

Advancing Group Development Through Icebreakers and Games

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1. Getting to Know Your Group

Ball Toss

Have everyone stand in a circle and give one person a ball. Have this person throw the ball at someone else in the group while saying the name of the person being thrown the ball. Have the ball tossed around the circle until everyone has received the ball from someone and has thrown the ball to someone. Make sure everyone knows that they will need to know both who threw to them and to whom they threw. Then have the ball go through the created sequence once more. Next start the sequence again and after a few tosses start a second ball and then a third ball. Make sure every time a ball is thrown that names are being yells to get the person's attention. Finally, after all the balls have completed the sequence have the balls thrown in the reverse sequence!

"Bingo"

Develop a "bingo" card asking general information about people. Have individuals acquire the signatures of other people in the group that satisfies the question/statement in the box. Declare a winner when someone has a signature in every box on the card.

Examples of questions include:

- Find some who plays the same sport as you
- Find someone with the same number of siblings as you
- Find someone from your home state (or closest to your home)
- Find someone who wants to declare the same major as you
- Find someone who has been to another country
- Find someone who played a musical instrument
- Find someone who has a great-grandparent still living
- Find someone who speaks another language

Dancing Game

Everyone in the group stands in a circle, introduces himself/herself and performs a dance move. Every successive person must perform all the dance steps done before he/she can add on his/her own move.

Going on a picnic

Tell everyone in the group that the group is going on a picnic and each person must bring something along that begins with the first letter of his/her first name. Variations can include bringing something matching the first letter of the last name or something that rhymes with the person's name.

If a Fire Happened

Tell all participants that a fire is happening right now in their homes. Ask every person to tell the one thing they would take out of their burning home besides family. If possible (like in dorm room situations) have everyone actually retrieve something they would take with them and have everyone share why they brought this particular item.

Luggage Conveyor Belt

Everyone in the group is handed a piece of paper cut into the shape of the suitcase. Everyone is asked to write down 5 luxury items that they would take on a trip. After everyone has filled in their suitcases everyone stands in a circle with their backs facing into the circle. Music is played and everyone passes his/her luggage around the circle (like a conveyor belt in an air terminal). When the music stops everyone should have a piece of luggage that is not his/her own. Each person needs to find the correct owner of the bag and ask to borrow something from the suitcase. The real bag owner must then tell why he/she brought this luxury item and then lend to the other person (scratch it off their luggage list). After everyone has their correct baggage repeat activity 4 more times until everyone has shared why they brought everything with someone new in the group.

Name Origins

Everyone in the group must state their full name and tell an interesting story or fact that relates to any part of his/her name. For example, a girl named Wendy might say her parents name her after Wendy in Disney's "Peter Pan."

Sheet Game

Players should introduce themselves by name to the entire group. Then players are divided into two teams and all forms of ID should be put out of sight. A sheet is raised between the two teams and all team members should huddle closely together behind the sheet so that neither team can see members of the other team. One member of each team approaches the sheet. Once the two players are at the sheet the sheet is dropped. Players must shout out the name of the person now opposite of them. Whoever says the other person's name first wins and the loser becomes part of the winner's team. Both people should reintroduce themselves to the group before the sheet is raised and the game continues. Only the players at the sheet can speak during the game. Play continues until one team wins or you feel the game has gone on long enough.

2- Low Risk Games

Balloon Stomp

Have each person playing blow up two balloons and tie them around their ankles with a piece of yarn/string. After everyone has tied on two balloons tell the players the winner will be the last person standing with an un-popped balloon. Players need to knock other players out of the game by stomping on the blown up balloons and popping them. For extra fun fill the balloons with a little bit of water.

Captain's Coming

This game is similar to "Simon Says" in the sense that one person is calling out commands to follow. If someone does not follow the directions correctly, remove him or her from the game. First familiarize players with the terms "stern, bow, port, and starboard" of a boat (Port = left; Starboard = right; Bow = front; Stern = back), Let the players know that whenever you call any of these terms they must go to appropriate place (designate where the bow is in the playing area). Also, teach the players to stand attention with their right hand at their forehead when "Captain's Coming" is called. Next, the caller must call "At ease" after the "Captain's Coming" command before players are allowed to move. If a player moves from attention to any other position without "At ease" being called, he or she is removed from the game. Also, if "swab the deck" is called, everyone must find a partner and pretend to clean the deck. Lastly, if "Man the lifeboats" is called then groups of three must get to together, hold hands and spin in a circle simulating a raft. Finally, when players are at attention the caller can yell "Attack!" and all players must stand still while you throw softballs randomly up in the air. If anyone is hit by any of the balls they are out of the game. The game is over when one person is left standing.

