

# The ART of ICEBREAKERS: Opportunities to Learn, Laugh and Lead

*“Icebreakers are tools that enable the group leader to foster interaction, stimulate creative thinking, challenge basic assumptions, illustrate new concepts, and introduce specific material.”*

The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers:  
Structured Activities that Warm-up, Motivate,  
Challenge, Acquaint and Energize  
Sue Forbess-Greene

## INTRODUCTION

*“...people of all ages crave the stimulation that comes from their participation in playful games.”*  
The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers

The *right* icebreaker at the *right* time with the *right* group can create an instant sense of community and focus within a group. Choosing the wrong icebreaker, however, can greatly dampen a group's ability to function. To perfect the art of leading icebreakers, you need to plan ahead, practice patience, and collect pages upon pages of potential icebreakers.

## PURPOSE OF ICEBREAKERS

*“All icebreakers are not the same.”*

The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers

There are many names for Icebreakers: *warm-ups, de-inhibitizers, tension reducers, brainteasers, getting acquainted activities, feedback/disclosure loops, energizers and games.* The names are not important, understanding what icebreakers can do is important.

Icebreakers can be used socially, educationally and topically.

### **Socially:**

- To establish non-threatening introductory contacts
- To increase participants familiarity with one another
- To increase a group member's comfort level
- To allow others to know us as we see ourselves
- To increase energy when the group seems flat
- To warm up group members

### **Educationally:**

- To reduce learning overload
- To stimulate, challenge, and motivate participants
- To heighten the creative resources of the group
- To start a session, or “prime” a group after a break
- To shift the focus of study
- To increase competence and or develop awareness

### **Topically:**

- To help the group think about the subject of the meeting
- To connect what the group already knows to the new information being presented
- To nudge the thought process onto a different track
- To serve as introductory experience for problem solving, competition, team building or consensus seeking
- To introduce a concept or idea

**or TO JUST HAVE FUN!!!**

## PICKING THE RIGHT ICEBREAKER

*“...the group leader must keep in mind that any structured activity can be misused.”*

The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers

Icebreakers are like rubber bands...they can be stretched to fit many groups for a variety of purposes. Of course, they can snap and hurt someone as well. It is hard to explain or predict all the dangers. It will be up to you to assess your group, define your goal, and pick the icebreaker. Then modify, adapt and change it as needed.

Things to think about as you pick your icebreaker.

**Goal:** What is the focus of the icebreaker—*getting acquainted, introducing a topic, building a team, reducing stress, energizing a group?*

**Risk:** What type of risks will participants be taking—*emotional, social, physical or intellectual?*

**Activity Level:** What will participants be doing physically—*running, sitting, moving, forming groups, reflecting, or talking?*

**Materials:** What do you need to facilitate the icebreaker—*what supplies, how much time, what type of facility space?*

**Inclusion:** Is the activity accessible and appropriate for all participants—*skill level, special needs, size of group?*

### ICEBREAKER QUICK CHECK LIST

*Which icebreaker? At what time? With what group?*

**PURPOSE:** What is the goal of your icebreaker?

**Are you...**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Getting Acquainted</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Introducing a Topic</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Building a Team</i>    | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Reducing Stress</i>     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Energizing a Group</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Transitioning</i>       |

**RISK:** Is your group ready to do what you are asking of them?  
Is the activity accessible and appropriate for all participants?

**Are the risks...**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Social</i>       | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Emotional</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Intellectual</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Physical</i>  |

**MATERIALS:** What do you need to be successful?

**Consider...**

- What supplies are needed?*
- How much physical space is required?*
- Do you have enough time?*
- Is the group too large or too small?*

## FACILITATOR CONSIDERATIONS

*“One of the most important keys to the successful use of icebreakers is the group leader’s ability to bridge the gap between the activity and the material that follows.”*

The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers

**Challenge by Choices:** Since icebreakers ask people to risk on the social, emotional, intellectual and physical levels, participants should have choices in regards to their degree of involvement. Honor a person’s need not to participate in an activity. Accept the fact that icebreakers intended to solicit serious responses, may actually cause participants to respond in a silly manner. Remember that *what* happens during the icebreaker is the most important thing, not what *you want* to happen.

