

Icebreakers and Energisers

Objectives:	To help participants feel comfortable with the sessions, with the trainer, and with each other.
	To focus participants' attention.
	To stimulate participants' level of energy and enthusiasm

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Icebreakers and Energisers

A. Icebreakers: Rationale

There needs to be an introduction whenever people gather to work on something. It helps participants become familiar with each other, with the trainer, and with their surroundings. It also helps the trainer to establish a tone for the session.

Participants often need help focusing their attention; they may have had a busy day, have concerns at home, rushed through traffic to come to the session etc.

B. Icebreakers: Method

By their nature, icebreakers are useful at the start of each session.

They need to be straightforward and uncomplicated without being trivial. They need adequate time, but not be allowed to drag or outlive their usefulness. Overdone, they can reduce the empathy between the trainer and some participants.

Once a group has already met for a few sessions, the group-building role may become less important, and icebreakers can be briefer, especially if the group has already done the particular icebreaker chosen for this session. (Some groups are happy to adopt one or a couple of icebreakers as the way they always start sessions.)

Conversely, a group which is having difficulties working together may benefit from having an extended time on certain icebreakers.

Many icebreakers can actually lead into the theme of the session. For example, Knots can lead into an introductory session or it can preface a session on the Win/Win Approach or Co-operative Power.

In short, they are a valuable part of a session, and need to be chosen and run as appropriate to the group, the tone and content of the session, and for the style and skills of the particular trainer.

C. Energisers: Rationale

Sometimes, at the beginning or during a session, participants may feel drained of energy and unable to concentrate. An activity which invigorates them is called an "Energiser". Energisers are usually fairly briefs and are often zany and fun, rather than intellectual and "relevant".

Energisers also help to punctuate lengthy sessions, especially if the material is more didactic and less interactive. They may provide a structured break if the session is about to move to new material or take quite a different direction.



D. Energisers: Method

In some circumstances, energisers may be needed at the start of every session, and can be combined with an icebreaker. They can, however, be scheduled at any point during a session, though not usually towards the end. Trainers need to be constantly aware of the mood of the participants, and it is always better to stop for an unscheduled energiser, or a cup of coffee, rather than forging on ahead dragging tired and increasingly unreceptive participants behind.

E. Variations

Trainers can add interest and spice even to the most commonly used icebreakers and energisers by inventing individual ways of running certain steps in the processes. For example instead of letting participants find their own way into pairs the trainer could hold metre-long pieces of string. Each participant grabs one end, and then people have to untangle the string to find out who are their partners.

Alternatively, they may have to find who matches the coloured spots given to them at random, or they may be asked to pair up with the person closest to them in height. Icebreakers and energisers lend themselves to experimentation and creativity. Have fun!



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Outcomes Introduction

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	At the beginning of a workshop, this activity helps people to clarify and focus on the outcomes they want from the course or session. It also helps them to become acquainted with each other.
Time:	15 minutes
Aim:	To clarify and express explicitly the outcomes that participants want from the course or session. To help participants become acquainted.

Instructions: We are going to clarify for ourselves what we want from this course, and then share it with each other. Think about some outcomes you would like from the course. Write them down. Try to have at least four outcomes. *(Perhaps ask them to imagine that it is the end of the course and they have learnt or achieved just what they want. What is it?)*

Now, move about introducing yourself to people you do not know, sharing these:

- your name
- your occupation
- an outcome from your list, a different one to each person you meet
- a long term goal in life.

You may copy someone else's outcome if it appeals to you, or if you run out of your own. After just a little while with one person, move on to another.

When participants have each met about four other participants, call the group together.

VARIATION

Delete the process of introductions to one another and concentrate on reflecting on the desired outcomes.

Perhaps lead them through a guided reflection, as follows:



Relax for a moment. Sit comfortably, perhaps with your eyes closed. If anything comes into your mind, accept it and then let it drift away. Imagine you are just at the end of this course, and you are walking out, satisfied with what you have received from it.

What is it that you are pleased about?

What is it that the course has given you?

Discussion: What are some of the outcomes you discussed?

Write up the answers, stopping after a reasonable sampling of the group.

Does anyone have something you really feel you want to add?



