TOP TEN
Ice-Breakers & Group Games

playmeo

by Mark Collard

author of No Props No Problem & Serious Fun

Introduction

Hi, my name is Mark.

Thank you so much for downloading this ebook.

If you're looking for a bunch of **awesome, fun, non-threatening, highly interactive activities** for your next school, conference, staff training, camp or youth-based program, then you've come to the right place.

If you enjoy the energy and sheer craziness that only interactive group games can give, you are also about to embark on a wonderful journey.

After thousands of programs with people all over the world, I can assure you that the extraordinary ice-breakers and group games contained within this ebook sit at the tippy-top of the enormous list of group activities that I know and love.

These activities are the ones I pull out whenever I feel that my group is a little too 'cold' or needs to 'loosen up' a little. Within moments of introducing these simple, easy-to-present activities, you too, will visibly see your group start to **relax**, **interact**, **smile** and, most importantly, **laugh**.

It doesn't matter if you're a novice, an experienced facilitator, or work with children, adults or young people. These activities have universal appeal, require no equipment and are totally success-oriented.

To squeeze the most from these activities, please read the opening two chapters which describe *Why Ice-Breakers Don't Work* and *My Top Ten Strategies for Success*. I promise you the tips & strategies you will learn here will help you look like an expert.

Oh, and if you like what you see here, take advantage of playmeo's **7-Day Free Trial** to unlock 485+ fun group games & activities – turn to page 24 for more details.

I wish you every success in your next program.

Have fun,

Mark Collard
Experiential Trainer & Author
www.playmeo.com

Contents

Illustrations by Anna Rampelt

Why Ice-Breakers Don't Work
or Oh No, Not That Again

Having fun and making a difference is not just noticed – it's experienced and felt.

Ask for too much too soon – by not removing the ice – and you'll frighten your group away. But, progress too slowly – by neglecting to focus on your group's potential – and you'll risk boredom setting in.

Naturally, we want to get this right.

To be clear, 'ice' in this context refers to those intangible feelings and beliefs which people reasonably experience that limit or inhibit their interactions with others.

Typically, you can expect a lot of ice to form among people who are new to each other, but it is often present in groups who have known each other for a long time, too.

Little or no talking, poor eye contact, reluctance to make physical contact, lots of standing around, lack of initiative, and an absence of trust or energy are all good examples of ice manifesting itself.

Ice can also look and sound like making excuses, the choice to keep to oneself, arriving late, lying, acting out and looking down at the ground to avoid responsibility.

Basically, any task that requires people to step outside of their Comfort Zones before they're ready to do so, will trigger a set of feelings, behaviours and survival instincts which result in an icy atmosphere. In short, ice is the devil of group-based programs.

The development of trusting and healthy relationships relies heavily on interaction. Ice prevents this process occurring smoothly and productively, therefore as program leaders we are obliged to remove as much of it as we possibly can. The more ice you break, the more fun and greater the difference you will make in your program.

There are several key program design strategies that will help you 'break the ice' and, critically, create a platform upon which your group (and program) will thrive.

But, note, these strategies are not about playing ice-breaker games. It's about introducing experiences that break the ice, ie these are not the same thing.

If you or your group cringe at the thought of 'ice-breakers,' then read on carefully because I'll reveal five reasons why most 'ice-breakers' don't work.

Ice-Breaker Versus Ice-Maker

Well-versed in the theory that group exercises are a great way to invite people to interact, many program leaders decide to present one or more of these experiences at the start of their program. And then wonder why people sometimes crawl back into their shells.

To truly 'break the ice' and, critically, create a platform upon which your group will thrive, an experience must reflect most, but hopefully all, of the following five criteria.

1. **Fun** – the sort of fun discovered in the activities featured in this ebook;
2. **Non-Threatening** – everything occurs within your group's Comfort Zone;
3. **Highly-Interactive** – ample opportunities for people to mix and share with others;
4. **Simple & Easy To Understand** – quick and easy explanations; and
5. **Success-Oriented** – focus on group accomplishment and worth.

In short, if an activity or experience you are considering does not tick three, four or (hopefully) all five of these attributes, don't do it - it's an ice-maker. Even if you call it an ice-breaker, it won't work well.