**Setting the Tone:** If the goal is to get acquainted, join the icebreaker and meet people. If the goal is to energize the group, lead the activity like a hurricane. If the goal is to have fun, crack yourself and be silly. If the goal is disclosure, share a personal story in the icebreaker’s introduction. If the goal is to segue into a serious look at a group’s mission and purpose, drop your voice. As the facilitator, be the person you want each participant to become.

**Monitor and Adjust:** An icebreaker is a jack-in-the box. In general, you know what is going to pop out of the group before you wind it up. But, be ready for surprises. Sometimes the Jack springs from the box and its head flies off. Treat all information participants share during an icebreaker with care. At times it will be important to set group boundaries regarding confidentiality. As participants start to react to the icebreaker, you can tone it down, ratchet it up, or cut your losses and move on. The facilitator is the steward of the process with the end result being participants who are willing to play again.

**Debriefing:** Every book has a last chapter. The job of a facilitator is to help the group write the ending to their experience. Sometimes just a quick comment from you is all that is needed. Sometimes the group needs to sit down and write individual responses to the icebreaker. Most of the time a few carefully considered questions from the facilitator will bridge the gap between the participant experience and the goal you had in mind.

**FUN:** *Familiar, Universal, Non-Toxic:* Laughter, inside jokes, light-hearted teasing and playfulness can be good indicators that the icebreaker worked. Listen carefully to make sure the fun that comes out of the icebreaker is healthy. Is the humor familiar to everyone in the group? Help the pockets of laughter explain to the group what they are finding so funny. Is the humor universal to all people? Make sure what the group is seeing as funny could be enjoyed by any person experiencing the icebreaker. Is the humor non-toxic? Check to see that the laughter not anchored in something rude, crude or lewd or derogatory toward any race, creed or color.

## RESOURCES

**Activities That Teach**—*Tom Jackson*

**Appalachian Toys & Games**—*Linda Garland Page & Hilton Smith*

**The Big Book of Creativity Games**—*Robert Epstein*

**The Big Book of Icebreakers**—*Edie West*

**The Big Book of Motivation Games**—*Robert Epstein*

**The Big Book of Presentation Games**—*Edward Scannell and John Newstrom*

**Cowstails and Cobras II** —*Karl Rohnke*

**Encyclopedia of Icebreakers**—*Sue Forbes-Greene*

**Energizers**—*Carl Olson*

**Feeding the Zircon Gorilla**—*Sam Sikes*

**The Giant Book of Games**—*Will Shortz*

**Great Games to Play With Groups**—*Frank W. Harris*

**Initiatives, Games and Activities**—*Dan McIver*

**New Games Book**—*Andrew Fluegelman*

**Quicksilver**—*Karl Rohnke & Steve Butler*

**Silver Bullets**—*Karl Rohnke*

## EXAMPLES OF ICEBREAKERS...

### NAME GAMES

*An active way to learn and remember names of people in a group.*

#### **Name Ring:**

Find a length of rope that allows for all group members to stand in a shoulder-to-shoulder circle while holding the rope. Mark one part of the rope (the knot connecting the two ends works well). Ask the group to move the knot in front of each person alphabetically by first name by moving the knot to the left or right around the circle. Once the pattern has been established, ask them to do it again for time. As the knot is racing to each person, the group should be chanting his/her name.

#### **Wamp ‘em:**

Form the group into a circle and place one person in the middle. People in the circle hold one hand out at waist height, palm up. A volunteer starts the action by naming a person in the circle. The person in the middle attempts to “wamp” the named person’s hand before he/she can name another person in the circle. If the “wamper” hits the hand before another name is called, the “wampee” is in the middle. People can also get into the middle by doing one of the following: flinching the hand, saying the name of the person already in the middle or volunteering to go into the middle.