I Never/Train Wreck/Winds of Change

Everyone stands in a circle with one person in the middle. The person in the middle says the statement "I never have..." And says something they have never done. Anyone who has done whatever the statement was enters the circle and races for a newly created spot in the circle. The person left without a spot makes a new statement and the game continues.

Shoe Shucking

Everyone in the group stands in a circle, takes off one shoe and throws it into the middle of the circle. One by one someone from the circle picks up a shoe and describes the owner based on the appearance of the shoe. After the description is made the shoe is returned to the owner who selects the next shoe to describe. The game is over once everyone has both shoes back on his/her feet.

Toilet Paper/M&M/Number Game

This game is fairly common knowledge in the toilet paper/M&M form. With these forms of the game you pass around a roll of toilet paper and tell everyone to take as many sheets of paper as he/she would need for the rest of the day or pass around a bowl of candy and tell everyone to take some candy. For every sheet of paper or every piece of candy the person takes he/she must say something about himself/herself. Try to create different versions of this game to fool people that already know these two versions. For example, ask everyone to write down their favorite number and then have them put away their pens and pencils. Then have everyone tell that number of facts about themselves and why that is their favorite number.

Uncommon Commonalities

Separate players into teams of 3 or 4 and challenge them to develop a list of uncommon things that they all have in common. They can only write down things that everyone on the team has in common. After 5 minutes of writing down these uncommon commonalities have each group read off their list. If any other team generates the same idea then it must be crossed off the list. Any idea that was not included on another team's list results in a point for the team. The team with the most points after all the reading of the lists is declared the winner. **Note: An uncommon commonality would not be "Everyone in the group likes pepperoni pizza" but, rather, "Everyone in the group squeezes their toothpaste out by rolling the tube from the bottom."

"Just One Word"

Supply two separate groups with the letters "J", "U", "S", "T", "O", "N", "E", "W", "O", "R", "D" and ask each of them to create "Just One Word" from the letters provided. Teams will not realize they are spelling the phrase "just one word" for a while. Time the teams to see who discovers the fastest. After the trick to the game has been discovered have teams compete to find as many real words (3 letters or more) from the letters provided using each letter only once (other than "O" which is given twice). See which team can create the longest word, most words, strangest word, etc.

Kangaroo Race

Divide players into two teams and have them stand in a straight line one behind the other. Give the first person in each line a ball. This person must pass the ball over his/her head to the next person who must pass the ball between his/her legs. The third person must take the ball over his/her head and the pattern continues over, under, over, under until the last person in line gets the ball. The last person must then place the ball between his/her knees and hop to the front of the line. The line repeats the action until the original head of the line makes it back to the front. The line achieving this objective first wins.

Killer

Everyone stands in a circle with their eyes closed. Someone is selected to be the murder by the facilitator of the game. Everyone opens their eyes and must walk around greeting each other. The killer winks at someone when he/she is met. If you are winked at then you must die a dramatic death soon after meeting the killer but not immediately after the wink. Players still alive must try to guess the killer's identity. Accusations must have a second and if the accusation is incorrect the original accuser dies (but not the person seconding the motion). The game ends when the killer has been identified or everyone but the killer is dead. **Note: Once someone has been winked at they cannot make an accusation!

Mingle, Mingle

Everyone mingles with others in a group until the facilitator of the game shouts out a number. Players must then form groups of that exact number. Any group containing more or less than the number shouted out is removed from the game. Anyone not mingling between the calling of numbers should also be disqualified. The game ends when two players are left.

The Question Game

This game is modeled from "Who's Line is It Anyway?" Players sit in a circle and ask questions to another player one at a time. The object of the game is to not answer the question asked but to ask someone else in the group another question. Eye contact must be made between the questioner and the question. If someone answers a question, laughs too much or takes too much time asking the next question they are removed from the circle. The game ends when only one person remains. (This game can be a lot of fun because society in general teaches people to answer questions immediately and this game goes against the norm!)

Secret Pals

This activity can only be done over an extended period of time. Basically, just gather the names of everyone desiring to participate. Assign each person another person's name that they will be responsible for giving a gift or doing something special for over an extended period of time. Suggest the clues be given to indicate the identity of the secret pal but that one should not tell their pal who they are. Set a maximum spending limit for the activity to ensure someone won't go too overboard with the activity and feel ungrateful in the end if their pal wasn't so enthused. After the time for giving has ended hold a party where the participants try and guess their secret pal was.