An Ice-Breaker, Really?

To illustrate, I need not go any further than contrast this 'ice-breaking' technology with the all-time classic ice-breaker in which everyone in a group is asked to stand up and introduce themselves at the very start of a program.

Nine times out of ten, I guarantee, the program leader will refer to this exercise as their 'ice-breaker.' IT'S NOT.

At the very least it's a terrible waste of time, and at it's worst, a horrible excuse for not knowing what else to do.

Now, I'm not saying that you should never present this group exercise. That is not my point. My point is, this exercise as described is NOT an ice-breaker, because it does not break the ice.

Let's run through the checklist...

This exercise is rarely fun, except perhaps for the class clown (there's one in every group) who now views the room as a stage, upon which he or she will enjoy being in the spotlight for a moment or three.

Standing up and talking in front of others threatens people. Remember, most people list public-speaking as their number one fear, especially if they have to talk about themselves. This exercise is made even more threatening when the class clown makes everyone laugh, and now it's your turn.

This exercise is not interactive. Most people are too focused on what they are going to say – especially if they're next in line. They are not listening to anyone else.
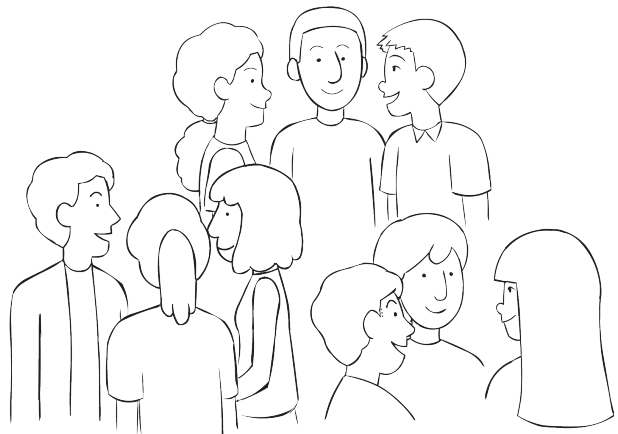
Conduct a survey of how much data is retained the next time you run this exercise, and you'll see what I mean.
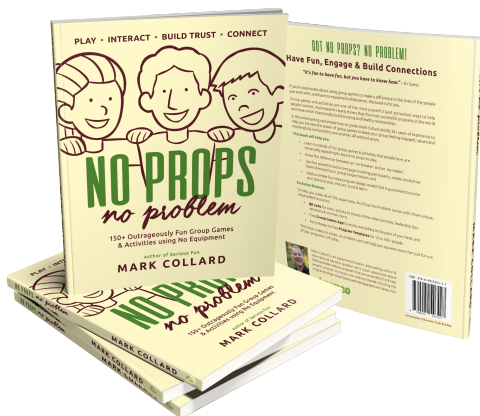
Now, to be fair, if there is one thing that this exercise can check off the list, is that the task is relatively simple and easy to understand. It may be simple to understand, but the process it relies on to succeed is very complex indeed.

Finally, being both judge and jury in this case, I think it is safe to say that this exercise is anything but successful. Discomfort, anxiety and anything but warmth and humour will have started the day. Epic fail.

An experience, any experience, is ONLY ever an ice-breaker when it truly breaks the ice. And this result can only ever be achieved when the experience invites lots of **fun**, **simple**, **non-threatening** and **success-oriented interaction**.

The full text of this conversation can be found in my book **[No Props No Problem: 150+ Outrageously Fun Group Games & Activities using No Equipment](#)**.

Top Ten Strategies for Success
or What The Experts Don't Tell You

With my **Top Ten Ice-Breakers & Group Games** in your hand, all you now need are the top ten strategies to help you lead them successfully.

Many years ago, I started to record a list of all the activities I had been exposed to – mostly as a participant – during my early training experiences.

Reflecting my fastidious inclinations, I grouped similar activities together, so that as the list grew longer and longer, I would find it easier to access them when I needed a good idea. Ice-breakers, de-inhibitizers, warm-ups, initiatives, trust exercises, games – I recorded the names of everything.