#### **FACES:**

**Favorite: Food, Activity, Color, Entertainer, Site (natural):** Announce that the group will be forming into pairs and talking about favorite things with five different people. During the first meeting, ask pairs to talk about favorite foods; for the second meeting, the new pairs should talk about favorite activities; the third meeting, pairs talk about favorite entertainers, and during the fifth meeting, pairs talk about favorite natural sites. The acronym FACES will help the group remember what to talk about with each new person: Food, Activity, Color, Entertainer, Site (natural). The twist of the game is that after the second pair discusses favorite activities, they need to point out the people they first met and explain their names and favorite foods. After the third pair meets, they also need to point out the people they met in the first and second pairing by pointing them out and explaining their names and favorites. The pattern of pointing out the individuals people have already met continues through the fourth and fifth pairing.

#### **Peek-ah-Who?:**

Divide the group into two equal teams and have them face each other. Hold a tarp, blanket, or butcher paper as a barrier between the groups so no one is able to see people on the other side. Ask each group to quietly select one person to stand directly in front of the barrier. On the count of “Peek...Ah...Who?”, drop the barrier. The first person to name the individual standing in front of them “captures” that for their side. The barrier goes back up and the game continues. You can also ask each group to send teams of two, three, or four, people to the barrier for a round.

## JUST FOR TWOS

*Activities for pairs of people designed to energize a group, to create a comfortable group atmosphere, or just to have some fun. Depending on your goals for the group, new pairings can be constantly created to promote getting acquainted, or pairs can stay together for greater lengths of time to accent trust and relationship-building.*

### **1, 2, 3 Shoot:**

First, partners agree to add, subtract, multiply or divide. They then place both hands behind their back. On the count of... "1, 2, 3 Shoot," both people hold out their fingers displaying 0 (two fists) to 10 digits. The first partner to add, subtract, multiply or divide the digits correctly "wins" the round.

### **This is My Nose:**

One partner points to something on his/her body, for example, the nose, but states that it is really another body part: "This is my kneecap." The next person must point to the named body part, in this case a kneecap, but then state that it is something other than what it actually is: "This is my ear." The game continues until someone points to something or names something incorrectly based on the rules of the game.

**Toe Tap Fencing:** Partners face each other and with outstretched arms grasp hands. Without breaking the grip, each partner attempts to step (lightly) on the other person's toes while avoiding being stepped on.

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### **First to 15:**

Each person is allowed to mark on a piece of paper either one, two, or three times. The goal is to be the person to make the 15<sup>th</sup> mark. Partners take turns going first by either making one, two or three marks on the page. (You can also play the game without using paper and pencil by clapping while counting numbers out loud.)

### **Trivia Twist:**

First, partners agree on a category: geography, famous people, fruits and vegetables, animals, etc. One partner starts by naming something in the category. "Texas," for example if the category was geography. The other partner must now name another item that starts with the last letter of the item named by his/her partner, for example: "Seattle."

### **If/Then:**

One partner silently thinks of an "if" statement: "If I could save time in a bottle," while the other partner silently thinks of a "then" statement: "Then all the birds fly South for winter." When both partners indicate they have thought of their statement, the partners share. The same game can be played with the sentence stems: "What would you do if..." and "I would..."

## SILLY THINGS FOR CIRCLES

*Silly Things for Circles are icebreakers designed for groups of 8-15 members. They can be used to energize a tired group, to refocus a distracted group, or to just have fun with any group.*

### **Look Up, Look Down:**

Form the group into a tight shoulder-to-shoulder circle. On the command of "Look Down," all group members look at their feet. On the command of "Look Up," all group members must quickly look up and stare directly at someone in the circle. If two people are staring at each other, they both must let out a blood-curdling scream...then cover one eye. The game continues to the count of "Look Up," and "Look Down". When a group member has covered both eyes, he/she steps out of the circle and the group closes the gap where the person was standing by forming a tighter shoulder-to-shoulder circle. The game ends when everybody has covered both eyes or someone is left with at least one eye uncovered.

