



ICE BREAKERS

Here are some icebreakers compiled from several youth work environments some adapted through the generations of youth workers and peer educators who have used them.

These icebreakers are simple to use and suitable for a wide age range. They are great with a small youth group and can be used in a small space! They require very few props. This selection will encourage sharing, openness, listening, cooperation and discussion, providing a useful 'getting to know you' or 'group building' introduction for a small group.

Icebreakers can play an important role in helping young people integrate and connect with one another in a group environment. Icebreakers can also enhance the learning by helping to stimulate cooperation and participation. They can provide positive momentum for small groups and discussion by:

- ✓ Helping a new group get to know one another.
- ✓ Helping new members to integrate into a group.
- ✓ Helping young people feel comfortable together.
- ✓ Encouraging cooperation.
- ✓ Encouraging listening to others.
- ✓ Encouraging working together.
- ✓ Encouraging young people to break out of their cliques.
- ✓ Developing social skills.
- ✓ Building a rapport with youth workers.
- ✓ Creating a good atmosphere for learning and participation.



ICE BREAKERS AND YOU - A 10 SECOND CHECK LIST!

- ✓ Be enthusiastic, whatever happens, be enthusiastic!
- ✓ Choose volunteers carefully and don't cause embarrassment.
- ✓ If something is not working move quickly on to the next activity.
- ✓ Timing is important. Don't flog them to death. Use only 2 or 3 icebreakers as a 20-30 minutes introduction to your workshop. Finish each icebreaker while young people are still enjoying it.
- ✓ Choose icebreakers appropriate for your age group. No group is the same and your understanding of what will and will not work with your group is a core youth work skill.

EXAMPLES OF ICE BREAKERS

CONVERSATIONS

Each person is given a sheet of paper with a series of instructions to follow. This is a good mixing game and conversation starter as each person must speak to everyone else. For example;

Count the number of brown eyed boys in the room.

Find out who has made the longest journey.

Who has the most unusual hobby?

Find the weirdest thing anyone has eaten.

Who has had the most embarrassing experience?



FEARS

Who knows what 'Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia' is a fear of? Nearest guess wins. If that's too easy you can try Arachibutyrophobia, Alektorophobia, Ephebiphobia or Anglophobia.

Answers

- ✓ Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia - Fear of long words (not a giant hippo in sight!)
- ✓ Arachibutyrophobia - Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of the mouth. (I think I might have this!)
- ✓ Alektorophobia - Fear of chickens. (No KFC today then!)
- ✓ Ephebiphobia - Fear of teenagers (tough phobia for a youth worker!)
- ✓ Anglophobia - Fear of England or English culture. (Be afraid, be very afraid!)

GROUP JUGGLE

Requirements: 4 tennis balls & 5-15 young people. Age range: 8yrs+.

Get your group to form a circle with a step's distance between each person. Then tell them you are going to send a tennis ball around. Begin with just 1 tennis ball and ask them to throw it to the person on their left in the circle. When they have all done it tell them you are going to make things harder by sending a second ball around. Then proceed to send the two balls around. If they successfully manage to send two balls around proceed with the third and then the fourth. To add a competitive element to the game eliminate people who cause the ball to touch the floor either by giving a bad pass to the next person or dropping the ball.

ROLL OF HONOUR

Hold up a roll of toilet paper and inform group that it will be passed around and each person may take off as many or as few sheets off as they like. After each person in the group has taken their share, break the news to the group that for each sheet they took, they have to tell



the group something about themselves. Example: For 4 sheets...."#1. My name is Bob, #2. My favourite subject is Science, #3. I like to play football in my spare time, #4. My favourite car is the Corsa."

HI HARRY

Get the group in a circle. The first person turns to the person on their right & says "Hi Harry." That person replies "Yes Harry" - to which the first person replies "Tell Harry" - that person then proceeds to say the same phrases to the person on their right.

If the person passing on the message fails to pass it on exactly then that person receives a spot which can be made with a lipstick. From then on in the game all players must respond to that person with the name "one spot" instead of "Harry."