Thirty years later, that list has grown into what I refer to now as my 'Book of Tricks.' There are simply hundreds of great activity ideas contained between its seriously dog-eared covers.

Yet, as much as this book represents a chronicle of what I have played and discovered over the years - and continue to draw benefit from - it would fail to inform even the most learned of my colleagues the slightest glimpse of what I have discovered along the way.

And, most importantly, it fails to offer a glimpse of what I believe to be more significant than the games themselves.

As I flick through its pages, I know for a fact that my briefing, presentation and understanding of many of the earliest recorded activities has changed significantly – for the better – since I first learned to play them.

It's true, I have added many new and wonderful variations to my list of games, but this is not the difference I speak of.

Rather, I refer to the philosophies and general comprehension of how play can develop positive relationships that now envelops my facilitation style and overall program delivery approach.

As an experiential trainer and author with 30+ years experience, I often muse about these differences for the benefit of my training participants.

Now, in no particular order, I'm keen to share these with you...

*Visit **playmeo.com/facilitatortips** for 60+ facilitation tips & strategies, all supported with video tutorials.*

1. Frame, Frame, Frame

In other words, prepare, prepare, prepare.

Appropriately framing an activity – that is, to 'set the scene' or provide a context in which the activity will take place – is one of the most valuable tools I employ to help groups achieve their goals, ie get success. Otherwise, your group may not be ready – in most cases, emotionally under-prepared - for what is about to happen.

People have a natural proclivity to want to know why they are doing what they are doing. Framing goes a long way towards answering these questions, as well as reducing anxiety, providing clarity, and generally coaxing people forward into your program, perchance, into their Stretch Zone.

Everything you do programmatically provides the context in which the next activity is framed. For example:

- Your language – it's not just what you say, but how you say it – see the next tip for a more thorough discussion;

- Lead-up activities – like building blocks, every activity should aim to complement the next, rather than subvert it. To illustrate, leading into a serious discussion after a very energetic, bounce-off-the-wall type of activity is unlikely to result in a settled, composed or focused group of people.

- Your general approach to facilitation – if you operate under the premise of 'challenge by choice' but your overall demeanour limits people's opportunity to make choices, you are likely to turn them off.

Ask yourself, 'Have I done everything to prepare my group – emotionally and physically – to experience success?' and 'Do they know what they are getting into, and why?'

If not, think about what lead-up activities you could use to prepare them, or perhaps what introduction or briefing might be necessary to soothe the group into the activity.

2. It's All In How You Say It

As a participant, which would you prefer to hear?

'....and if you're too slow, or get the wrong answer, you are 'out' and you have to come in to the centre of the circle...'

Or, *'...and if the time expires, or you make a mistake, you are invited to take your turn in the centre of the circle and have some fun...'*

Perhaps each statement is saying the same thing, but for many people, they will hear a big difference.

The first implies that I have no choice ('you have to') so I might feel under pressure because I don't want to be 'slow' or 'wrong.' This may manifest itself as, I don't want to make a mistake, so perhaps I won't play.

While the second statement is all about options (you may decline the invitation) and fun is introduced as an integral part of the consequence of 'going out.'

As program providers, our language is one of our most potent tools. It can work for us or against us, and I don't just mean the use of 'politically correct' terms. Beware that everything you say, from the moment you introduce yourself to the waves good-bye at the end, will fan the flames of invitation and play or snuff them out.

Ask yourself, 'Have I introduced this activity in the most appealing, inclusive way?' Provide choices to people so that they can find a level of participation that is comfortable for them.

3. Inject Lots Of Humour

This is such a critical element of my delivery, and to be honest, the trick to disarming my group.

Take time to observe the crazy, menial little things people do, and serve it back to them in a manner that asks have you ever noticed this? Of course, they have, they just don't want to admit it.

