



Icebreakers

Icebreakers

Icebreakers are an important element of participative group work. They are most commonly used at the beginning of sessions but can also be used during sessions when energy is flagging or when you want to change the pace. They can:

- help participants relax and relieve tension
- enable everyone to become involved right from the beginning
- build trust and group cohesion
- provide practical opportunities to experience an issue that will be discussed, for example, good team work or communication.

Tips for effective use of icebreakers

- Make sure they don't use up too much time – five to 10 minutes is adequate.
- Make sure they are not too demanding or revealing.
- Make sure they are suitable for your group and the trust they have in you and each other.
- Vary your choice of icebreakers.
- Whenever possible make sure they relate to the exercise that will follow.
- Be confident about using them – if you are, others will follow.

Suggestions for icebreakers

A good decision I made was...

In pairs or small groups, ask each young person to quickly think of a good decision they have made recently and share it and share it with the group.

Ask each person to say why it was a good decision.

A risky situation I saw on TV was...

In pairs, talk about a risky situation they saw recently on TV. Get them to think about why it was risky. Get the pair to describe it to the group.

About me...

Ask each person to say a sentence about themselves in response to a simple statement prepared earlier, for example:

- something I did at the weekend...
- my favourite soap...
- the first thing I would do if I won the lottery...
- if I could live anywhere in the world... .

Because

The first person describes an everyday situation in a simple way. For example, 'My shoes are muddy'.

The next person gives a reason why. For example, 'Because it's raining outside'.

The third person suggests a probable effect. For example, 'And my footprints are all over the floor'.

Encourage the young people to state cause and effect rapidly and not to worry about coming up with the best answer. Spontaneity is key.

Build a machine

Explain to the group that they are going to build a machine using their bodies. Each part of the machine should have a specific purpose that can be explained, and that contributes to the overall machine.

One person starts a mechanical action, then others attach themselves until a large machine has been built.

If it's helpful, give specific instructions about what the machine can do, for example it might be a musical machine or a giggle machine.

How I feel

This activity can only be used successfully when trust has built up within the group. It can help to create a supportive environment in the group and can be repeated at the end of the session to check out how people are feeling now and see if feelings have changed.

In a round, ask each person to come up with a word or phrase to describe how they are currently feeling, for example, 'Right now I'm feeling a bit nervous'.

Now the news

The object of this game is for each person to add three words to a story as it is passed round the group. The three words should help to describe an incredible story. The more absurd the funnier.

Begin the story slowly. For example, the first person might say: 'Late last night...', the second person might add 'A green monster...', and the next person adds 'Ate New York.' If anyone gets stuck and can't think of something to say, come back later. Keep the game moving.

One thing I am good at

Ask young people to go round in a circle and say one thing they are good at, and why.

One thing I would change

Ask young people to go round in a circle and say one thing they would change to make them more healthy.

What I would be...

Ask each person to say what they would be if they were suddenly turned into something else, for example, a piece of furniture or fruit.

What's in my pocket?

In a round, ask each person to talk briefly about one item they own, which they like.

Who I am

In pairs, preferably of people who don't know each other very well, ask each person to introduce themselves to their partner and say one thing about themselves they don't mind sharing.

Once both partners have done this, return to the full group and ask each person to introduce their partner to the group and share the information they have learned.

You can give specific details of what information to share, for example, 'What I had for breakfast this morning', 'What I like doing in my spare time'.

Or

In a round, ask each person to say their name and something about it. For example, were they named after someone? Do they like their name? Where does the name come from?