

Icebreakers, Team Building Activities, and Energizers

About this Resource

What is an icebreaker? The term "icebreaker" comes from "break the ice", which in turn comes from special ships called "icebreakers" that are designed to break up ice in arctic regions. And just as these ships make it easier for other ships to travel, an icebreaker helps to clear the way for learning to occur by making the learners more comfortable and encouraging conversation. Specifically, an icebreaker is an activity designed to help people to get to know each other and usually involves sharing names and other background information.

A team building activity is designed to help groups form bonds and become a team. Team building activities differ from icebreakers in that the group members already have learned each other's names, and perhaps some personal information, and the focus is on making the group become more cohesive.

Energizers are quick, fun activities to liven up a group. They are particularly useful after a meal, when groups may be getting sluggish, or late in the day when energy is waning and motivation is decreasing.

Often an icebreaker, a team building activity and an energizer overlap. For example, during an activity in which participants are asked to line up in alphabetical order by first name, participants will learn each other's names (typical of an icebreaker), they'll work together as a team to form the line (teambuilding), and become invigorated by being able to get up and move around the room (an energizer). As a result, the activities in this resource are grouped together according to how they might be used instead of how they are defined.

Listed on the pages that follow are activities to facilitate introductions, to introduce a topic, to review concepts recently learned, to encourage team building, and to energize. There are also some miscellaneous activities at the end that you might find interesting or useful.

https://sixth.ucsd.edu/_files/_home/student-life/icebreakers-teambuilding-activities-energizers.pdf

There are several website that have more suggestions but for our retreats we must make sure that we are following the Safe Environment guidelines and policies from the (Arch) Diocese.

Activities to Facilitate Introductions

These icebreakers can be used to help participants relax and ease into a meeting or training; and to help participants learn each other's names and personal/professional information.

When participants are meeting for the first time, start with an icebreaker that helps everyone to learn names and personal/professional information. If you are facilitating more than one session, choose a few icebreakers -- you can use one to get people chatting and exchanging personal information, another to help memorize or review names, and another at a stretch break.

Seating Plan Ask participants to arrange their seats: * *alphabetically, according to first name, or* * *sequentially, in order of birthday month and date*

Marooned

You are marooned on an island. What five (you can use a different number, such as seven, depending upon the size of each team) items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded. Note that they are only allowed five items per team, not per person. You can have them write their items on a flip chart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group. This activity helps them to learn about other's values and problem solving styles and promotes teamwork.

Who's Done That?

Prior to the meeting, make a list of about 25 experiences or skills that might be useful to individual.

For example, a list for a group might have some of the following:

- o Developed a youth group website
- o Has applied for a scholarship
- o Has attended a Leadership Workshop
- o Has visited the Diocese of Amarillo website
- o Has taken an online course on different topics of Faith Formation
- o Has been an altar server, usher, lector etc.
- o Is good at using PowerPoint
- o Led a community service project

Ensure there is plenty of space below each item (3 or 4 lines) and then make enough copies for each person.

Give each person a copy of the list and have him or her find someone who can sign one of the lines.

Also, have them put their job title and phone number next to their names. Allow about 20-30 minutes for the activity.

Give prizes for the first one completed, most names (you can have more than one name next to an item), last one completed, etc. As a result of this activity, participants will have a list of who can serve as resources, and will have learned about each other.

Chaos

Material Needed: 3-4 soft small objects (stuffed animals, koosh balls, bean bags) Time Required: 10 minutes Group Size: 8-20 Purpose: Physical energizer, name game

1. Organize participants into a circle. Go around the circle once and have each participant introduce him or herself by name.
2. One person begins by tossing one of the objects to someone else, saying, "Hi, Name of Person!"
3. The person who catches the object then says, "Thanks, Name of tosser!" and repeats by tossing to someone else in the circle.
4. Names must be said each time the item is tossed or caught.
5. 3-4 items may be in place at once, but make sure to space them 30-60 seconds apart from each other.

Meeting Warm-Ups

Quick ideas to get people focused on each other and ready to participate!

This activity can be done with a group of any size.

Time Required: The activity can be as long or as short as you would like.

Materials: None

Physical Setting/Location: Needs to be in a location where group members form a circle.

Instructions:

Go around the circle and complete one of these sentences:

I came to this retreat because...

The best project I ever worked on was...

Being a Catholic has taught me that...

When people ask me about being Catholic, I tell them...

This year I plan to...

Each person in the circle should answer the question before a new question is issued to the group.

"I Have Never" (10 Fingers)

Each person starts off with some candy. Going around the circle, each person finishes the sentence "I have never..." Everyone who HAS done what they have never done gives that person one of their candies. A fun way to learn things you might otherwise not find out about people.

Me Too

This activity works best for small groups or with a large group divided into smaller groups of 4-6 participants.