### **Face Off:**

A person in the circle starts the game by volunteering to go first by making a strange, funny face. The person to the face-maker's right then imitates the face to the best of his/her ability. Then, he/she makes a new strange, funny face, which the person to his/her right then imitates before creating an original funny face. The game ends when everyone in the circle receives a face to imitate and passes on a face to be imitated.

### **Zen Countdown:**

The group forms a circle and all members look at their feet. The goal is for the group to count to the number representing how many people are in the group, say 14. The only thing a group member is allowed to say is a number from 1 to 14. Do not allow a strategy session before the group begins or during the counting task. If two or more people say a number at the same time, all group members must look at the sky and scream in anguish...then start again from number 1. The game ends when the group has successfully counted to 14 with each group member having said just one number without being interrupted.

### **A Change of Place:**

The group forms a circle and a volunteer stands in the middle. Using only non-verbal cues, two people in the circle change places. The goal of the person in the middle is to take a vacant spot left by one of the people changing places. More than two people can be changing places at a time, but only non-verbal communication is allowed during the game. The game continues when the person in the middle finds a vacant spot thus creating a new middle person.

### **Boppitty-Bop-Bop:**

The group forms a circle and a volunteer stands in the middle. The middle person attempts to get out of the middle by looking directly at someone in the outer circle then soliciting an incorrect response from him/her. If the person in the middle looks at someone and says, "Boppiitty-Bop-Bop," the person in the outer circle must say "Bop," before the middle person can finish the phrase. If the person in the middle looks at someone and says "Bop," the person in the outer circle must not say anything.

### **Pass the Sound:**

The group forms a circle and someone volunteers to go first. The volunteer passes a sound across the circle to another group member by making a throwing motion while making a noise. The person on the other side of the circle receives the noise by making a catching motion while imitating the sound. The receiver of the sound then passes a new sound across the circle. For added fun, the people on either side of the receiver of a sound can add "energy" to the receiver before they become a sound passer by waving their hands up and down in a fanning motion while making energetic noises.

### **A What?:**

The group forms a circle and someone volunteers to start the game by becoming the object passer. Two objects are needed for this game; they can be anything except a banana and a grapefruit. The passer takes one of the objects and passes it to the right and says, "This is a banana." The receiver of the object says, "A what?" The object passer then reassures the first receiver by saying, "A banana." The first receiver then passes the object to the person on his/her right and says, "This is a banana." The second receiver of the object says, "A what?" The first receiver turns to the object passer and again clarifies what the object is by asking, "A what?" The object passer clarifies by saying "A banana" and then the answer is passed up to the second receiver, who upon hearing the correct reply passes the object to the right to a third receiver by saying, "This is a banana." The question "A What?" of course gets passed down the line back to the object passer with the clarifying answer, "A banana" being passed up the line. Just when the group gets the hang of the pattern (about 3 receivers down the line), the object passer starts the other item to the left by saying, "This is a grapefruit." The game ends when both objects get back to the object passer, or the silliness of the game stops due to confusion and laughter.

## **CHANGE, ARRANGE & EXCHANGE**

*The "Change, Arrange & Exchange" icebreakers are designed to facilitate learning. They can be used to stimulate, challenge, or motivate participants. They can also be helpful by heightening the creative resources of a group or shifting the focus of study.*

### **Picking Partners**

The act of picking a partner for an activity can be an interesting, fun and inclusive process. Try some of the techniques below to spice up a presentation or lesson:

#### **Numbers:**

Use phone numbers, street numbers, shoe size, or birthday numbers (days and months) to form groups. Create "evens" and "odds" by adding digits or selecting a digit from a number. To form multiple teams, arrange participants by grouping numbers: 0,1,2...3,4,5...6,7,8. Then adjust as needed.

**Matching:**

Pass out colored popsicle sticks, playing cards, or slips of paper with words on them (professions, actions, emotions, animals, people, etc.) Ask participants to find their matches. Participants can also be grouped based on what they are wearing: clothing color, watch or no watch, style of shoe, jacket or no jacket, and clothing with words or without words.