For example, the insistence some people have for tagging their opponent after you have stopped the game, or the understated crawling on knees when a simple pivot on one knee was sanctioned.
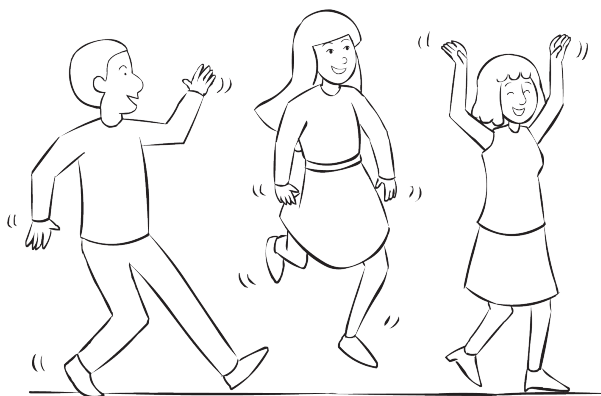
Or, at a more serious level, the subtle glance over the shoulder to check that your spotters really are there behind you to catch your fall, even though the command 'Ready, fall away' was given.

What about the way we (notice, I'm using the royal 'we' here, so as to not draw attention to myself) divert our eyes and attention away from someone whom we met and learned their name earlier in the day, but now that they are coming our way, can not for all the fish in the sea remember it? I could go on and on....

Suffice to say, people love to laugh at these silly interactions - it was the essence of the TV show 'Seinfeld.' Our programs are made up of so much normalness, perhaps nothingness, it can be hilarious to sit back and look at it for what it really is at times.

Of course, how you deliver these moments is important – what could appear to some as a diamond in the rough, may just be a rock to others. Focus your humour so that you encourage your group to laugh with rather than at others.

Oh, and inject tons of FUNN (Functional Understanding Not Necessary) too – it will act as a magnet for many more moments of people simply being human!

4. How To Pick A Partner

Have you ever noticed how the seemingly innocuous words 'Okay, everybody pick a partner....' can strike fear into the hearts of many participants? In my experience, it is one of the most frightening things you can ask a group to do.

Questions such as 'Should I pick someone, or wait to be picked?' or 'What if I pick somebody, and they don't want to play with me?' or 'Does she really want to play with me, or is she just being nice' or 'If I pick him, will he think I'm hitting on him?' will be roused among many others.

Sadly, the instruction to 'pick a partner' is too-often interpreted as 'find someone you like or are like.'

This thought is as embarrassing as it is open to the anxiety-laden prospect of people feeling left out. There are just too many other ways to ask people to form into smaller groups, including pairs, to risk these outcomes.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you should never use the words 'pick a partner' again. Certainly, as your program develops and your group becomes more comfortable with each other, the panic-inducing reaction to simply 'picking a partner' will diminish.

But, with most groups, especially if they have just met each other, you are well advised to avoid the typical 'pick a partner' suggestion.

*pssst... you can find dozens of fun & random group-splitting ideas in **No Props No Problem**.*

5. Always Ask For A Volunteer

There is always, no matter how long you wait, someone willing to step forward as a volunteer, and help you do whatever you need to do. Perhaps you need help to demonstrate the next move, or need someone to break the ice and start the activity, whatever. It never fails, there is always someone willing to step forward.

But why bother, you may ask, when you can often save time and potential embarrassment by doing it yourself, or asking a colleague to step in? The value is hidden in the invitation.

It can be as simple as observing the initial humour of no-one stepping forward, or everyone but one poor soul stepping back. However, beyond the humour of these moments, there is extraordinary value of enlisting the support of a volunteer from your group.

Having one or more of your group step forward says 'I am willing to... take a risk, have fun, give it a go, look silly, etc, etc.' These are huge transformative messages that are broadcast loud and clear – yet subtly - to the rest of your group. It will frequently open up further opportunities for more of these decisions, from more of your group.

Asking for volunteers is part of the fun, it's suspenseful ('what are they going to do?') and it's an adventure, especially if you don't tell them what you're going to be doing in advance.

Besides, I get to be up-front all the time, I want to share the limelight from time to time.

6. Have More Up Your Sleeve Than You Need

You can never have too many activities lined-up in your head, nor too much equipment at the ready. This could be just another way of saying 'be prepared,' but it's more than that. It's about options.

Stuff happens – the bus arrives late, it starts to rain, the room is smaller than you anticipated, a member of your group is nursing an injury or disability, etc, etc – all of these events call for immediate attention.

Sometimes, it may be just as simple as getting to the end of your list, and realising too late that the activities ran for much less time than you had imagined.