1. Everyone in the group gets 10 pennies/toothpicks/scrap of papers, etc.
2. The first person states something he/she has done (e.g. water skiing).
3. Everyone else who has done the same thing admits it and puts one penny in the middle of the table.
4. Then the second person states something (e.g. I have eaten frogs' legs).
5. Everyone who has done it puts another penny in the center.
6. Continue until someone has run out of pennies

Activities to Introduce a Topic

Sometimes when a group is gathered for a retreat (confirmation), participants already know each other well. In these situations, use an icebreaker that leads into the content of the gathering. A topic lead-in can play a number of functions. It can:

- generate interest in the topic of the retreat or training
- activate participants' prior knowledge of the subject
- help the facilitator and participants to identify individual learning needs and goals
- encourage the sharing of information and resources
- surface resistance to discussion or learning

Topic lead-in questions can be answered collectively or individually. Use topic lead-ins liberally: it is appropriate to use them in every session.

Individual lead-in questions Individual lead-in questions are designed to identify individual learning needs and goals, encourage the sharing of information and resources, and/or surface resistance to learning. Participants can respond to questions in a predetermined order (e.g., left to right around the room), or by volunteering responses in random order. If you let participants speak in randomly, remember that one of the purposes of this activity is to get people talking, so try to ensure that everyone in the group makes a contribution.

Here are some topic lead-in suggestions:

- State one or two "burning questions" you hope will be answered in this session/retreat.
- Describe one strategy/resource you have successfully employed recently (relevant to the topic of the meeting/training or retreat).
- State your personal definition of the topic (eg., in a session on relationship, "Relationship means...").

The following lead-ins are particularly useful when the subject matter challenges established beliefs or practices:

- State your opinion on the topic. ("I think...")
- Complete a phrase or phrases (eg., in a session on public speaking, "encourage a person who is fearful of public speaking by...").

To encourage free-flow participation, ask participants to listen to all contributions, but reserve their comments for discussion later in the session.

Word Tree Generate a list of words related to the topic. For example, if discussing goal setting, ask participants to give you words related to the topic. Participants may suggest: 'objectives,' 'action plan,' 'targets,' 'planning,' 'achievement,' etc. Write all suggestions on the board, clustering by theme where possible. You can use this opportunity to introduce essential terms, too. **Multiple Choice or True/False Quiz** Rather than giving participants a multiple choice or true/false quiz at the end of a session, try giving it at the beginning. As facilitator, you can walk around and discretely scan participants' responses -- this can help you to identify where to focus your attention during the training. Check the answers with the group at the end of the session.

Activities for Reviewing and Applying Learning Concepts

These activities are meant to reinforce, review or apply material that was recently learned. They are a fun way to highlight key concepts while getting the participants up and moving around.

Ball Toss

This is a semi-review and wake-up exercise when covering material that requires heavy concentration. Have everyone stand up and form a circle. It does not have to be perfect, but they should all be facing in, looking at each other. Toss a foam ball or bean bag to a person and have them tell what they thought was the most important learning concept. They then toss the ball to someone and that person explains what they thought was the most important concept. Continue the exercise until everyone has caught the ball at least once and explained an important concept of the material just covered.

Process Ball

This is similar to the above exercise, but each person tells one step of a process or concept when the ball is tossed to them. The instructor or learner, in turn, writes it on a chalkboard or flip chart. For example, after covering "The Books of the New Testament," you would start the ball toss by having everyone give one of the books, e.g. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, etc.

Traffic Lights

The purpose of this activity, suitable for any group, is to introduce the idea of developing an action plan at the end of a training session/retreat.

Materials: flipchart paper; pens and/or markers

Time: 20 minutes

1. Divide the group into teams.
2. Draw a traffic light on a flip chart at the front of the room. Explain that the traffic light represents an action plan: what participants should stop doing (red light), what they should do less of (yellow light), and what they should go forward with (green light).
3. Ask each participant to write down his or her own "traffic lights". Allow 5 minutes.
4. Go around the group and ask each person to tell the rest of the group one of the things they will stop doing as a result of the training session/retreat, one of the things they will do less of, and one of the things they are going to go ahead and do.

Source:

Adopted: Barca, Michele and Cobb, Kate. (1993). *Beginnings and Endings: Creative Warmups and Closure Activities*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press P.139

Activities to Build Teams

Blind Numerical Order (20 minutes)

Illustrates: Communication and listening.

- a) There is no talking
- b) You must keep your blindfolds on at all times
- c) Each of you will have a number whispered into your ear
- d) The goal is for the group to arrange itself in numerical order without speaking and without the use of sight.

Blindfold all the participants. Whisper a number to each of them (do not allow other participants to hear). The number should be RANDOM (not just 1-12, etc). After whispering the number, move the participant to a random location. Once every participant has a number, they should begin. Make sure all participants are safe throughout the exercise.

