a reminder of the exercise and the thoughts the group shared. Works well for groups of any size!

A great story – icebreaker activity:

A well-known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20.00 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?"

Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this. He proceeded to crumple the \$20 dollar bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. Well, he replied, "What if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. "Now, who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

My friends, we have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to those who DO LOVE you. The worth of our lives comes not in what we do or who we know, but by WHO WE ARE.

Sources:

<http://www.residentialassistant.com/icebreakers>

<http://www.flora.org/mike/poped/icebreakers.html>

<http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/breakice.htm>

<http://www.union.uiuc.edu/programs/readers/icebreakers.htm>