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Introductions

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	This activity introduces participants within a group.
Time:	10 minutes
Aim:	To introduce participants to each other. (The trainer can be included.)

Instructions: We are going to spend some time getting to know each other.

Arrange yourselves into two concentric circles. Each person in one circle should be facing one person in the other circle.

I will specify a topic, and then you have 2 minutes to discuss it before you move on to a new partner and a new topic.

After 2 minutes, ask the people in the outside circle (only) to move one person to the left, and then announce the topic for the next 2 minutes.

As appropriate, include some topics relevant to the group, such as the following:

- a person you would most like to meet
- a favourite pastime
- one thing you would love not to have to do any more, and what you would do instead
- the most hilarious/exhilarating/ embarrassing time you ever had.
- if you could use any mode of transport what you would choose.
- how you handle conflict.
- how you would prefer to handle conflict.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Name Game

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	This activity helps people get to know each other if they are unfamiliar with each other, and is useful if they will be meeting long enough together to make learning each other's name worthwhile.
Time:	10 minutes
Aim:	To help participants and trainer learn each other's first name.

Instructions: We are going to spend some time learning each other's first name.

Arrange yourselves into a circle. Think of a word that begins with the same letter or sound as your first name (e.g. Friendly Fay, Careful Casey, Hectic Helen).

The first person starts by saying the word to match his/her name (e.g. friendly Fay"). The next person repeats what the first person said, and then adds his/her own word and name ("Friendly Fay, Careful Casey"). This continues around the circle, so the sixth person may say something like: "Friendly Fay, Careful Casey, Hectic Helen, Daggy David, Perfect Pat, Mighty Michael".

VARIATION

The first word could be chosen by an alternative rule. For example, it could be the name of an animal that starts with the same letter, it could describe the person, or the person's job, or mood that morning etc.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

“I’d like you all to meet...”

Trainers’ Information Only

Context:	This activity introduces participants within a group. It could be useful to reinforce or introduce active listening.
Time:	15 minutes plus 2 minutes per person to introduce each other.
Aim:	To introduce participants to each other. (<i>The trainer can be included.</i>)

Instructions: We are going to spend some time learning each other's name and a little about each other. Separate into pairs, preferably with someone you do not know. We could call you Person A and Person B. Person A will introduce Person B to the group and vice versa.

Person A will have 5 minutes to get to know person B, and then there will be 5 minutes for person B to get to know person A. I suggest you focus on some of the following aspects of the person you will be introducing:

- Name
- Where the person works, his/her main activity, his/her role in the organisation
- Major interest or pastime
- What the person hopes to get out of this course.

Select appropriately from this list, or include themes special to the group.

Discussion: Did anyone find it easier to introduce someone else, rather than yourself? How did you go, trying to remember the details? Did anything make it easier?

Did open-ended questions encourage people to tell more about themselves? Were there any examples of misunderstandings, which were clarified using questions to check?



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Mindchatter

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	The inner "voice" chattering in our minds strongly affects our behaviour in a situation. It can be a powerful tool for centring, or a powerful distraction.
Time:	5 minutes
Aim:	To recognise and acknowledge mindchatter. To practise controlling mindchatter, using it to clear and relax participants' minds at the start of a session.
Materials:	Pens, paper, small rubbish bin.

Instructions: When we start a new activity, we are often distracted by something on our mind. It may be something that happened today, something imminent, something we must remember to do, or other important personal matters. Our minds tend to chatter about this and distract us.

This activity controls this "mindchatter" and focuses our attention.

Take about 3 minutes to write down any mindchatter you are experiencing at present. If it includes anything you must do, write it at the top of the page. If it is "nuisance" chatter, write it at the bottom of the page.

When it is complete, tear the top ("must do") from the bottom ("nuisance") Put away the "must do" list in your bag safely, and the "nuisance" section you can screw up and gleefully throw in the bin.

Now you should have a clearer, more relaxed mind to start the session.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Knots

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	Used with an introductory session, this activity reflects conflict being unravelled, and people working together. For a session on Win/Win, this activity shows the value of co-operative effort in reaching an outcome in which everyone wins. For Co-operative Power, it involves people working together and sharing leadership roles to enhance problem-solving.
Time:	10 minutes
Aim:	To provide a fun, informal and invigorating introduction, especially for sessions as described in "Context".