Processing Questions:

What was the most difficult aspect of this exercise?

Did you have a sense of working together? Why/why not?

How frustrating was it when you could not talk?

What was necessary in order for you to be successful?

Did you assume that the assigned numbers would be in order (like 1-12)?

How important is good communication in groups?

How does this activity relate to our group?

All Tied Up

Material Needed: Bandanas or cloth strips, other items as needed

Time Required: 15-30 minutes, depending on the goal and number of group members

Group Size: 2-15

1. Purpose: Work as team to complete a common goal
2. Arrange participants into a circle, facing each other. Ask them to hold out their arms.
3. Tie the group together so that each person is tied to both neighbor's wrists.
4. Now that the group is "all tied up", give them a task to do together.

Some ideas are:

- Make root beer floats for everyone
- Wrap packages with gift wrap, bows, and a card
- Eat lunch
- Make a snack
- Create an art project
- Pour a cup of water for each person in the group
- Anything else that is fun and crazy

Note: To make the task more difficult give the group a time limit. **Debrief Questions or Topics:**

1. Why were you successful (or unsuccessful) at completing the task?
2. How did the time restrictions aid or hinder your group from completing the task?
3. Did everyone in the group help to get the task done?
4. What happened when someone didn't help?
5. Do you ever feel like you are "tied up" with someone else when you are working with them and trying to get a job done? If so, why, and how do you deal with this feeling?

Source: Jones, A. (1999). *Team -Building Activities for Every Group*. Richland, WA: Rec Room Publishing. P. 56-57.

Rain

Everyone sits in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. No talking is allowed. The leader starts the exercise and each person joins in when they hear the sound the person to their left is making. The leader starts the exercise by rubbing their palms together. This continues in the circle until it comes back to the leader who then changes the sound (snap fingers, clap hands, slap thighs, stomp feet, and then in reverse order). The sensations created are akin to the sounds of a rainstorm.

Thanks Giving

Material Needed: Paper, envelopes, writing utensils

Time Required: 20-30 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size: 2-40 Purpose: Team building, recognition

1. Explain to the group that the phrase "thankless job" is one that can be applied to many positions or specific tasks. Explain that sometimes one simple phrase coming from the right source can change that descriptor; the phrase is "thank you".
2. Distribute blank paper and envelopes.
3. Ask group members to write their name on their envelope and place them in a location easily accessible to everyone during the meeting or retreat.
4. Invite group members to write a note at any time during the session when they remember a particular time, event, or behavior for which they would like to thank another team member.
5. Throughout the meeting or retreat tell members they may place the notes in the envelopes of their team members.
6. Encourage team members to write at least one thank you note for each individual.

Variations:

- This activity can be adapted to include compliments or encouraging words. It can also be as simple as 3 kind words to describe the team member.
- If done on a retreat, before hand you could create 8 x 11 posters with a picture of the person and their name and then have people write directly on the poster throughout the retreat. You can also include an envelope for people to put their note, in case someone doesn't want their note to be public.

Note: Since these notes are personal between sender and recipient, do not explore them further as a group. The power of this activity is in the result, not the process. **Source:** West, E. (1997). *201 Icebreakers*. New York: McGraw Hill. P 409.

Activities to Energize Your Group

Ever feel like your group is just running out of gas? Perhaps it's late, or after a meal, and your group doesn't seem to have a lot of energy. We have provided a list of short energizers to get you and your group going. These can be used at any time, so enjoy!

Animal Roundup

Material Needed: None

Time Required: 10 minutes

Group Size: 5-50

Purpose: Physical energizer

1. Tell group members to silently think of their favorite animal.
2. Then tell group members that without talking, they need to arrange themselves from largest to smallest animals.
3. Group members can only make gestures and the noise of their animal.
4. After they have finished, have group members go around and say the animal they were supposed to be to see if it was accurate.

The Youth Ministry Needs Me Because...

Material Needed: None

Time Required: 7 minutes

Group Size: 5-50

Purpose: Physical energizer

This exercise brings out humor, team spirit and reinforces commitment.

1. Ask participants to think of three reasons why the Youth Group needs them, or how they contribute to the group..
2. Then, have participants, all at the same time, either stand up or walk around the room shouting out these reasons with commitment and belief.

Animal Noises

Materials Needed: Notecards with names of animals on them

Time Required: 5 minutes

Group Size: 10-50

Purpose: Energizer, icebreaker, good activity for breaking up people into subgroups.

1. Write the names of animals on note cards. Do at least 2 of each animal, but you may want more depending on the size of the subgroup you want to create. For example, if you want subgroups of 5 people each, you'll need 5 note cards with the same animal on them.
2. Distribute one card to each participant. Explain there are some duplicates.
3. Tell participants they must identify their partners (or group members) within the room purely by making the noise that they would associate with "their" animal. There should be no talking at this stage, only animal noises.

