

Icebreakers

Why do icebreakers? Because new groups (or new persons in groups) require an introduction to each other in order for members to gain a level of comfort, get to know each other, and build trust. Icebreakers are structure activities that are fun, energizing and interactive. Some things to keep in mind before you start:

- Be sure to clearly spell out how the icebreaker will proceed and that everyone understands what is expected of him or her.
- Identify pre-existing conditions that might affect people's ability to participate. For example, someone who is recovering from a knee or shoulder injury might not be able to participate in a human knot, and someone in nice clothes may not appreciate an exercise that requires being on the floor. Provide alternatives for involvement for people who opt not to participate for physical or comfort reasons.
- Stress that icebreakers are not a competition but an opportunity for everyone to participate. They should bring people together, not drive them apart.

Ball Toss

Have the group stand in a circle. Using a small ball, tennis or koosh, the leader introduces him/herself to the group, then hands the ball to the next person, who introduces him/herself, etc. around the circle until the ball returns to the leader. The leader then repeats his/her name and throws the ball to a person across the circle, saying, "This is for _____" and saying the name of the person who is to catch the ball. That person says, "Thank you, _____" stating the name of the person who threw the ball. The person who now has the ball repeats this, throwing the ball to another person in the circle. This repeats until everyone has thrown the ball. At the end, challenge one person to go into the circle and name each person.

Identification

With the group in a circle, the leader asks each participant to look into their wallet/purse/backpack to find something representative or symbolic of their personal or professional characteristic or skills. For example, a picture, membership card, dollar bill, etc. After several minutes, the leader asks each person to share his/her name, identify the item s/he chose, and provide a brief explanation of why the object is symbolic.

Human Knot

Have the group stand in a circle, facing each other. Instruct them to reach out their right hand and grab the hand of someone across the circle. Next have them reach out their left hand and grasp the hand OF A DIFFERENT PERSON across the circle. The object is to untangle the resulting knot in a single circle without releasing hands.

Solemn and Silent

The leader explains that this exercise takes self-control. Members pair up back to back. On the count of three everyone must face their partner, look each other in the eyes and 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 is standing and has not smiled or laughed.

Secrets

The object of this exercise is for each person to find out one "secret" about every other person in the group. Be sure everyone has a piece of paper and something to write with. The leader instructs the members to talk with every other person, collecting one piece of information about that person that no one else in the room knows. Once everyone has a secret from each member, sit down in a circle. The leader then picks one person, and has everyone share what they found out about this person. If there are ten people in the group, there should be nine different secrets shared. Repeat the process for the next person in the circle until everyone has been named and all the secrets have been shared.