If the player with one spot fails again then they receive two spots. If that player fails a third time, then they are eliminated from the game. You can carry on playing until all players are out - the person left as "Harry" or with the least number of spots is declared the winner.

CRASH aka 'CLUMP'

Everybody mingles, constantly moving until the leader shouts out a number. All players must then try to get into groups of that number any group/s that don't succeed are out.

Variation: Players find others who have things in common, such as same shoe size.

ELVES, WIZARDS, GIANTS

Another team version of the old game 'Scissors-Paper-Stone', but has funnier actions and noises which each team has to act out. Each character (Elf, Wizard, Giant) has a specific action or noise.

Elf Squatting down and imitate pointed ears by holding two fingers up by your ears (similar to making bunny ears). Make "Eeeking" noises while doing this.



Giant Standing on tip toe, arms raised in frightening posture making growling / roaring sounds

Wizard Standing normally but with arms outstretched as if casting a spell. Make appropriate spell casting noises.

As with Scissors-Paper-Stone each character/icon can win against one character or lose against the other. If wanted, teams can make the appropriate actions for winning or losing.

| Winning team: | Action/s: |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Elves shoot Wizards: Elves win | Elves pretend to shoot an arrow, Wizards make dramatic gestures as though struck in the heart. |
| Wizards frazzle Giants: Wizards win | Giants pretend to shrink. |
| Giants squash Elves: Giants win | Giants pretend they are squishing something small. |

Each team finds a quiet corner and decides on a character to be as a team, after choosing their character each team stands facing each other with hands behind their backs. On a given signal (e.g. the count of three) the whole team acts out their character with the points going to the team that chooses the winning character. If both teams pick the same character there is a draw.

M&M GAME

Pass around a bag of M&Ms and have each person take as many as they want. For each colour of the M&Ms have a question that they have to answer. For instance, red can be, "Describe your first crush." You can play this with Skittles or other coloured sweets.

GROUP SCAVENGER HUNT

Have audience break into 3 - 4 groups. Leader calls out different items or activities for the groups to produce. The first group (the entire group does not have to go) to come up to the



front with the item gets a point. Group with the most points at end wins. Suggested items and activities:

- Red (or another colour) shoelace - to be removed from the shoe
- Pen with a chewed cap
- Penny or any coin with a certain date
- Paper clip
- Stamp
- Family picture
- Guy wearing red lipstick
- 2 people with their shoelaces tied together
- Gum in the wrapper - MC thanks the person and then eats the gum
- Key chain with at least 8 keys
- Church bulletin
- Book mark
- Store receipt

SIT DOWN IF...

Have a list of questions (with the next one getting wilder, and the wilder the better) beginning with the phrase, "Sit down if you (blank)". Find out who remains standing after each round. [Kit: If you want a good idea of how this games works in action and perhaps some types of question being asked, this was used by Graham Norton at the start of his shows.]

SHOE PILES

A good way to have new people meet everybody. Everyone takes off one of their shoes and throw it into a big pile. Then each person picks up a different shoe from the pile and finds the person it belongs to. Works well for large groups.

SPINNING PAIRS

Get into pairs and face each other. Place your palms on other's palms between you a little above shoulder height. Both partners close their eyes and pull their palms apart (approx. 12



inches) while keeping their palms at that height. Both then turn around on their respective spots 3 times at the same time. The goal is to reconnect palms after spinning while keeping your eyes closed.

STRING TOSS GAMES

Get a spool of string or yarn. Have each person answer a question of some sort when they have the string in their possession. They then hold on to string and throw the ball/spool to another so they can answer the question. You eventually create a web of some sort. In the end, describe how the web analogous to the group in that we all play a part in creating the web, and that if one person was gone it would look different. Likewise, it is important that we all take part to make the group what it is, unique and special.

WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL ARE YOU?