Instructions: *(If there are more than a dozen participants, it may be valuable to separate them into groups, preferably between 6 and 12 in size.)*

We are going to spend some time loosening up, raising our energy and working together. Stand in a circle, facing inwards. Everyone close your eyes, put your hands into the middle and join hands with two other people. Now, everyone open your eyes to see a tangle of hands. Without letting go of anyone's hands, let's unravel the "knot".

We will be stepping over or under each other's arms, bending down, stretching up and twisting around.

The game ends when everyone has unravelled into a circle, holding hands. Sometimes there is more than one circle at the end.

If the unravelling is taking a very long time, the trainer can unlink one set of hands and the group unravels into a line instead.

Discussion: *(It may be more appropriate to go directly on to the session for which this is forming an introduction omitting the discussion.)*

How did you do it?

How did you feel at the start, and while it was happening?

Was there co-operation or competition? Did everyone "benefit" from the outcome?

Who led the process? Did the leader's role shift? What caused those shifts?



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Group Story Telling

Trainers' Information Only

Context: This activity builds cohesion in a group, especially where the group has met before. It gets everyone to speak, and so may be useful where some participants are reluctant or overpowered by others. It encourages listening to each other and spontaneity, and it is light-hearted.

Time: 10 minutes

Aims: To build cohesion within a group.
To encourage or allow everyone to participate.
To encourage listening.
To establish a relaxed atmosphere.

Instructions: We are going to spend some time working as a group to create something. It is a chance for us to relax together, as well as to build an effective team for the work we have ahead of us. The particular "something" we are going to create is a story. This will enable us all to have a say, make an input and contribute. I do not yet know what the story is about, or how it ends. Will someone please suggest a theme?

You may need to ask particular person or selection of people for an idea. You may like to ask specifically for, say, an object, a place, or an emotion. Or the theme of the story could be chosen in some way which is relevant to the group.

Who would like to start our story? You will speak for about 20 or 30 seconds, telling the first part of the story. The next person will then pick it up and tell us what happened then, for the next 20 or 30 seconds. We will keep going around the group until we have all had a go. The lucky last person will have to make up the ending.

If the group is very large, you may wish to break it into groups of about six.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

E.S.P.

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	Sometimes, people locked in conflict expect others to be able to know what the problem is, or what they need, without actually telling them. They expect people to be mind-readers. People often have a cautious interest in whether E.S.P. exists. This can be utilised to invigorate participants and to increase the coherence of the group, even if they are fairly new to each other.
Time:	10 minutes
Aims:	To investigate the reliability of E.S.P., especially as it relates to "telling people how a conflict situation is for me". To invigorate participants and heighten their attention. To build cohesion within the group.

Instructions: We often expect people to know what is wrong, or what we need, before we actually tell them. It is like we are expecting them to "read our minds". Let's explore how well we communicate using E.S.P. This will be a chance to try out this puzzling phenomenon, and we can just have some fun together. Divide into groups of 3. Stand so you are all looking away from each other.

One of you, decide on a pose or posture, and move into that posture. Remember not to sneak a peak at what each other is doing! When you are in your posture, concentrate on communicating it by E.S.P. to the other two people in your group.

The rest of you have to try to "hear" what the other person is communicating to you. Try to match their posture.

When I say so (and not before), turn around holding your pose, to see how close you were. Then, we will do it again to find out whether we are better at receiving or sending messages.

Run this so each person gets a turn, giving each round a couple of minutes.

VARIATION

Perhaps specify that the poses or postures must represent an emotion, an animal etc. appropriate for the group.



Discussion:

Who was able to match someone else's pose?

How much consensus were we able to achieve by trying to read each other's minds?

What alternatives are more reliable than E.S.P.?



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Thunderstorm

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	When a group is comfortable with being together, it is often interesting and fun to do something very novel together, especially if it uses our senses rather than our intellectual powers. This can be very absorbing, bringing our attention to where we are now.
Time:	10 minutes
Aims:	To invigorate a group, providing participants with a short, novel experience. To focus participants' attention. To increase cohesion within the group.

Instructions: We are going to do something very unusual, which will help focus our attention and get us ready for the session. Arrange yourselves around me in a horseshoe pattern.