I can't tell you the number of times I have been 'saved' from that menacing what-are-we-going-to-do-now look by resorting to Plan B, C or D, and making it look like I had it all planned from the start. It's always better to say 'Gee, I didn't get to do half of what I planned...' than 'Arghhhh, I need to think of something quick...' It makes you look good too!

7. Stop An Activity Before It Wanes

Always leave your group wanting more.

Stopping an activity just as it reaches its peak, and perhaps a tad further, will give you many useful programmatic starting points.

Moving on at this juncture keeps the energy of the group and their spirits high. It's easier to slide into the next activity if you have their attention, even if they are complaining that you stopped too soon. Better this, than having no complaints because everyone left the scene on account of boredom!

You can always go back to the activity if it really is that good (and it fits your program goals,) but it's often better to move onto something new while you have them in the palm of your hand.

And remember, quoting the evangelical words of Karl Rohnke, if at the end of the day you have waned more often than you waxed, get a new job.

8. Walk Your Talk

Example is a powerful cause in people's life. If your group sees you do the very thing you are asking them to do, they're more likely to do it too. This is one of the main reasons I love my work, because I get to play and join in on the fun, rather than stand back all the time.

But more than just participating, walking your talk embraces everything about your program and who you are to your group – from the language you use and encourage, to the choices you make and respect - it all matters.

If you can mix it with your group (when it is appropriate) and demonstrate that you are prepared to take risks (for example, in the challenges you set, and the types of activities you use,) your example will inspire your group to have fun and take risks too.

Naturally, there are times when you need to step back, and let your group play and learn on their own. However, please acknowledge that some groups like nothing more than to see their teacher, leader, coach, whomever, do the activity with them.

One further nudge – I surmise that about 95% of the activities I know and deliver I have learned through direct experience. Be it as a participant of someone else's program, or an activity that I've just picked up from somewhere (ie a book or a peer,) pretty much all of the activities I know and present, I have done as a participant.

I also strongly believe that this experience of being a participant – as distinct from being the leader – will make you a much better facilitator of the activity.

Actual get-your-hands-dirty participation will give you direct knowledge of what it feels like to be a participant in the activity – which no book or learned colleague's stories about a new, you-beaut activity could ever substitute. It will also keep you fresh, you know, in a way that reminds you what it's like to be a participant again.

And if all of this has failed to impress you to walk your talk, just do it because it's fun.

9. Play On

Have you ever been left out of a group? Ever felt that everyone else was having fun, but you weren't?

You're not on your own – I've been there, and done that, especially when I was younger. So I make it a point not to introduce too many activities that eliminate people, especially early in a program.

Games which eliminate folks can be great fun - I still use many of them in my programs today, eg take a look at **Thumb Wrestling in Stereo**. But... when used at the wrong time, or in the initial stages of a group's development, elimination games risk alienating certain people, not to mention, losing a lot of useful energy.

Also, it is not unusual to watch the same people get eliminated over and over again. Beware what message this may send to your group - and those unlucky individuals - if this does not occur within a safe and supportive environment.

If you must (or want to) present an elimination-style activity, look for ways to actively engage those who are eliminated in a new role, such as a heckler, time-keeper, etc, to add more fun and value to the exercise.

Clearly, the more people you have involved, the more energy and good times you can develop – which brings me to my tenth and final strategy.
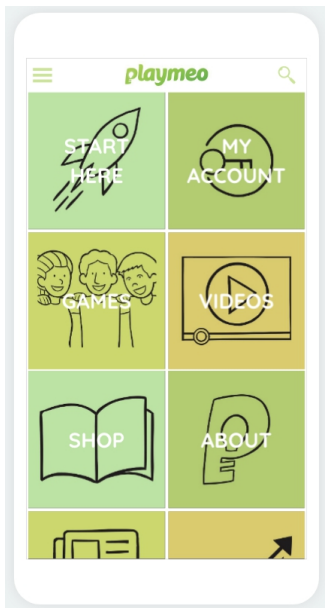
10. Keep People Bunched Together

The wall-flower syndrome - you know, those folks who like to stand away from the group with their backs to the wall - is such a killer of energy and enthusiasm, especially in the beginning stages of your program.

