

# BREAK THE ICE

The primary goal for an icebreaker or getting-acquainted exercise is to develop an environment which is anxiety-reducing and allows individuals to “break the ice” or get acquainted by having fun. Icebreakers are intended to be tension-reducing rather than providing encounters on a direct interaction basis. Icebreaker exercises should be used with any group that appears to be extremely anxious in the initial stage of development (i.e. first meeting of clubs, program boards, etc.).

Icebreakers should not be used to avoid dealing with anxiety, but rather to provide a less threatening environment. A non-threatening environment initiated at the beginning of a group’s development may make way for more meaningful interaction and relationships during the life of the group. Here are some important reminders about icebreakers and getting acquainted exercises.

1. They can be excellent devices to help people feel more comfortable with themselves and with others and feel more “at home” in a group.
2. They break up the “cliques.” Invite people to form random groupings and help individuals meet others in a non threatening and fun way.
3. They can be used to set a tone for the time a group will be together, will encourage people to feel “safe” and hopefully will evoke lots of laughter in releasing tension.

## **Examples of Icebreakers:**

### **1. Human Scavenger Hunt**

Find someone who:

- A. Is Left-handed
- B. Plays a musical instrument
- C. Loves dogs
- D. Wears contacts

### **2. Hometown**

Members tell where they are from and information about their hometown.

### **3. Name Game**

Why or how the member got his/her name

### **4. Knots**

Form a circle by placing hands in the middle of the circle, grab someone else’s hands (other than the person’s on either side of you), and without letting go, try to untangle the “knot”.

### **5. Repetitive Name Game**

Everyone sits in a circle. The first person states their name and a word that may describe them that begins with the first letter of their name (you may want to limit the work to a topic: food, vacation spot, etc.). The second person repeats what the first person said, and then says their own. The third person repeats what the first and second said, and then their own, and so on.

### **6. Halves**

Prepare pictures of objects on cards. Cut the pictures in half and give each person a card. When told, they are to mingle and find the other half of the picture.

## **Examples of Getting-Acquainted Exercises:**

### **1. Dyads**

Members get into groups of two and find out information about each other. Possible questions to use:

- A. Who do you think is the most important person who has lived in the past 100 years?
- B. What is the best movie you have seen recently?
- C. What is the title of the last book you have read?
- D. If you could be any animal other than human, what would you be?
- E. If you could travel to any place in the world, where would you go?
- F. What is your favorite sport?
- G. One adjective to describe me is.....
- H. The emotion I find most difficult to control is.....

### **2. Crest or Coat of Arms**

Members create their own "Coat of Arms" on paper by filling in information about themselves using words or drawings. Information to include:

- Hobbies
- Hometown
- Major
- Favorite Emotion
- Family Members
- Five-or Ten-Year-Goals

### **3. Forced Choice**

Ask members to stand in the middle of the room and have them move to either side to indicate their choice of the following:

- A. More like a Cadillac or a Volkswagon?
- B. More of a saver or a spender?
- C. More like a dog or a cat?
- D. More yes or no?
- E. More like a student or a teacher?
- F. More here or there?
- G. More religious or non-religious?
- H. More like the present or the future?
- I. More like a file cabinet or a liquor chest?
- J. More intuitive or rational?
- K. More like a tortoise or a hare?
- L. More like an electric typewriter or a quill pen?
- M. More like a roller skate or a pogo stick?
- N. More like a bubbling brook or a placid lake?
- O. More like a gourmet restaurant or a McDonald's?

### **4. Informal Discussion**

An informal discussion sharing feelings about being at Santa Ana College, and a member of the club. You can use some of the following leading questions: *Where are you from? Why did you choose SAC? Why did you join the club? What is your major/career goal? What sort of activities were you involved in high school? What sort of activities do you think you will get involved in here? What are some of your hobbies? What do you do in your spare time?*

### **5. The Toilet Paper Game**

Get a roll of toilet paper (has to be the kind with perforated sheets) and pass it around the circle, telling everyone to take as many sheets as they want (don't tell them why!). Once everyone has done this, tell them that for each sheet they took, they have to share something with the group about themselves. You may want to start out (in case no one else starts). Go around the circle, one sheet at a time, or have each person use all their sheets at once. As someone shares something, they tear off the sheet and throw it in the middle of the circle. This game also works with M&M's.

## **6. *Brown Bag***

Have each person bring three things in a brown bag that symbolize who they are, or what is important to them. Share the objects with the group. A variation of this exercise is: Put all bags in a pile and draw them out one at a time, guessing which person it belongs to.

## **7. *Lifeline***

Provide each person with a large sheet of paper and a marker or pen. Have them write their name and create their “lifeline” on the sheet – drawing or writing significant events in their life from birth to that day. Then share with the group.

Source: Dean of Students Office, California State University, Fullerton (1999)

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