

40 Icebreakers for Small Groups



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'40 Icebreakers for Small Groups' is a **FREE** eBook compiled from several articles posted on my blog **Insight**.

These posts continue to be popular, so I thought it might be helpful to put them together in a **FREE** resource for you to download. In addition, I've added several new 'bonus' icebreakers which don't appear in the articles!

These 40 icebreakers are simple to use and suitable for a wide age range. They are great with a small youth group and can be used in a small space! They require very few props and can easily be used in a home without feeling a hurricane just came through!

This selection will encourage sharing, openness, listening, cooperation and discussion, providing a useful **'getting to know you'** or **'group building'** introduction for a small group study or teaching time.

It's probably impossible to say who first thought up any of these icebreakers and games. Many are based on common party games and adapted through generations of youth leaders. Most came to me by word of mouth from friends and colleagues, or seeing them in action.

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Why icebreakers?

Icebreakers can play an important role in helping young people integrate and connect with one another in a group environment. Icebreakers can also enhance your teaching by helping to stimulate cooperation and participation. They can provide positive momentum for small group study and discussion by:

- Helping a new group get to know one another.
- Helping new members to integrate into a group.
- Helping young people feel comfortable together.
- Encouraging cooperation.
- Encouraging listening to others.
- Encouraging working together.
- Encouraging young people to break out of their cliques.
- Developing social skills.
- Building a rapport with leaders.
- Creating a good atmosphere for learning and participation.

Icebreakers and you

A 10 SECOND CHECK LIST!

- Be enthusiastic, whatever happens, be enthusiastic!
- Choose volunteers carefully and don't cause embarrassment.
- If something is not working move quickly on to the next activity.
- Timing is important. Don't flog them to death. Use only 2 or 3 icebreakers as a 20-30 minutes introduction to your programme. Finish each icebreaker while young people are still enjoying it.
- Choose icebreakers appropriate for your age group. No group is the same and your understanding of what will and will not work with your group is a core youth work skill.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

ICEBREAKERS

Fact or fiction?

Ask everyone to write on a piece of paper THREE things about themselves which may not be known to the others in the group. Two are true and one is not. Taking turns they read out the three 'facts' about themselves and the rest of the group votes which are true and false. There are always surprises. This simple activity is always fun, and helps the group and leaders get to know more about each other.

Interview

Divide the young people into pairs. Ask them to take three minutes to interview each other. Each interviewer has to find 3 interesting facts about their partner. Bring everyone back to together and ask everyone to present the 3 facts about their partner to the rest of the group. Watch the time on this one, keep it moving along.

My name is?

Go around the group and ask each young person to state his/her name and attach an adjective that not only describes a dominant characteristic, but also starts with the same letter of his name e.g. generous Grahame, dynamic Dave. Write them down and refer to them by this for the rest of the evening.

Conversations

Each person is given a sheet of paper with a series of instructions to follow. This is a good mixing game and conversation starter as each person must speak to everyone else. For example;



- Count the number of brown eyed boys in the room.
- Find out who has made the longest journey.
- Who has the most unusual hobby?
- Find the weirdest thing anyone has eaten.
- Who has had the most embarrassing experience?
- Who knows what 'Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia' is a fear of? Nearest guess wins. If that's too easy you can try Arachibutyrophobia, Alektorophobia, Ephebiphobia or Anglophobia. **(Answers on last page!)**

The question web

You need to have a spool of string or wool for this game. Ask the young people to stand in a circle. Hold on to the end of the string and throw the ball/spool to one of the young people to catch. They then choose a question from 1-20 to answer. A list of 20 sample questions is given below. Adapt for your group.

Holding the string they then throw it to another member of the group. Eventually this creates a web as well as learning some interesting things about each other! At the end of the game you could comment that we all played a part in creating this unique web and if one person was gone it would look different.

In the same way it's important that we all take part to make the group what it is, unique and special.