Always invite people to come closer to you, get them to bunch up a little. Circles work fine, but when you don't need a circle, collapse them in, and ask people to move closer to you. You and they will bristle with energy, which is a wonderful way to build interest in what you're about to share.

My style is very much 'Hey, come over here, I've got a secret to tell.' People move in, they lean closer, their attention is piqued. I love that. They are now primed, and ready to rock-n-roll. Yet, at the same time, my group has started to unconsciously break down some barriers, not to mention, trust and share a little too.

Try speaking a little softer, that often works a treat. Your group will have to bunch in closer to simply hear you. And all those folks who can't hear you because they are too busy talking, will suddenly gasp when they realise the group has gone quiet! I love the humour these moments bring.

Oh, there is just one caveat - never ask a very large group of over-enthusiastic children standing in a circle, to take a few steps into the centre towards you – before you know it, you will be under the biggest pile of 'stacks on the mill' you've ever had the back-breaking pleasure to be a part of.

Got the App?

Install playmeo's **FREE** Group Games app today.

Access 100s of group games & activities, video tutorials, leadership tips & articles.

The Ten Most Successful
ICE-BREAKERS & GROUP GAMES

If you're looking for a bunch of fun, non-threatening and highly interactive activities for your group, then you have everything you need in the pages which follow.

To make it super-easy for you, all of the activities **require few if any props** and most come with a **video tutorial** to help you know what the activity looks like, sounds like & feels like.

You can learn even more by clicking the embedded links or scanning the QR code with your smartphone.

Here's what else you'll discover:

- Dozens of fun, innovative ways to **split your large group into smaller groups**;

- A bunch of **simple tools** that will 'break the ice' and energise your group; and

- Reflection prompts to help you **squeeze even more value** from the activities.

These ice-breakers, energisers, and interactive games work because people love 'em.

Here are my top ten, listed alphabetically...

Are You More Like

Categories

Cocktail Party

Jump In jump Out

Making Connections

Paired Shares

PDQ Test

Playing Card Mixers

Thumb-Wrestling In Stereo

Train Station Greetings

Click the links at left to learn more about each activity including video tutorials to see what the action looks like.
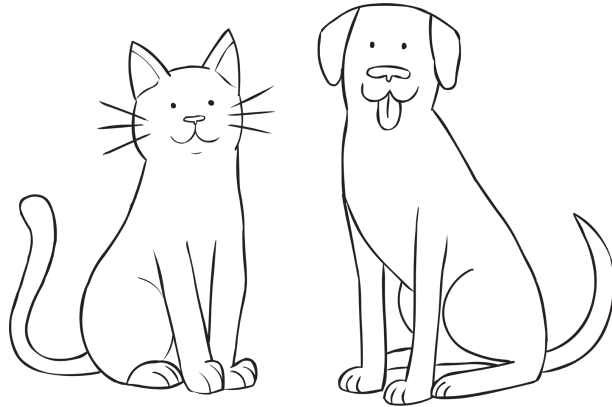
ARE YOU MORE LIKE...

Series of questions to share & celebrate diversity.

Benefits
- No right or wrong answer
- Fosters communication
- Develops critical thinking
- Simple & complex options

People 10+

Time 10-15 mins

Instructions

1. Prepare a set of 'Are You More Like...' questions (see below for examples.)
2. Organise the cards so that you have one set of paired statements (a match) for every two people.
3. Randomly distribute one card to each person.
4. When ready, instruct each person to mingle with others until they find the person holding a card with their match, eg UP is matched with DOWN.
5. Once matched, invite partners to share their response to the question posed by the conjunction of their two cards, eg Are You More Like... a CAT or a DOG?
6. Encourage people to share as much as they feel comfortable.
7. When ready, randomly re-distribute the cards, and start again.
8. Continue this matching, sharing and re-distributing process for 10 to 15 minutes.

Variations

- Here is a very short list of 'Are You More Like...' questions to help you understand what a matched-pair looks like:

ACTION – SUSPENSE	MOVIE – TELEVISION	CAT - DOG
LADDER – TREE	GIVER – RECEIVER	DOOR - WINDOW
EXPLORER – SETTLER	ANYTHING – SOMETHING	MIDDLE - EDGE
LANDING – TAKE-OFF	DEFENSE – OFFENSE	SLIDE – SWING

Make your own, or scan the QR code below to download more question-pairs.