**Letters:**

Form groups through letters. Some examples include: the first letter of their mother's maiden name, by the number of letters in their first name or last name, by alphabetical groupings, or by the first letter of a participant's place of birth.

**Preferences:**

Pick groups by asking for likes and dislikes (e.g.-those who like yogurt vs. ice cream; hot dogs vs. hamburgers; milk vs. juice). Ask participants if they would like to be one thing over another: car or boat, mountain or a beach, baseball player or movie star, killer whale or grizzly bear.

**Silly Things:**

Do you pick up pennies or leave them on the ground? Do you put your left or right foot in your pants first? With which eye do you give a spontaneous wink? After a store purchase, do you count your change or not? Sit down on the ground...which hand touched the ground first? Put your hands together...is the left thumb over the right thumb or right over the left? Using your index finger as a pencil, draw an imaginary circle in the air...does your finger travel clockwise or counter clockwise?

**Family Photo:**

This icebreaker presents a creative challenge to participants. The activity involves a team of four to five quickly arranging themselves for an old-fashioned, family photo based on a theme. Provide two chairs in the performing area to increase creativity. At some point in the frenzied creation process, yell "freeze." The family must freeze in position so the audience can enjoy the picture.

General themes:

*scared family, smart family, animal family, happy family, nervous family, bored family.*

School-related themes:

*WASL test-taking family, lunchroom family, in-the-hall family, after-school family, teacher family.*

Leadership themes:

*project planning family, communication family, leadership family, dance family, spirit family.*

**Press Conference:**

This playful icebreaker is great for reviewing material, summarizing a lesson, or conducting an idea exchange. The activity mirrors a press conference. A group of three to four people sit in front of the group and act as "experts." Everyone else plays a reporter from a newspaper, TV or radio station or other media group. Using the reality-based idea that all the reporters at a press conference loudly jockey for attention to ask their questions, the activity begins. The experts take turns calling on a reporter. If an expert does not know the answer to a question, he/she says: "I defer my answer to one of my esteemed colleagues." (*Note: if using the activity for an idea share session, all three "experts" answer the question before the next question is asked.*) The members of the press corp take mental notes on the questions being asked to make sure that they never repeat a question.

**Uses for a Spoon:**

Brainstorming sessions can be enhanced with this simple icebreaker. Before a group begins to discuss ideas for the topic of the brainstorm, ask them to warm up their brains by seeing how many creative uses for common objects they can think of in one minute. To add dramatics to the icebreaker, keep the common object (spoon, stapler, roll of masking tape, keys, marker, etc.) hidden until it is time to brainstorm uses for it. Appoint a timekeeper as well as a counter that keeps track of the quantity of suggested uses. Do this with one to three objects attempting to increase the number of creative responses each time. When the group is primed and thinking creatively, then ask them to brainstorm ideas regarding the real topic.

**20 Questions:**

This icebreaker can be an anticipatory set to start a new project or it can be an evaluative tool at the end of a project. The activity involves a facilitator (usually the adult) and a group taking turns asking questions of one another. The group gets to ask the facilitator ten questions and the facilitator gets to ask the group ten questions. The facilitator can guide the psychological depth of the process by starting off with general, low exposure questions then moving to more meaningful, higher risk questions.

## METAPHOR MIXERS

The "Metaphor Mixers" are icebreakers that can move a group beyond social play because of the metaphors within them. They can be used to introduce a topic, promote reflective thinking, develop awareness, or connect ideas.

**Note:** Under Metaphoric Connections, many different processing questions are listed for each activity. From the list, pick and choose only the specific questions that will help direct your group to the desired learning. Also remember that the best questions are derived from a group's unique experience with an activity.