1. If you had a time machine that would work only once, what point in the future or in history would you visit?
2. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
3. If your house was burning down, what three objects would you try and save?
4. If you could talk to any one person now living, who would it be and why?
5. If you HAD to give up one of your senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting) which would it be and why?
6. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
7. Do you have a pet? If not, what sort of pet would you like?
8. Name a gift you will never forget?
9. Name one thing you really like about yourself.
10. What's your favourite thing to do in the summer?



11. Who's your favourite cartoon character, and why?
12. Does your name have a special meaning and or were you named after someone special?
13. What is the hardest thing you have ever done?
14. If you are at a friend's or relative's house for dinner and you find a dead insect in your salad, what would you do?
15. What was the best thing that happened to you this past week?
16. If you had this week over again what would you do differently?
17. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about God?
18. What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?
19. If you could ask Christ to change one problem in the world today, what would you like him to change?
20. What book, movie or video have you seen/read recently you would recommend? Why?

Desert Island

Announce, 'You've been exiled to a deserted island for a year. In addition to the essentials, you may take one piece of music, one book (which is not the Bible) and one luxury item you can carry with you i.e. not a boat to leave the island! What would you take and why?'

Allow a few minutes for the young people to draw up their list of three items, before sharing their choices with the rest of the group. As with most icebreakers and relationship building activities, it's good for the group leaders to join in too!

If

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Write 20 'IF' questions on cards and place them (question down) in the middle of the circle. The first person takes a card, reads it out and gives their answer, comment or explanation. The card is returned to the bottom of the pile before the next person takes their card.

This is a simple icebreaker to get young people talking and listening to others in the group. Keep it moving and don't play for too long. Write your own additional 'IF' questions to add to the list.



1. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
2. If I gave you \$10,000, what would you spend it on?
3. If you could watch your favourite movie now, what would it be?
4. If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be?
5. If you could wish one thing to come true this year, what would it be?
6. If you could live in any period of history, when would it be?
7. If you could change anything about yourself, what would you change?
8. If you could be someone else, who would you be?
9. If you could have any question answered, what would it be?
10. If you could watch your favourite TV show now, what would it be?
11. If you could have any kind of pet, what would you have?
12. If you could do your dream job 10 years from now, what would it be?
13. If you had to be allergic to something, what would it be?
14. If you sat down next to Jesus on a bus, what would you talk about?
15. If money and time was no object, what would you be doing right now?
16. If you had one day to live over again, what day would you pick?
17. If you could eat your favourite food now, what would it be?
18. If you could learn any skill, what would it be?
19. If you were sent to live on a space station for three months and only allowed to bring three personal items with you, what would they be?
20. If you could buy a car right now, what would you buy?

Name that person

Divide into two teams. Give each person a blank piece of card. Ask them to write five little known facts about themselves on their card. Include all leaders in this game too. For example, I have a pet iguana, I was born in Iceland, my favourite food is spinach, my grandmother is called Doris and my favourite colour is vermilion.

Collect the cards into two team piles. Draw one card from the opposing team pile. Each team tries to name the person in as few clues as possible. Five points if they get it on the first clue, then 4, 3, 2, 1, 0. The team with the most points wins. (Note: if you select the most obscure facts first, it will increase the level of competition and general head scratching!)



Would you rather..?

Questions may range from silly trivia to more serious content. On the way you might find out some interesting things about your young people! Place a line of tape down the centre of the room. Ask the group to straddle the tape.

When asked 'Would you rather?' they have to jump to the left or right as indicated by the leader. Don't forget to encourage your adult helpers to join in too! I've included 20 starter questions, just add your own and let the fun begin.

Would you rather..?

- Visit the doctor or the dentist?
- Eat broccoli or carrots?
- Watch TV or listen to music?
- Own a lizard or a snake?
- Have a beach holiday or a mountain holiday?
- Be an apple or a banana?
- Be invisible or be able to read minds?
- Be hairy all over or completely bald?
- Be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
- Make headlines for saving somebody's life or winning a Nobel Prize?
- Go without television or fast food for the rest of your life?
- Have permanent diarrhoea or permanent constipation?
- Be handsome/beautiful and dumb or be ugly and really smart?
- Always be cold or always be hot?
- Not hear or not see?
- Eliminate hunger and disease or be able to bring lasting world peace?
- Be stranded on a deserted island alone or with someone you don't like?
- See the future or change the past?
- Be three inches taller or three inches shorter?
- Wrestle a lion or fight a shark?



