Energisers & Ice Breakers

This document is intended to provide ideas for fun and engaging exercises to energise a group at the beginning of a workshop and build their confidence working together as a group. They may also be useful after an intense group discussion, or a long period of sitting down and listening, in order to restore energy and dispel awkwardness.

When selecting an exercise, consider what objectives you are trying to achieve and choose one which fits best with the learning points of the workshop.

*You will also have to factor in cultural and practical factors, as in your design of the workshops themselves. For example, exercises that require physical contact between participants may be inappropriate in countries where this is not usual, or in mixed groups where male-female contact could cause awkwardness or offence.*

WHY USE GAMES AND ICEBREAKERS?

- **People learn better when they are actively involved** physically, mentally, interpersonally, and emotionally. Games and icebreakers foster this kind of active, practical learning. Adult learners learn best in an environment that acknowledges and allow them to use their life experience. Games can offer opportunities for adult learners to share their knowledge and learn from each other. For young people games are a chance to move about, build friendships and team spirit and have some fun.

- **People learn differently.** Some learn best by hearing, some by seeing, some by reflecting, some by interacting, some by doing, some by talking, some by incorporating music or rhythm, some by solving problems. Good facilitation and teaching incorporates elements of all learning styles to assure that everyone is hooked into the process. Games offer an opportunity to help people with diverse learning styles to engage with a topic or issue.

- **People learn better in a safe environment,** where they are able to let their defenses down. Games can help to lower these defenses. Everyone is afraid of, or at least concerned about, what others think of them. Telling personal stories builds trust. If everyone speaks within the first five to ten minutes, people's anxiety level diminishes and they are more ready to learn. In this context icebreaker games provide an opportunity for everyone to get involved on equal footing as they make quick connections with others in the group.

- **People learn better in a supportive group context.** Games can establish instant rapport. No matter how different individuals are, any two people can find a point of connection and identification, a place where their needs, experiences, or agendas overlap. One of the purposes of a game is to help people find this commonality, this connecting point.
WHEN TO USE GAMES AND ICEBREAKERS

Don't limit yourself to a single introductory process at the beginning of a session. Try an icebreaker after a break to get the group refocused. Try one as a tool for shifting gears or making transitions to a new areas of learning. Try a game at the end of a session. Many of the processes can work well to provide closure or reinforcement of learning. Try an energy game whenever the group energy flags. Just try to make sure that whatever activity you choose is appropriate to your learning objectives and goals.

HOW TO CHOOSE GAMES AND ICEBREAKERS

Choose icebreakers to fit your topic. Don't just play games with no purpose. As you search for creative activities, keep your learning objectives in mind. Make sure the activity you choose moves the group and individuals in the desired direction. Adapt different processes to fit your overall goals.

Choose icebreakers to fit your setting. When possible, rearrange your setting so you have ample room for group activity and flexible seating for small groups.

Choose icebreakers to fit your audience. Understand your audience and select appropriate activities. Working with groups of people who know each other well is quite different from working with groups of strangers. Different groups have different cultural and social norms and may respond very differently to the same activity. Games can be a fun way to stretch people’s normal comfort zone a bit in a positive safe environment so it is normally possible to take some risks.

Choose icebreakers to fit your tolerance for ambiguity, disruption and resistance. Games may sometimes challenge your need to be in control of the situation. In every group there will be some people who won’t like a particular activity. It may take some persuasion and gentle group pressure to get everybody to participate in a game.

Choose icebreakers to fit your own skill level and understanding of group dynamics. Pay attention to your own reactions. If an idea seems too complicated or risky, try something simpler or more conventional. Some processes that are exciting in a big audience fall flat in a small group. Experiment until you find a repertoire of techniques that work for you and members of your target group. Experiment with new techniques when you feel comfortable.

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Giving instructions to a group takes skill and lots of practice. Inexperienced facilitators often make the mistake of giving too many complicated instructions, too quickly.