Have all participants stand in a circle. Talk about parents in the animal kingdom ie, the lioness and how she ferociously protects her young. Then have each of them say what kind of animal they would be and why. Brings out interesting ideas about parenting and how we see ourselves.

AGELINE

Ask participants to line up from youngest to oldest without talking. They should put themselves in the line where they think they should be. Then ask participants to introduce themselves by name and age. They should then rearrange themselves so they are in the correct place. Facilitator can then ask a series of questions, such as: What is the best/worst thing about your age? What age would you like to be if you could? Why? Give participants an opportunity to switch places and "try out" a different age. Ask those who switched why they did so. Ask the youngest and oldest people to switch places. Do they have any questions for the other? Any advice? Ask the youngest group if they were surprised by the answers of the older people. Ask the older group the same question. Discuss the stereotypes and myths we hold about different ages.



GUESS WHO?

Ask each participant to describe five significant things about themselves on a 3 X 5 card. Instruct them not to include their names. Shuffle the cards and give them out to the participants. Make sure that no one has her/his own card.

Tell the participants to find the author of the card. To do this, they have to look around and guess who might have written the card. Once they find a candidate, they should not show them the card; instead, they should ask questions. They cannot ask, "Did you write that you love cats?" Instead, they should ask "Describe things you really love."

When they find the author of their card, they should hold onto the author's right arm. Then the author must take them with them to find out whose card they have. When they find out, they hold on to that person's right arm. Eventually, everyone will be connected.

Next ask group members how they decided whom to approach. Did some cards suggest that they were written by a young person or an older adult? A male or a female? How did it feel to latch onto someone? To be latched onto?

PARTY

Affix each end of a two foot long piece of string on the top corners of 8.5" X 11" sheets of construction paper. On each piece of paper write in large bold print an occupation or a social role. For example, "banker", "third grader", "homeless person", "nursing home resident", "basketball star", "nuclear physicist", "person with AIDS", "teacher", "hearing disabled".

Without letting participants see which you are giving them, hang these signs on people's backs. Instruct them to mill around making small talk with each other as though they were at a party. Ask them to treat each other as is appropriate to the sign on their back. Their goal is to give clues to help each other guess their roles. They should be somewhat subtle. To one with a sign that says "McDonald's cashier" say "I smell french fries" or "Why did you only give me back 43 pence". Don't say "How does it feel to work at McDonald's?"

Ask them to exaggerate their response to the social roles. Encourage them to be obsequious to the rich and famous, disdainful of the poor, patronizing to the very young and very old. When people guess their role correctly, ask them to wear their signs in front of them to let others know they've correctly guessed their roles. After everyone has guessed the role on the signs on



their backs, discuss the experience. How did it feel to be treated the way they were? How many would want to have that role permanently? Did people's behaviour mirror that of general society? How would people have preferred to have been treated? Have any of them ever felt that they've been treated stereotypically because of their appearance, age, job, etc.

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Ask participants to sit in age-integrated groups of three. Within each group, each member should tell her/his partners two true things about her/himself and one complete fabrication. The partners must try to guess which is the lie. Stories about adventures, famous people they've met, strange occurrences in their families or major life achievements all work well in this exercise. When everyone has told their truths and lies within their groups, ask each group member to introduce one of their partners to the larger group by telling them one interesting thing they learned about them.

NAME GAME

Name games are a great way for intergenerational groups to begin their first meeting. Seat participants in a circle. Ask the first participants to say their name preceded by an adjective that describes them and that begins with the first letter of their name (e.g. Amazing Amy, Gregarious Gregory, Hilarious Hilary). The next person must say the first name and adjective and then their own. The third person must say the first two names with their adjectives and then their own, and so on. One variation would be to not compel the group to memorise the other names but for everyone to repeat each name as they go around. Or, instead of using adjectives, ask members to come up with a famous person with the same first name or to name an animal or a kind of food they like.

DRAW

Give everyone a piece of paper and a pencil. Allow 5 minutes to draw a picture that conveys who they are without writing any words or numbers. At the end of 5 minutes the leader collects the pictures. Show the pictures to the group, one at a time, and have them try to guess who drew it. Each artist can then explain how their work expresses who they are.