Masks

You will need crayons or paints, markers, scissors and white card for this activity. Give each young person a piece of white card. Ask them to draw and cut out a life-sized shape of a face. They can also cut out eyes and a mouth if they wish. Each young person is then asked to decorate their card face. One side represents what they think people see/know/believe about them i.e. on the outside. The other side represents what they feel about themselves i.e. things going on the inside, what people do not necessarily know or see.

This is best used in an established group where the young people are comfortable and at ease with each other. 'Masks' is also a good discussion starter on self-image and self-worth.

Flags

Flags is a get-to-know-you activity, helping young people express what's important to them or more about themselves. Provide large sheets of paper, crayons, markers and paints. Ask each young person to draw a flag which contains some symbols or pictures describing who they are, what's important to them or what they enjoy.

Each flag is divided into 4 or 6 segments. Each segment can contain a picture i.e. favourite emotion, favourite food, a hobby, a skill, where you were born, your family, your faith. Give everyone 20 minutes to draw their flags. Ask some of the group to share their flags and explain the meaning of what they drew.

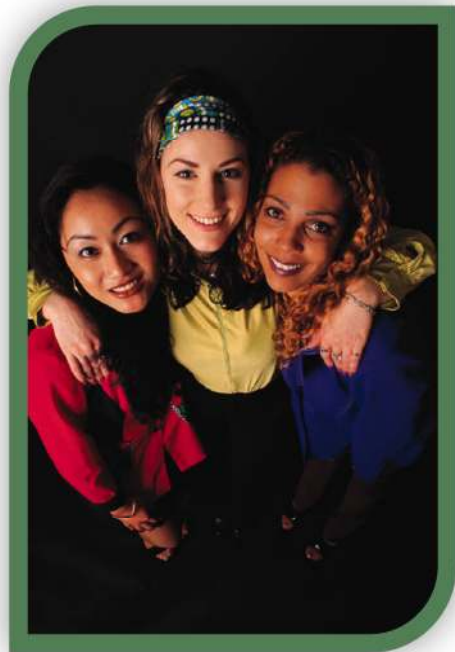
People Bingo

Great for new groups. Make a 5 by 4 grid on a piece of card and duplicate for everyone in your group. Supply pens or pencils. Each box contains one of the statements below. Encourage the group to mix, talk to everyone to try and complete their card. If one of the items listed on the bingo card relates to the person they are talking with, have them sign their name in that box.

End the activity after 10 minutes and review some of the interesting facts the group has discovered about each other. You can add your own statements appropriate for your group.



- Has brown eyes
- Has made the longest journey
- Has eaten the weirdest food
- Plays Tennis
- Is wearing blue
- Speaks a foreign language
- Knows what a muntjak is (it's a small deer)
- Plays a musical instrument
- Has 2 or more pets
- Has been to the most foreign countries
- Hates broccoli
- Has 2 or more siblings
- Name begins with an 'S'
- Loves Chinese food
- Loves to ski
- Knows what a quark is (A quark is a tiny theoretical particle that makes up protons and neutrons in the atomic nucleus. So there!)
- Loves soccer
- Likes to get up early
- Someone who's favourite TV show is CSI
- Someone over 6ft tall



GROUP BUILDERS

Around the world

The leader begins by saying the name of any country, city, river, ocean or mountain that can be found in an atlas. The young person next to him must then say another name that begins with the last letter of the word just given. Each person has a definite time limit (e.g. three seconds) and no names can be repeated. For example - First person: Londonn, Second Person: N Niagara Fallss, Third Person: S Switzerland

Supermarket

The first player says: "I went to the supermarket to buy an Apple (or any other object you can buy in a supermarket that begins with an A). The next player repeats the sentence, including the "A" word and adds a "B" word.