Spoons/Pulse

Two teams sit cross-legged in a line facing one another. Players join hands with their neighbors behind their backs. One end of the line is called the tail where a spoon is placed on the ground between the two tail team members. Everyone on the team faces the spoon except for the team member at the head position of each line. A quarter is flipped and on “heads” a pulse should be sent down the line via hand squeezing. Once the tail member received the pulse he/she must grab the spoon before the other team’s tail member. The winning team rotates position with the tail becoming the head person. If a pulse is sent at the wrong time (“on tails”) the person at the head position becomes the new tail for the team. The object of the game is to cycle the team through the head position to the original head position.

Spoon Relay Race

Divide players into two teams. Tie a string to the end of a 2 separate spoons and have teams race moving the spoon down the line of players by taking the spoon through their clothes (not through underwear though!). The first team to move the spoon all the way down the line wins.

Two Truths and a Lie

Each participant should be given a few minutes to think of two truths and 1 lie about themselves. Then participants mingle and introduce themselves to one another using the 3 statements that they have developed. The person that is being met needs to identify the lie and then tell his/her own three statements. Encourage participants to pick truths and lies that can be used as springboards for conversation (i.e. statements like “I’ve had my hair catch on fire before” & “I’ve been in the hospital a total of 27 times in my life” vs. “My favorite color is blue” & “I’m 20.”)

Wizz Bong

To begin this game everyone must sit in a circle. The game emphasizes speed and mind/body coordination. The game consists of two words “wizz” and “bong.” “Wizz” is used to continue the direction of words being said around the circle and “bong” is used to reverse the direction of play. The game begins with one player turning his/her head to his/her neighbor saying “wizz”. The player which “wizz” was said to now has the choice of either turning to the next neighbor and saying “wizz” OR looking back at the person who just spoke to him/her saying “bong” and changing the direction of the words being spoken (if the words and head turning were in the right direction they now are being said in the left direction). For example person 1 starts by turning to the right and saying “wizz: to person 2. Person 2 now can turn right and say “wizz” to person 3 OR turn back and face person 1 and say, “bong”. Person number 1 now must either turn back and say “bong” to person number 2 (because the words change direction when #2 said “bong”) or he/she can continue the now leftward direction of the words being said by saying “wizz” to the person sitting on his/her left. Players are removed from the game if they say words in the wrong

direction or by saying the improper word with regards to which direction he/she is looking. In other words, players always say “wizz” in the direction that is currently in place and if someone wants to reverse the direction of the game they must look against the current flow and say, “bong”. “Bong” is only said when an individual wants to reverse the direction of the game. If someone looks in the current direction of play and says “bong” he/she is out of the game and if someone looks in the opposite direction of play and says “wizz” he/she is also out of the game. Speed is key in this game to ensure people mess up so anyone taking too much time should be removed from the circle as well.

HA-HA

Participants must lie on the ground in a domino fashion with their heads on the stomach of the person before them (Looking on the floor the players should look like they are forming a staircase or diagonal slant). The first person must say “Ha” followed by second person saying “Ha” twice and then the third person saying “Ha” three times. Each successive person must say “Ha” one more time than the person before him/her. If anyone in the group bursts out laughing then the entire process starts over from the beginning. The goal of the game is to make it to the last person without the group laughing. (This game is harder than it sounds!)

Human Knots/Doctor

Everyone stands in a tight circle shoulder to shoulder. Everyone raise their right hand and grabs the right hand of someone on the other side of the circle. Then this action is repeated with the left hand but instruct people to not hold both hands of the same person. Have one person start a “pulse” by having the, squeeze the hand of someone they are connected (and then this new person squeezes their other hand and the pulse travels from person to person) and make sure everyone receives the pulse (this way they are in a knotted up circle). Repeat the hand grabbing if everyone did not receive the pulse. Then instruct participants to undo the knot they have created without ever letting go of hands.

Lap Sit

Everyone stands in a circle shoulder-to-shoulder facing inward. Everyone turns to the left and takes a few small steps inward to tighten the circle. On the count of 3, the groups’ objective is to slowly sit down resting their bodies on the newly created lap of the person behind them. If everyone sits at the same time then weight will be distributed evenly and no one will fall over. For the advanced version of this activity make the group take three medium-sized steps forward in the sitting position.

Orange Neck Relay

Have teams form straight lines. Give each person at the beginning of the lines an orange and have them place it between their chin necks. The orange must be passed down the line without using hands or mouths but passing from neck to neck. If the orange falls on the ground the relay

starts from the beginning. If someone uses his/her hands the orange must start from the beginning. The winning team is the first to have the orange reach the end of their line.