### Obstacle Walk:

Form the group into a circle. Ask the participants to identify the obstacles that they are currently facing or will be facing with a specific project. For each identified obstacle, place an object inside the circle to represent it (i.e.-a chair, piece of paper, notebook, ball, stuffed animal, etc.). Spread the objects around on the inside of the circle. Ask a volunteer (or volunteers) to stand in the middle of the circle, close his/her eyes, spin around three times then stop. The goal of the group is to provide clear directions to the site-impaired volunteer in the middle so he/she can walk around the objects to join the circle again.

*Metaphoric Connections:*

**a)** How does this activity mirror the project? **b)** What is the most difficult obstacle for us to negotiate? What is the easiest one? **c)** What strengths do we have as a group to help us overcome the obstacles? **d)** What are the weaknesses we have as a group that might become obstacles themselves? How can we improve our weaknesses? **e)** Who emerged as the leader of our group? **f)** Was it easier to be on the inside, or outside, of the circle? **g)** How did we react when people made mistakes? What can we learn from this?

### Chaos:

Form the group into a circle. Ask each member of the group to silently and secretly choose two other people in the circle. On the command of "chaos," the goal is for each member of the group to maintain an equal distance from the two people he/she has chosen. To maintain the equal distance, participants can be between the two people or they can be an equal distance from them by forming one point of an equilateral triangle. Start the activity and play it for five minutes or until the group has stopped moving because everyone has managed to achieve equal distance. Once the activity is stopped, ask for three volunteers. Using just one of the volunteers at a time, ask them to move to a new position while asking the entire group to stay in place. After the volunteer has moved, ask the group to react to the volunteer's movement. Group members should only move if they need to in order to establish equal distance. (Some volunteers will cause the entire group to start moving again because of their connections to other people while other volunteers, because of a lack of connections, will not affect anyone in the group.)

*Metaphoric Connections:*

**a)** Whose lives does our group influence? How? **b)** Who do you follow? **c)** Who follows you? **d)** What responsibilities do leaders have to their followers? **e)** Explain how a small action can start a chain reaction? Provide an example of this from history and from your personal experience. **f)** What is something you have no influence over? **g)** What is something that "moves" you? Why?

### Consensus Chants:

Ask each person to think of a short phrase, word, or sound that they will be able to repeat over and over. These sounds can come from common sources like movies, TV shows, or commercials or they can be original sounds. On the command of "chant," everybody starts to mingle around the room repeating their word, sound or phrase. When two people (or groups of people) meet, one of three things can happen: 1) Both people do not change their sound then go off separately looking for someone else to meet; 2) One person adopts the other person's sound by making the sound and linking arms with him/her; 3) A new sound is created through synthesizing the two different sounds. The group then links arms, makes the new sound, and then goes to find other groups to meet. No talking can take place during a meeting; only the sounds can be made. Stop the activity when the group is making only one sound, or a number of different sounds are being made. Allow time for the group to hear all the surviving sounds if you stop the game when multiple sounds are being made by multiple groups.

*Metaphoric Connections:*

**a)** How does this activity mirror the purpose of our group? **b)** What "sound" is being made by our group? By our school? By our nation? **c)** If we only wanted people to hear one message from all the "sounds" we are making, what would that one message be? How would we communicate this message? **d)** In life, what influences our decisions to change or not change our "sounds?" **e)** What do these "sounds" symbolically represent? **f)** What are the potential benefits associated with everyone making the same "sound?" **g)** What are the potential dangers with everyone making the same "sound?"

## **Pruí (pronounced PROO-ee)**

Form the group into a circle. Explain the game. 1) The goal is to find and join hands with the Pruí. 2) Only the Pruí will have its eyes open. Once you find Pruí, you may open your eyes. 3) When you meet people mingling about with your eyes closed, shake their hand and ask: "Pruí?" If they respond, "Pruí?" you have not found Pruí. Continue to search. If there is no response, you have found Pruí. Pruí can't talk. 4) The game will end when the entire group has linked hands with Pruí. Start the game by asking participants to close their eyes, put their hands out in front of them, and mingle. Once the group starts, wait a few minutes then secretly ask one participant to open his/her eyes and become the Pruí.