Each successive player recites the sentence with all the alphabet items, adding one of his own. For example; 'I went to the supermarket and bought an Apple, Banana, CD, dog food, envelopes, frozen fish'. It's not too hard to reach the end of the alphabet, usually with a little help! Watch out for 'Q' and 'X' 😊

Tall stories

The leader starts a story with a sentence that ends in SUDDENLY. The next person then has to add to the story with his own sentence that ends in SUDDENLY. Continue the story until everyone has contributed. The story becomes crazier as each young person adds their sentence. Tape it and play it back. For example; 'Yesterday I went to the zoo and was passing the elephant enclosure when SUDDENLY.....'

Once upon a time

Ask each young person to think of either the name of a person, a place or a thing. Invite them to share this with the rest of the group. Select one of your group to begin a story. However, within 10 seconds they must mention the person, place or



thing they have thought of. After 10 seconds (use a stopwatch or kitchen timer) the story is continued by the next person who must also mention their person, place or thing within the 10 seconds.

Continue until everyone has made a contribution. The stories can get really weird, but that's part of the fun! Tape the story for playback at the next parents meeting!

Word link

This is a word association game. Ask the group to sit in a circle. The first person starts with any word they wish i.e. red. The next person repeats the first word and adds another word which links to the first i.e. tomato. The next person repeats the previous word and add another word link i.e. soup, and so on. To keep this moving, only allow five seconds for each word link.

Object stories

Collect together a number of objects and place in a canvas bag. The objects can include everyday items i.e. a pencil, key-ring, mobile phone, but also include some more unusual ones i.e. a fossil, holiday photograph, wig!

Pass the bag around the group and invite each young person to dip their hand into the bag (without looking) and pull out one of the objects.

The leader begins a story which includes his object. After 20 seconds, the next person takes up the story and adds another 20 seconds, incorporating the object they are holding. And so on, until everyone has made a contribution to your epic literary tale 😊

Add words

Simple, completely ridiculous and a lot of fun. The first person says a word, for example 'The'. The second person says the first word and ADDS a second word of their choice, and so on. At the end you might have a complete sentence!

For example, 'The aardvark spiralled into the puddle of custard clutching his skateboard while whistling his favourite Bjork melody.' The fun thing is putting twists in the sentence so that the others have a hard time coming up with a word that fits. ADD WORDS can be played a few times without being boring.



Vocabulary

You begin by thinking of a word and then give the first letter. The next player thinks of a word beginning with this letter and gives the second letter. The third player thinks of a word that begins with the first two letters and adds a third. The object of the game is to avoid completing a word. When a player has completed three words or failed to add a letter they can rest their brain for the remainder of the game! You might need a dictionary handy to adjudicate on some words.

One minute please!

The aim of the game is to talk for one minute on a given subject. You announce the topic and a member of the group is randomly selected to speak for one minute. Use a pack of cards to randomly select i.e. person who draws the lowest number. Choose subjects to stimulate the imagination and which may be amusing. Put a stopwatch on each person to see how long they last before drying up! Subjects might include, my earliest memories, my favourite computer game, why beans are good for you, 10 things you can do with potatoes, Alligator wrestling, pre-millennialism (no, not really!)

Newspaper puzzle

Divide into teams of five or six people and give each group a copy of the **SAME** newspaper. Ask them to spread the newspaper out in front of each team. Describe a particular advert, article, fact or picture from the paper and the group has to find it, rip it out and bring it to you. The first team to bring it gets a point. Continue calling out items and the winning team is the one with the most points. Watch the paper fly 😊



Name grid

Divide the young people into groups of four. Each group needs paper and pens. Ask them to draw a grid on which they write their forenames. For example,

S	I	M	O	N	
W	E	N	D	Y	
R	O	B	E	R	T
A	N	N	E		

Give each team three minutes to write down as many words (three letters or more) that they can make only using the letters in their names. Letters must adjoin each other in the grid, but do not have to be in a straight line.

When the time is up each team adds up their score.

3 or 4 letter words = 1 point

5 letter word = 2 points

6 letter word = 3 points

Line up

Ask the youth group to line up. Works best with 8-10 in a line. If you've got a bigger group, split them up and challenge each line to complete the task first. Ask the group to form a new line in order of....