Park Bench

This game starts with an individual leaving the room. After the person is out of hearing range the rest of the group must decide the identity of the person who just left (i.e. the person who just left may be identified as Superman). The person who left reenters the room and sits down. One by one group members take turns meeting/interviewing the person who just returned pretending that the person is whoever the group decided they were (in my example group members would ask questions of the contestant like “So are you really faster than a speeding bullet?”). The object of the game is for the person who left to figure out their identity based on the clues provided by group members.

River Crossing

Everyone in the group grabs a sheet of construction paper and then stands on their paper with the group forming a semicircle. Another blank piece of paper is placed between the middle two people in the semicircle. The object of the game is for everyone on one side of the blank paper to end up on the other side of the blank paper (In other words everyone needs to switch sides of the semicircle). However, only two feet can ever be on a single piece of paper at any given time and no feet can touch the ground except where a piece of paper is located. Construction paper squares cannot be moved either.

Tape Shape

Make a shape on the ground out of masking tape and ask that everyone in the group fit within boundaries of the shape. Gradually make the shape smaller and smaller challenging the group to think of creative ways to include everyone into the area.

Turtle Crossing

Pieces of construction paper are put down on the floor in a unique design (not a normal shape). The group is divided into two teams that stand on opposite ends of the design. The objective is for everyone in the group to switch sides by stepping on squares that are part of the design. However, no more than 2 feet can be on any given square at a time and once a square has been stepped on if the square is completely vacated then it is removed from the design and the group can no longer use that step. In other words, once a square has been stepped on a foot must remain on the square at all times for it to remain in the game.

Web of Ideas

Have the group sit in a circle. Give the group a topic and give one person a ball of yarn. The person with the ball talks about the topic and then throws the ball of yarn to another person but holds onto the end of the ball of yarn creating a link between the two people. The next person speaks and then tosses the ball of yarn after holding onto part of the string. Everyone talks and

thus everyone ends up connected in the end. The facilitator should then help the group realize how everyone's thoughts and ideas are interconnected in a giant web.

4- High Risk Games

Honey I love you but I just can't smile

Players begin by sitting in a circle with one person in the middle being "it". This middle person must approach a member of the circle and attempt to make the person smile or laugh. The person who is "it" can do anything except touch the individuals in the circle. After about 15-20 seconds if the person sitting in the circle hasn't smiled they can force the approaching person to leave them by saying, "Honey, I love you but I just can't smile," The game continues until someone laughs or smiles and this person must now be in the middle.

Prooey

Everyone stands in a circle with his/her eyes closed. The facilitator taps one of the players on the shoulder and this person opens their eyes and becomes "Prooey". After the person has been selected tell everyone prooey has been chosen and they are all to find prooey with their eyes closed. People are to walk around with outstretched hands saying "prooey?" when they bump into someone else. If the person bumped into is not prooey they say "prooey" in return. If the person bumped into is prooey they do not respond and the bumper know he/she has found prooey. The person opens their eyes and links arms with prooey. The game ends when only one person is left searching for prooey.

Note: Selecting someone who seems to not be well integrated into a group yet as prooey is a great way to include them in the group development process.

To Tell the Truth

This game requires slightly more preparation. Towards the beginning of the meeting time (or at a previous meeting time) have all participants write down a short embarrassing story about themselves that they wouldn't mind the rest of the group hearing. Collect the stories and read through them picking stories you think the group would enjoy and that don't contain too many details. Then when playing the game pick 3 people to be the panel of contestants-1 of this people should be the owner of the story. After selecting the contestants read the story to the group and allow the audience to ask 3-5 questions of the contestants. The contestants are instructed that only the owner of the story **MUST** tell the truth when answering the question while the two liars have the goal of convincing others that they are the owner of the story. After the questioning is done take a vote to determine who the group feels is the owner of the story. Reveal the true owner by having him/her stand up and then let this person elaborate on the story as much as he/she desires.

5-Group Closure Activities

Popcorn/Circle of Friends

Everyone stands in a circle and one person stands in the middle. Everyone standing in the circle take turns randomly saying traits they admire or like about the person in the middle. Everyone takes a turn in the middle of the circle and no one should be pressured into saying something about the person in the middle.

SIS/SOS

SIS(Strengths I See) / SOS (Strengths Others See) charts can be created by individuals in a group by dividing a sheet of construction paper in half and writing strengths one sees in oneself under a “SIS” heading. Then the papers can be posted somewhere where group members can write comments on the “SOS” side of the chart. Only positive terms and phrases should be used on these charts. Again people should not be pressured into writing on every chart if they do not desire to do so. After all the writing has been done group members are encouraged to take this chart with them and post it somewhere they will see it periodically. (This can also be adapted to writing on plain white T-shirts with permanent markers with the front being SIS and the back being SOS!)