First, get people’s attention. Whenever you encourage active participation you need effective strategies to stay in charge. You can use a musical instrument or whistle to interrupt small group discussions and regain the attention of the whole group.
Never try to talk when there a lot of noise and activity in the room. This is especially important when you are doing active icebreakers. Blow your whistle to get people settled down. Try whispering instead of shouting to get people to listen.

With a brief icebreaker, give step-by-step instructions first. Demonstrate, if possible. Don't give too many instructions at once. In a longer, more complicated exercise, break the instructions into logical steps. Give an overview, then guide the process in segments, explaining as you go along. Be sure to allow plenty of time for participants to do the activity before giving the next set of instructions.

Always give instructions for forming small groups first. Wait until people settle into groups before assigning further tasks and giving detailed instructions.

Be prepared. Always work through an exercise first yourself so you can anticipate questions. Brainstorm examples appropriate for your audience. Where necessary have some personal responses appropriate to the exercise ready to use as examples and illustrations.

### PICTURE HOPES AND FEARS

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Cut out a large number of pictures from various magazines and newspapers. Try and get a variety that includes some strange pictures, some colours, images as well as people. Imagine what types of feelings and thoughts the young people may have and include pictures that mirror this.

Either on their own or in small groups ask each young person to pick pictures that represent what they hope will happen during the sessions and what they are worried about. For example they may pick a picture of a watch if they are concerned about timekeeping or pick a crazy image if they are hoping to increase their creativity. Ask them to place them on pieces of flip chart paper that are labelled hopes and fears. Ask the young people to group any that are similar and then add sentences that explain that group of pictures.

**EXTRA**

If the group is very practical they could produce still images like photographs, instead of using the pictures. Polaroid’s could be taken of these and grouped in the same way as the pictures.
GROUP CONTRACT

Objectives | Creating Group Contract
Hopes and Fears
Personal Disclosure
Monitoring
Time | 20-30mins
Numbers | 4+

The group contract can be put together using the hopes and fears identified by the participant. Go through each fear and ask the group what they could do to counteract this fear. For example, one fear of a participant might be that they will be shouted down and the way to counteract that may be that everyone should respect each other’s opinion. Repeat the exercise with the hopes but write them as they are. For example, a young person may say, ‘I hope I can gain more skills,’ on the contract could go ways of making this happen such as participation and having a go.

Finally ask the group if they would like to add anything else to the contract.

EXTRA
Always make sure that the contract is framed in positive rather than negative language. That it starts with, we will... rather than we will not. If suitable get each young person to sign the contract and make sure that this is displayed at each session along with the hopes and fears.

NAME VOLLEYBALL

Objectives | Warm Up
Group Building
Build Energy
Time | 10-20 mins
Numbers | 5+

Divide the group into at least two teams. If you have large numbers then make more teams and have a knock out tournament.

Put the two teams facing each other on opposite ends of the room.

The teams are going to play an imaginary game of volleyball. When they hit the ball they have to shout the name of the person on the opposite team that they are hitting to.

Points are won if the recipient does not respond to their name or if there is no one of that name on the team.

There should be one person who is a referee; either a participant or the facilitator and they will have the final say in any point.

EXTRA
Try and encourage people to leap in the air and hit the ball with enthusiasm so the game gets lots of energy.
When the teams become use to the game add the rule that they can hit the ball to one member of their team before it has to go over to the other side. This can add confusion and more fun.
NAME CIRCLE

Objectives   Warm Up
             Group Building
             Personal Disclosure
Time   10 mins
Numbers  5+

Group to stand in a circle.

Go round the circle twice getting participants to say their name. Person ‘a’ throws the ball to person ‘b’ saying their name and the name of the person they are throwing to, e.g. Jack to Simon. Continue round the circle.

After a while add alternative rules such as going down on one knee if don’t know someone’s name or adding a fact about yourself when you throw the ball, e.g. Simon, I am Jack and I like swimming.

EXTRA
Try and encourage the participants to make eye contact with the person they are naming.