- Height, from smallest to tallest.
- Birthdays, from January through to December.
- Shoe size, from smallest to largest.
- Alphabetical first names (A-Z).
- Alphabetical mothers first names.
- Alphabetical grandmother's first names!
- Anything else you think up.



Balloon hugging

Select three couples to help you with this game. Give each couple three balloons. The couple must blow up and knot all their balloons. Then place two under the girl's armpits and one between the pair as they face each other. The couple then has to burst the three balloons simultaneously by hugging each other. The winning couple is the pair who burst all their balloons in the quickest time. You need to see this to believe it!

Who am I?

Prepare a self-adhesive label or post-it note for each young person in your group. Write on it the name of a well-known or famous person. This can be an historical character or current sportsman, musician, TV personality, celebrity etc. Have a good mix of men and women. Keeping the names hidden, stick the post-it notes on the foreheads of everyone in the group. They must then ask questions of the others to find out their identity.

Each person takes a turn to ask questions and figure out who they are. For example, Am I alive? Am I female? Am I in a band? Only yes or no questions can be asked. If the answer is no, their turn is over. If the answer is yes, they can ask another question and keep going until they get a no, or guess who they are. Keep playing until everyone has guessed, or if time is short, stop after the first few correct answers.

Pass the orange

Ask the young people to form a circle. Give the first young person a large orange and explain they need to pass this around the circle. No problem. BUT, it has to be passed around the circle using only chin and neck. If the orange is dropped, it must be returned to the previous player in the circle and the game restarts. A camera is a must for this game!



Liquorice line-up

You will need some very long strands of liquorice (or smaller strands tied together). Invite five or six couples (boy/girl) to take part in the game. Each couple places one end of the liquorice in their mouth. At the signal they begin to chew until they reach the middle. The winning couple is the one which reaches the middle first. Award a bag of liquorice to the winners!

Chocolate chomp

Another old party game, but still lots of fun. Ask everyone to sit in a circle on the floor. In the middle of the circle place a large bar of chocolate on a plate, a knife, a fork and three items of clothing – gloves, scarf and a cap. (Don't forget to remove the wrapper from the chocolate!) Each person in the circle takes a turn at rolling a dice.

On throwing a six they run to the middle of the circle, put on the items of clothing and try to eat as much chocolate as possible. However, they can only cut it with the knife and pick it up with the fork. As soon as someone else throws a six, they run to the middle, put on the gloves, hat and cap, and take over. Continue until all the chocolate is eaten.

Whistle and burp

Invite three couples to take part in this simple game. Ask them to sit together at the front of the group. Give each of the boys five crackers and give each of the girls a can of coke. On the signal the boys must eat the crackers as fast as possible and then whistle a pre-selected tune to the satisfaction of the rest of the group. They then hand over to their partner (girl) who must drink the coke and then burp audibly. The first couple to finish wins a packet of crackers and a can of coke!



Pass the polo

Invite the group to line up in teams of six. Give each person a toothpick, which they must hold in their mouth. The person at the front of the line has a polo on his toothpick and he must (without using his hands) pass the polo down the line. If anyone drops their sweet, the team must start again from the front of the line with a new polo.

Knots

Divide your group into teams of 6-8. Each team forms a small circle. Ask them to extend their right hand across the circle and hold the left hand of the other team member opposite them. Then extend their left hand across the circle and hold the right hand of another group member. The task is to unravel the spider's web of interlocking arms without letting go of anyone's hands. Give them a three minute time limit to complete the task. Pressure!

Backward clumps

Divide into pairs. Ask each pair to sit on the floor with their partner, backs together, feet out in front and arms linked. Their task is to stand up together. Once everyone has done this, two pairs join together and the group of four try to repeat the task. After they succeed, add another two and try again. Keep adding people until your whole group is trying to stand together. A sight to behold!