A large group may have people two or three deep around the horseshoe.

We are going to make an orchestrated thunderstorm. I will be the conductor, and I will communicate to you through eye contact. When I look at you and your part of the group, you make the sound I am making at the time. You then keep making that sound until I look at you again, making a new sound. As well, I will let you know that I want the sound to be louder by lifting and spreading my arms this way (demonstrate), or that I want it to be softer by lowering and pulling my arms in towards me like this. (Demonstrate.) After a while, I'll indicate to you and your part of the group to stop making the sound as the thunderstorm ends.

Move your gaze slowly around the horseshoe, demonstrating the following sounds in the order listed, and encouraging people to join in: sshhhh, clicking fingers, slapping thighs, stamping feet. Start a new sound on each 360 degree visual sweep. Make the sounds quietly at first, for the start of the thunderstorm, and then make them louder for the thunder. After a short time, gradually let the thunderstorm lessen, taking them back on each sweep to the quieter sound of slapping thighs, then clicking fingers, and sshhhh. Indicate a stop, and listen to the silence for a moment.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Zip, Zap, Boing, Pop

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	When a group is comfortable with being together, it is often interesting and fun to do something very novel together, especially if it uses our senses rather than our intellectual powers. This can be very absorbing, bringing our attention to where we are now.
Time:	10 minutes
Aims:	To invigorate participants and to focus their attention. To show the value of being attentive and clear when communicating with others.

Instructions: We are going to give ourselves some energy for the session ahead, and at the same time practise being attentive and clear in our communications with others.

Stand in a circle, facing inwards. We are going to pass around an imaginary parcel, using four sounds. If we say "zip" and turn our heads to the left, we are passing it to the left like this.

Demonstrate after each sound is described.

If we want to pass it to the right instead, we say "zap", and turn our heads to the right. If we say "boing", it changes direction and goes back the way it came, the new person saying either, "zip" if it's going to the left or, "zap" if it's going to the right. We can throw it across the circle to anyone we choose using "pop". If you are "popping" it to someone, you have to make clear eye contact so that the person knows it is his/her turn.

Progress may be slow at first, as participants gradually get used to the four possible sounds. It may be useful to introduce the sounds one at a time, rather than all at once at the start.

This activity can be used at the start of or during several sessions, and can become something of a favourite for some groups.



Icebreakers and Energisers Activities

Rhythm, Rhyme and Association

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	This activity works best with a group that has already worked together. It invigorates participants and shows the importance of attentive listening and responding appropriately to what is said to us.
Time:	10 minutes
Aims:	To invigorate participants and to focus their attention. To practise listening attentively and responding appropriately.

Instructions: We are going to practise listening accurately to what is said to us and responding appropriately. It is also a bit of fun, so when we have finished, we will be full of energy for the session ahead.

Arrange yourselves in a circle, looking inwards. We are going to set up a rhythm that goes like this: first we clap our hands once on our knees, then we clap them once together, then we point into the centre using the index fingers of both hands. (*Demonstrate this and practise it.*)

Now we will build just one more step onto what we can do already. When we are all pointing into the centre, I will say a word like "frog". We keep up the rhythm, and when we point next time, the person on my left says a word either rhyming with "frog", perhaps "log", or it could be a word that has something to do with "frog", like "green". We keep going around the circle, with the next person on the left saying a new word every time we point. You can accept an idea from someone else if you get stuck, but try to keep up the rhythm.

Here is an example of how the word string might develop:

- Frog
- Green
- Branch
- Bank
- Tank
- Plank
- Floor
- House...



VARIATION

First, we clap our hands once on our knees, then we clap them once together. Then we click the fingers of our right hand, followed by clicking the fingers of our left hand. (Demonstrate this and practise it.)

Now we will build just one more step into what we can do already.

When I click my right fingers I will say a word like "frog". When I click my left fingers I will say a word that rhymes with frog, like "log" or a word that is associated with frog, like "green". Then we repeat the rhythm, with the person on my left repeating the last word that was said like "green" when he/she clicks his/her right fingers, and adding a new word when he/she clicks his/her left fingers, and so on around the circle.

Finish after about three rounds.

