

Principles for Using Icebreakers / Team-Builders

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1. Why use icebreakers and team-builders?

- to foster acquaintanceship: help people get to know each other better
- increase feelings of comfort
- develop feelings of connectedness with others
- develop a feeling of trust
- break down walls / masks / barriers / territoriality
- help participants to understand and appreciate the differences among people in the group
- foster energy and enthusiasm
- to "get the blood moving" again
- serve as a "clearing technique", helping participants to forget about other issues and focus on the seminar
- provide an "advance organizer", an overview of the next topic or the purpose of the seminar
- increase personal awareness of current skill / knowledge level and need to learn seminar material
- set the tone for the seminar: participation; fun; risk-taking; etc.
- to "grab" the attention of participants

2. Principles for using team-builders / icebreakers

- have activity somehow relate to topics of workshop
- use more physical activities at beginning and after any break
- start with lower risk activities and build up to higher risk ones

- always model/give an example before the activity
- model enthusiasm and energy
- build in a low risk amount of physical contact
- encourage laughter
- vary the membership of groupings and the size of groups
- use dyads and triads for more high risk sharing
- always process key points of activity to show relevance to overall seminar

3. Examples of low - moderate risk activities

a. Introduce your partner: Dyads interview each other with several specific sentence stems and report back to the group.

b. Change five (5) things: Partners turn back-to-back and alter their appearance in five ways. They turn to face each other and try to guess the changes. Mirrors: Partners take turns imitating "mirroring" the nonverbal and verbal behavior of the other.

d . Off-balance: Partners hold hands and try to form as many different balancing positions that are very "off-balance".

e . Make a machine: small groups have to use their bodies to make a moving machine and demonstrate it for the group.

f. Shield: Have participants draw an empty coat-of-arms and fill in 4-6 segments with words or pictures as they respond to the facilitator's sentence stems.

Resource: Fluegelman, A. (Ed.) (1976). The New Games Book. NY: Doubleday.

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