### *Metaphoric Connections:*

**a)** What does Pruí represent? **b)** What does it feel like to be a part of the Pruí? What does it feel like to not be a part of Pruí? **c)** At school, what social group represents Pruí? How do you become a part of the Pruí at school? What are the benefits to belonging to the Pruí at school? Is it fair to have a Pruí at school? **d)** What are you currently "looking for?" Why? How will you know when you find it? **e)** What will you be looking for 10 years from now? Why?

## **Cross the Line**

Ask each group member to find a partner, then move to opposite sides of the room from each other. Place a rope (or row of chairs) that clearly divides the room in half. Name the two sides of the room something silly, for example the Mango side and the Kiwi side. *Do not name the groups, just attach names to the parts of the room. It is important to never say "your side" of the room.* Establish a means to give both groups the same set of instructions at the same time. Do not let the participants know that both groups have been given the same instructions.

### *Group Instructions:*

- a) Your goal is to convince your partner to cross over to the Mango side/Kiwi side of the room.
- b) You may not tell them what your goal is.
- c) You may not physically touch them.

Play the activity for 5-10 minutes.

### *Metaphoric Connections:*

**a)** How does the activity mirror the purpose of our group? **b)** What would be a good name for this activity? **c)** Did you and your partner compete or cooperate? How do you "win" the game? **d)** How attached did you become to the side of the room you started on? How do we become attached to things in life? Are there things in life we become overly attached to? **e)** What could the "line" represent? **f)** What "lines" are people being asked to cross at school? Are they "good" lines or "bad" lines? **g)** What are the consequences for not crossing a "line"? **h)** How are people being pressured to cross the "lines"?

## **ROUNABOUTS**

*An active way to facilitate a conversation between different pairs in a large group.*

### **Wagon Wheel:**

The group forms two circles: one faces inward and one faces outward so pairs are looking at each other. The facilitator asks a question for discussion. To meet a new partner after conversation ends, one circle rotates a specific number of people clockwise or counter clockwise while the other circle stands still.

### **Parallel Lines:**

The group forms two parallel lines facing each other to discuss a facilitator question. After conversation ends, one line moves a specific number of places forward while the other line stands still. People in the moving line go to the end of the line when they move past the front of the standing line. To add to the fun, you can ask the lines to high five each other as they pass. You can also ask the moving line to walk a specific way as they move (chicken, Egyptian, airplane, etc.)

### **Beat the Pan:**

The group forms smaller groups based on the number of times the facilitator beats a pan, blows a whistle, or claps. The smaller group then discusses the facilitator question. After the conversation ends, everyone stands up and mingles around the room doing something fun like shaking hands, saying "hello", or winking at everyone they pass. To help people find a group, establish a "lost and found" area where people can go if they can't immediately find a group after you have indicated the group number through your signal.

### **Back to Back/Face to Face:**

The group forms pairs standing face to face to discuss a facilitator question. After conversation ends, the facilitator says, "back to back," indicating to the pairs that they should be now standing back to back. The facilitator asks a new question then says, "face to face," indicating that everyone is to find new partners and begin talking about the new topic. The cue "back to back" is an efficient way to stop conversation and prepare the group to listen to the next question. For a large group, establish a "lost and found" area where people without partners can find one.

### **Conversation Starters for Roundabouts:**

What is your favorite color?  
What is your favorite TV show?  
What is your favorite book?  
What is your favorite food?  
What is your least favorite food?  
If you could go on vacation anywhere on earth where would it be?  
Describe your first bike.  
Talk about your most cherished pet.  
What are you looking forward to the most in your life?  
What is something you always seem to forget?  
Describe a great day for yourself.  
Who makes you laugh more than any other person?  
If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?  
What is the thing you like the best about yourself?  
What are the best ideas you have heard all day?  
Who is your favorite cartoon character?  
What is your best leadership skill?  
Be a meteorologist and describe your day in the form of a weather forecast.  
What kinds of music do you like and why?  
What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?  
What is your favorite outdoor activity or hobby?  
What is your favorite indoor activity or hobby?  
Who is your role model or hero and why?  
Up until now, what has been your favorite grade level and why?  
What is one goal you have for this school year?  
Describe a good childhood memory?  
Describe your family.  
What is your favorite thing to do when you are not in school?  
What subject in school do you like the most? (Lunch does not count!!!)  
What is your most embarrassing moment?  
Give 5 different ways to say hello