GROUP JUGGLE

Objectives   Energiser
             Focus
             Co-operation
             Group Building
             Problem Solving
Time   10 mins
Numbers  4+

Begin with the group standing in a circle and the facilitator having a number of soft balls. The first person throws a ball to someone who is roughly opposite them. They then throw the ball to someone who is opposite them. Continue this way until everyone has thrown the ball and it has returned to the first thrower. Ensure that each person only receives the ball once and so once someone throws the ball get them to fold their arms. This is the path that the ball will always take so map it out again a couple of times. For example A throws to C, C throws to G, G throws to B, B throws to D and D throws back to A. This pattern A-C-G-B-D-A is the set pattern.

Once everyone is fluid with that pattern gradually add another ball, keeping both of them going along the same pattern. See how many balls the group can juggle without dropping them.

A record can be kept and on further times they can attempt to break their record.

EXTRA
Ensure that the group throws the ball softly. After an initial period discuss with the group in what ways they could improve their performance. Again this could be used to explore ways in which they interact with others in the wider society.
KNEE TAG

Objectives
Energiser
Concentration
Co-operation

Time
10 mins

Numbers
4+

Divide the participants into pairs and if there is an odd number have one group of three.

The object of the game is to tag the other person knee as many times as possible without allowing them to touch yours.

Time them for 2 minutes and the winner is the one who has tagged the most.

The group could have a play off with each winner playing each other till you are left with one winner.

EXTRA
The facilitators must be very clear that it is just a light tap and only on the knee.

You could ask each pair to hold opposite hands to ensure that they do not go mad running around the room trying to get away. Or alternatively you could place boundaries around the distance they could travel.

TOUCH RACE

Objectives
Energy
Problem solving
Group Building
Co-operation

Time
10 mins

Numbers
2+

Ask the group to stand in a space facing you in the middle. They should be randomly placed around the room and not in a circle.

Identify three or four places like the door handle, the dustbin, plug sockets etc, being very specific. Explain that when you shout go you would like each person to touch the places you have identified and return to their original spot. However you would like the group to do this in the fastest possible time.

After the first go explore ways that they may be able to achieve this task in a faster time. Repeat a couple more times.

EXTRA
Remind the group that it is not about victimising someone, perhaps the person who comes last, but finding solutions as a group to ensure that the whole group improves.

As they get better at the exercise you can make the places to touch more and more difficult.
**KEEPY UPPY**

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<td>Group Building</td>
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Start with the group in a circle and throw a soft ball in the air. Explain that the object of the game is to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible. If the ball comes near you it can be tapped back up again using any part of your body. Each group member counts out loud for each tap and they try and reach the highest number possible.

This can be played in many sessions with the group trying to better their score each time.

**EXTRA**

You can ensure that the group does not gang up on somebody who drops the ball by initiating a groan each time the ball drops on the floor and also celebrating how many taps the group got.

**ZIP ZAP BOING**

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Game starts with the group standing in a circle. Tell the participants that you are going to send an imaginary current of electricity round the circle. The way to do this is put your hands together and turning to the person to the side of you. The movement must go the same way round the circle so if the first person passes it to the person on their right, everybody follows suit. Let the group practise this and get comfortable with this rule. Then explain that this movement will also have a sound, which is ZIP. Therefore every time you pass the current to the person next to you you have to shout ZIP at the same time. Again let the group practise.

In the same way add two other movements and sounds. The next one involves passing the current across the circle. The movement is the same as for ZIP but you get eye contact with someone across the circle and point with your two hands to them and shout ZAP.

The final movement is your hands raised in the air, shouting BOING. This bounces back the electrical current to the person who sent it to you changing the direction of the game.

Introduce one rule at a time and allow for practise each time.

**EXTRA**
If you would like to add an extra competitive edge you could have people sitting out and see who is left at the end. If you do choose to introduce this rule ensure that the people who are out are sitting in the middle of the circle so they are still involved.

As the group gets more used to playing the game encourage them to come up with their own rules and so personalise the game.

THE SUN SHINES ON…

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<th>Energiser</th>
<th>Personal Disclosure</th>
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Sit the group in a circle with one member standing in the middle. That person finishes the line, ‘the sun shines on…’ with any ending they like, e.g. ‘those people who had toast for breakfast’. Anybody who fits the criteria has to try and swap seats without the person in the middle being able to sit down. The person that is left standing continues with another sun shines on...