Miscellaneous Activities

Rearrange the Classroom (Change)

Prior to class, set the desks up in the old "traditional" classroom row style. Except, that you should set your stage (podium, flip chart, etc.) in the back of the class. Start your presentation (you will be behind them, facing their backs). Explain to them that this is how a lot of change is implemented in organizations. The leaders get behind their employees and attempt to "push" them into change. And the attempt to change is about as successful as trying to conduct a class this way.

Also, point out that this is how a lot of traditional organizations are set up, in nice even rows (departments), where it is hard to communicate and learn from each other. But, real teams develop when we break out of our boxes and design organizations that have cross functional teams working with each other. Ask them to rearrange the room so that real learning, communication, and teamwork can take place. Depending upon your learners, you might have to give them a few pointers to get started, but then get out of the way.

During the next break or after lunch, have them rearrange the room again, using some of the techniques that they learned. This can be repeated several more times, depending upon the length of the presentation. But, each time they change the setting, it needs to reinforce a concept that they previously learned.

You're OK

Good for ending a session or retreat. Distribute a 3x5 index card to people and ask them to write their name on it. Cards are passed around the group; at which time everyone write a positive comment about the respective individuals. The cards are then returned to each person.

RETREAT ACTIVITIES

Found on the Diocesan Youth Retreat Manual

This appendix is designed to point you in the direction of appropriate resources and activities to assist you in your retreat design. These are only a sampling of what is on our shelves. We are not recommending any one book over another. It is important that you read over each activity and make sure that it fits with the goals you hope to accomplish.

•Icebreakers, Games and Bond Building Activities

From *Building Community in Youth Groups*, Group Books, 1985
From *The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers*, Applied Skills Press, 1983
From *Have-A-Blast Games*, Group, 1991
From *Play It Again*, Zondervan Press, 1993

•Opening Up & Deeper Sharing Ideas

From *Building Community in Youth Groups*, Group Books, 1985
From *Rituals and Icebreakers: Practical Tools for Forming Community*, Sheed & Ward, 1995
From *Ideas Combo Edition*, 25-28, Youth Specialties, 1985

•Affirmation Ideas

From *Building Community in Youth Groups*, Group Books, 1985
From *Rituals and Icebreakers: Practical Tools for Forming Community*, Sheed & Ward, 1995 Hunting for Compliments

From *The Catholic Youth Retreat Book*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984

•Activities for Prayer and Worship

From *Creative Worship in Youth Ministry*, Group, 1985
From *Pathways to Praying with Teens*, St. Mary's Press, 1993
From *Prayers with Pizzazz for Junior High Teens*, St. Mary's Press, 1996

•Service Activities

From *Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn*, Abingdon Press, 1993
From *Ideas Combo Edition*, 49-52, Youth Specialties, 1992

•Activities for Outdoor Retreats

From *Resources for Outdoor Retreats*, St. Mary's Press, 1994
From *Vine & Branches, Vol. 2*, St. Mary's Press, 1992

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND GAMES

Group Publishing. ***Have-a-Blast - Games for Youth Groups***. Loveland: Group, 1991.
A good selection of active games.

New Games Foundation. ***New Games***. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1976.
_____. ***More New Games***. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1981.
These volumes contain many alternative and non-competitive activities that are suitable in retreat settings and great for brainstorming with the youth retreat design team.

Rice Wayne, and Tim McLaughlin. ***Ideas*** (52 Volumes). El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, Inc., 1992.
A resource with 52 volumes speaks for itself. There are plenty of possibilities in these books which can be used as is or adapted to retreat settings.

Rice, Wayne, John Roberto, and Mike Yaconelli, Editors. ***Creative Resources for Youth Ministry*** (6 volumes). Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1981. *Contains hundreds of communication exercises, community building activities, creative learning experiences, projects and worship experiences.*

Rice, Wayne & Yaconelli, Mike ed. ***Play It - Great Games for Youth Group***. Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, Zondervan, 1986.
_____. ***Play It Again***. Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, Zondervan, 1993.
Hundreds of indoor and outdoor community building games for different size groups and settings.

Rice, Wayne et al. ***Creative Gaming***. Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1982. *Contains hundreds of communication exercises, community building activities, creative learning experiences.*

Rydberg, Dennis. ***Building Community In Youth Group***. Loveland, CO.: Group, 1985. *Practical models (BOAST MODEL) for transforming your group into a close, caring family.*
_____. ***Youth Group Trust Builders***. Loveland, CO. : Group, 1993. *Seventy -one activities to develop friendships, share feelings without fear, affirm one another, and grow in faith and maturity .*