Song scramble

Before the youth meeting write out the first lines from several well-known songs, but write down only one line on each piece of card. Make sure that only enough songs are used to cover the number of people present. The cards are then scattered on the floor. Once the game begins each person grabs a card and tries to find the holders of the other cards which will complete the verse or section of the song. The winning group is the first one to correctly assemble and sing their song. Tape the songs to playback later. Here are a couple of examples which show my age 😊

*Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?
Caught in a landslide. No escape from reality.
Open your eyes. Look up to the skies and see.*



*I'm just a poor boy, I need no sympathy.
Because I'm easy come, easy go, a little high, little low.*

*I have climbed the highest mountain; I have run through the fields
Only to be with you. Only to be with you
I have run. I have crawled. I have scaled these city walls
These city walls. Only to be with you
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.*

AND THE SONGS (of course, you already got them!)

Bohemian Rhapsody, Queen

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For, U2

Charade relay

A simple party game but great fun. Make a list of 20 popular TV programmes. Divide your group into smaller teams who base themselves around the ground floor of your house! You stand somewhere in the middle. The game begins by each team sending one person to you. Show them the first TV programme on your list. They return to their team and silently act it out in front of the group. As soon as someone guesses it, that person runs to you for the next clue and repeats the process. The winning group is the one which has acted out and guessed 20 programmes.



Movie star scramble

Divide the group into pairs, each with a paper and pen. Ask them to visit the cards you have previously prepared and placed around the room. Their goal is to unscramble the names of 20 famous movies stars i.e. SHRIN FOR ROAD (work it out yourself!) Points are awarded for each correct answer. Alternatively there is ANIMAL SCRAMBLE, TV SCRAMBLE and so on. Anyone for OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET SCRAMBLE 😊

Body spell

Divide the young people into teams of five. They will need to play this game with bare feet. The groups can play against each other or the clock (five second time limit). Using a felt tip marker write three letters on each team member. Either two hands (palms) and one foot (sole) or one hand and two feet.

1. TDO
2. HYI
3. EHR
4. BFT
5. OCS

As you call out a series of 4, 5, 6 or 7 letter words the group has to spell the word using combinations of hands and feet. Select 20 words from the list below. The finished words must be clearly visible to the leader.

- 4 Letter words: rest, fist, dice, trot, crib, boot, rich, host.
5 letter words: shoot, first, drift, shirt, roost, shred, hired
6 letter words: forest, theory, bitter, bother, frosty, boiled, strict
7 letter words: thirsty, ostrich, october, boosted, shifted, hoisted.
8 letter word: stitched



Twenty questions

20 questions is an old party game which encourages deductive reasoning and creativity. One player is selected to think of an item. The rest of the group tries to guess the item by asking a question which can only be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No." Truthful answers only please, as anything else will ruin the game.

Wink murder

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Choose a number of playing cards to match the number of young people in your group. Be certain your selection contains an ace. Each young person then draws a card. They must not comment or show it to anyone else. The player who chooses the ace is the murderer and he kills his victims by winking at them!

The game begins quietly with players sitting looking at each other. When someone catches the eye of the killer and is winked at, they are killed, and can die in any manner they choose. Some prefer to die quietly with a whimper, some opt for the blood curdling scream technique, while others might fall off their seat and lie prone on the floor. The object is to identify the murderer while trying not to be killed in the process. An incorrect guess results in instant death!

The human chair

Invite everyone to stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder. Each person then turns to the right to face the back of the person in front of them. Ask them to place their hands on the shoulder of the person in front. On the count of three they slowly begin to sit down on the lap of the person behind. As long as everyone is helping the person in front of him or her to sit, then everyone should be supporting the weight of everyone else. Of course, should someone slip, the game becomes 'human dominoes.' 😊 It might take a couple of attempts to complete the challenge.



Your phobias answered

- Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia - Fear of long words (not a giant hippo in sight!)
- Arachibutyrophobia - Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of the mouth. (I think I might have this!)
- Alektorophobia - Fear of chickens. (No McDonalds today then!)
- Ephebiphobia - Fear of teenagers (tough phobia for a youth worker!)
- Anglophobia - Fear of England or English culture. (Be afraid, be very afraid!)

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