### **WHO ARE YOU?**

*The "Who Are You?" icebreakers are designed for group members to get better acquainted with each other. The activities can be used with groups that have just met or with groups that have known each other for a long time.*

### **Snowball Fight:**

On a piece of paper, each member of the group writes down a question they would like the other members of the group to answer. After writing down the question, people crumple up their paper into a ball. On the command of "snowball fight!" group members start tossing the papers at each other. On the "Stop" command, people pick up the "snowball" closest to them. During a group sharing session, group members answer the question on their snowballs.

### **Commonalities:**

Form the participants into groups of three to five or whatever number best fits your needs. Give each group a piece of paper and pen. The task is for each group to identify and write down as many things as they have in common. To challenge them, ask the groups to discover things they have in common that you would not notice just by looking at them. Have each group share their lists after a specific amount of time.

**Who Can It Be Now?/Fact or Fiction?:**

On an index card, group members write down some information about themselves. The information can be based on a prompt: What are five of your favorite things? Who is a celebrity you most admire? How is your school year turning out? Which type of food best describes who you are? Or, the information can be solicited in an open-ended manner: Write down a few things about yourself on the index card. Collect the index cards from all group members that are comfortable having their information shared. Read a card to the group...then have the group guess which person the card belongs to. For **Fact or Fiction**, have participants write down two true statements and one false statement. Collect the cards and after announcing a person's name, see if the group can identify the person's two true statements and one false statement.

**Pipe Cleaner Interviews:**

Form the participants into pairs. Using pre-selected interview questions or a free format, partners interview each other. Based on the answers each partner is hearing, they form a pipe cleaner into a shape that symbolically represents their partner. Post the pipe cleaners or have the partners introduce each other with the pipe cleaners.

**Dramatic Interpretations:**

Form the participants into pairs. Ask each pair to introduce themselves to each other non-verbally by acting out a few important things about themselves. No talking between partners can take place. When completed, have each person introduce their partner to the larger group by explaining what they learned about the person. Part of the fun of this activity is the "corrections" that are made after an interpretation of the non-verbal communication.

**Life Lines:**

Ask each participant to create a lifeline based on the following questions: What are three significant childhood experiences? What are three significant recent experiences? What are three significant experiences you hope to have in the future? Post the lifelines or have participants share them.

**My Title:**

This activity can be done in a library or with a stack of newspapers or magazines. Ask participants to find a title (or headline) that best describes their current life situation. With partners, or in small groups or in the large group, participants share why they choose their titles/headlines.

**DATA PROCESSING**

*A versatile, no-materials-necessary, any-size-group, almost-any-place icebreaker. The group lines-up or forms a circle based on a given characteristic such as birthdate, birthplace, alphabetically by first name, favorite food, future careers, number of people and pets in the family, etc.*

**Tips:**

- 1) The purpose of the activity can change depending on the questions you ask. Low risk, get acquainted questions (favorites, birthdays, alphabetically by name) accent group familiarity. High risk questions, such as line-up alphabetically by the one word that describes your relationship with your parents, can be used to introduce a lesson based on deep disclosure. Topics can be easily introduced. If you are starting a brainstorming lesson on fundraisers, the group can line up based on the dollar amount they hope to raise.
- 2) For large groups, have them line up in small group clusters of similar letters or answers. This will keep the activity moving and not bog the group down attempting to achieve alphabetical or numerical accuracy.
- 3) For spirit competitions, form students into groups of between 10-20 and seat them on the floor or in chairs. Ask them to stand up and line up in a specific way then immediately sit down when they are arranged correctly. This makes it easy to spot the winners and it settles the group down for the next round's question.