EXTRA

This can get quite personal especially if the game is played later on when the group is more formed. Do not be afraid to allow the group to explore deeper issues but as facilitators you may like to disallow some topics, for example those of a sexual nature.

DOMINOES

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<th>Time</th>
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Get the group to walk around the room in a random fashion. Ask them to keep moving but identify one person and start to copy their movements, without that person knowing who they are.

After a while you will find that the whole group is copying each other.

EXTRA

Discuss why they felt this happened and what are their feelings around it. With a group that is more difficult to engage the exercise can be repeated with everyone standing in a circle and copying someone else in the circle. The outcome should be the same.
ROPE SQUARE

**Objectives**  
Problem Solving  
Group Building  
Focus

**Time**  
10-20 mins

**Numbers**  
4+

Give the participants a long rope and some blindfolds.

Explain that they are going to have to make a square out of the rope using just themselves but whilst doing it they will be blindfolded.

Allow them 10 mins to work out a method and then blindfold them and get them to do the exercise.

Review their work and then allow them to have another go if they fail.

**EXTRA**  
Ensure that at least one facilitator is not blindfolded to stop any accidents happening and make sure there is as little cheating as possible.

PAPER NOT FLOOR

**Objectives**  
Problem Solving  
Group Building  
Focus

**Time**  
10-20 mins

**Numbers**  
2+

Place a large sheet of paper on the floor.

Gather the group members around the piece of paper and tell them to follow your instructions. Then ask them to make sure that everyone is ‘TOUCHING THE PAPER AND NOT THE FLOOR.’

Once the group has done this, usually by everyone standing on the paper, half it and repeat your instructions.

Keep repeating this process until you are left with a tiny piece of paper that means they have to think of a method other than standing on it.

The most common way to solve the problem is for everybody to be holding the paper and to jump in the air at the same time although this may not be the only solution.

**EXTRA**  
It is likely that the group will get frustrated as the exercise goes along. Keep repeating the instructions and if they get more frustrated say that the solution only has to last a few mins.

Sometimes they may use furniture and other stuff that is around. Allow them to try this solution and then ask them to do it without the added extras.
**TUMMY RUB**

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Group to stand in a circle and ask them to start by tapping their heads. When they have done that for a few minutes stop and ask the group to rub their tummies in small circles. Then ask the group to do the two things at once.

This is more difficult than at first imagined and should result in lots of laughter and funny facial expressions!

**EXTRA**
The group could try and explore other actions that result in such confusion.

**RAINFOREST**

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Ask the group to stand in a circle, facing each other and quite close together. Explain that each person will follow the movements of the person on their right and that they are going to recreate a rainforest.

The first person starts to make a gentle noise with their bodies, i.e. rubbing their hands together or clicking their fingers. The leader changes the noise every few seconds but it will take a while for it to go all the way around the circle therefore making more of a rainforest noise.

Swap the leader around so different people get a chance to start.

**EXTRA**
This exercise can be altered in a number of ways. For an energetic start use dance moves and louder noises.
When the group gets more familiar you could change the style and do a rainforest massage. Get everyone to stand in a circle and then turn right so everyone is facing someone else’s back. Instead of making noises the leader then touches the person in front with finger taps, small rubs or any other gentle touch. This is then copied from one person to the next.
HAND SLAPPY

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The group sits around a table or lies on the floor in a circle. Each alternative person puts their hands flat on the table in front of them. The people next to them then put each of their hands between the hands of the people next to them. This means if you have 3 people, A, B and C the hands would go A-B-A-C-B-C.

The first person then slaps the table and this is sent round the circle, with each hand following alternatively. Therefore using the above example A would slap first followed by B-A-C-B-C etc.

If someone slaps the table at the wrong time or hesitates too long then they remove their hand from the circle.

Once the group is familiar with the game it can be made harder by introducing extra rules such as two slaps on the table to change direction and three slaps to leap over somebody’s hand.

EXTRA
As the group gets more and more used to the game allow them to invent their own extra rules to make the game more personal.