FREEZE FRAME

Based on the party game of musical statues. Invite the young people to quietly move around the room and await your instructions. As they are walking the leader calls out the name of a sport, for example, golf, football, rugby, swimming, parachuting, cricket, basketball, horse racing etc. When they hear the name they must stop immediately and hold a still 'freeze frame' illustrating or acting out the sport. Take a photo of the most life-like or descriptive 'freeze frame' in each round for future display.

You can play variations to the game by shouting out emotions, job titles or even animals.

TAKE THE TREASURE

Invite the young people to sit in a large circle. Place a chair in the middle. On the chair place the treasure. A set of keys works really well. Ask for a volunteer to guard the treasure from thieves and give them a rolled up newspaper. Unfortunately, they have to do this while being blindfolded!

Once the guard is in place beside the chair, a thief is quietly chosen from the circle. They must attempt to sneak up to the chair and without alerting the guard, snatch the treasure. Meanwhile, the guard listens for the thief and try's to swat him with the newspaper baton. If the thief is swatted, he must return to the circle. If he succeeds in stealing the treasure and returning to the circle, his prize is to become the new guard.

CHOCOLATE CHOMP

Another old party game, but still lots of fun. Ask everyone to sit in a circle on the floor. In the middle of the circle place a large bar of chocolate on a plate, a knife, a fork and three items of clothing – gloves, scarf and a cap. (Don't forget to remove the wrapper from the chocolate!) Each person in the circle takes a turn at rolling a dice. On throwing a six they run to the middle of the circle, put on the items of clothing and try to eat as much chocolate as possible. However, they can only cut it with the knife and pick it up with the fork. As soon as someone else throws a six, they run to the middle, put on the gloves, hat and cap, and take over. Continue until all the chocolate is eaten. Prepare for mayhem!



WORD LINK

This is a word association game. Ask the group to sit in a circle. The first person starts with any word they wish i.e. red. The next person repeats the first word and adds another word which links to the first i.e. tomato. The next person repeats the previous word and add another word link i.e. soup, and so on. To keep this moving, only allow five seconds for each word link. See how many linking words your group can get.

OBJECT STORIES

Collect together a number of objects and place in a canvas or dark coloured plastic bag. The objects can include everyday items i.e. a pencil, key-ring, mobile phone, but also include some more unusual ones i.e. a fossil, holiday photograph, wig!

Pass the bag around the group and invite each young person to dip their hand into the bag (without looking) and pull out one of the objects. The leader begins a story which includes his object. After 20 seconds, the next person takes up the story and adds another 20 seconds, incorporating the object they are holding. And so on, until everyone has made a contribution to your epic literary tale. Let imaginations run wild!

I HAVE NEVER

Another good game for finding things out about others. Have everyone sit in a circle except one person. The person in the middle says something that they have never done (i.e. I have never drank alcohol or I have never worn a dress). All the people who have never done that have to get up and find an empty seat (from someone else who just got up). The person stuck without a seat is now in the middle. This game has no time limit.

CROSSWORD NAMES

Give a pen and paper to each young person in your group. Ask them to write their first name in capitals, in the middle of the paper. Each person then moves around the room, inviting others (including leaders) to attach their name, where the first letter matches a letter on the paper.



The names are then added like a branching crossword puzzle. The person who is able to attach the most names in the given time is the winner. This activity works well in larger groups where people are meeting for the first time.

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QUESTION BALL

This game is good for the Blind or partially sighted, support is needed to read out the question. Before starting prepare in advance a largish ball such as a blow up beach-ball or a bouncy one with peas or something that will make a sound like a rattle when thrown. Write questions on it using a marker pen. E.g. What's your favourite colour, favourite food, favourite cartoon, etc. To start the game throw the ball to any person. When they catch it where ever their right thumb is that is the question they have to say aloud and answer. The game can go on for a long time and be used a time filler.