Reflection

- What surprised you during the activity?
- What might this exercise teach us about diversity?
- How might this exercise help us to build relationships with others?

SCAN ME

CATEGORIES

*Highly-interactive exercise to create smaller groupings.*

Benefits
- Simple, rapid execution
- Highly-interactive
- Breaks down cliques
- Fun method to form random small groups

People 10+

Time 1-5 mins

Instructions

1. Assemble your group.
2. Announce a particular category, such as 'colour of eyes.'
3. Ask everyone to find all other people in the group who identify with the same category.
4. Repeat, with a series of two-group and multi-group categories, to successfully mix your group.
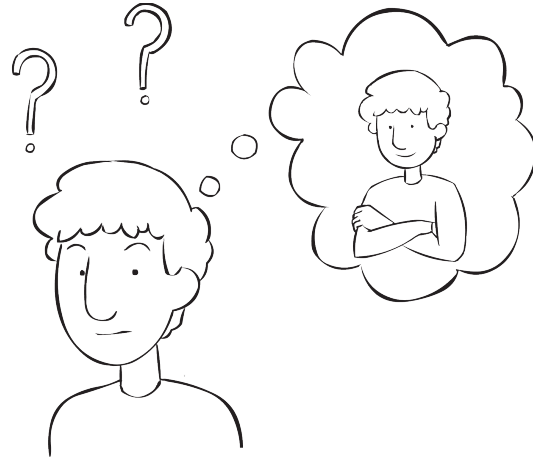
Video Tutorial

Variations

There are no shortage of category types you could announce, for example:
- Preference for good or bad news first when both are presented to you
- Favourite type of television show, movie or book genre
- Number of televisions in your home
- Number of materials recycled at home
- Type of shoes you are wearing (not necessarily their brand)
- Preference for the way toilet paper spills off the roll – forwards, like a waterfall, or backwards against the wall
- Leg you put into your pants, shorts, underwear, etc first when dressing
- Side of the bed you (typically) get out of in the morning (as you are lying in it, facing the ceiling).

Reflection

- What did you notice as the activity progressed?
- What outcomes were achieved during this exercise?
- What might this exercise say about our individuality?

SCAN ME

COCKTAIL PARTY

*Ice-breaker to invite people to playfully mix & mingle.*

Benefits
- Simple
- Reinforces new names
- Highly-interactive
- Promotes communication

People 8+

Time 1-2 mins

Instructions

1. Gather your group rather closely around you, as if standing in a small room.
2. Ask everyone to hold out their left hand as if they were holding their favourite drink.
3. On "GO" everyone shakes the hands and greets as many people in the room as possible.
4. Encourage people to use the name of the person they are greeting in the conversation.
5. For fun, announce your group has 43.5 seconds (or other nominal time) to achieve this task.
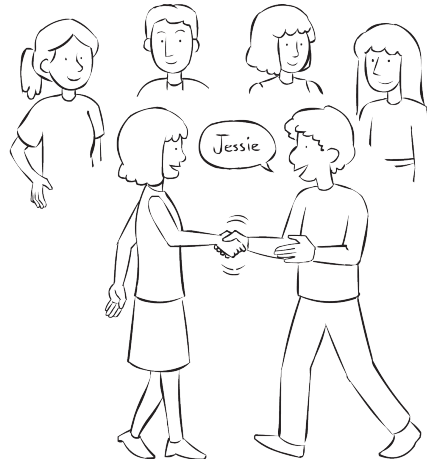
Video Tutorial

Variations

- For young people, or groups that may not imbibe alcohol, suggest they are holding their favourite (soft) drink.
- Imagine you're in a swanky food hall. Invite people to mingle as they treat themselves to the extraordinary array of fine foods available on people's food trays.

Reflection

- What did you notice as you mingled with others in the group?
- How many of you could remember the drinks other people were holding? Why do you think this occurred?
- How does the atmosphere of this artificial 'cocktail party' differ from the manner in which your group normally interacts?
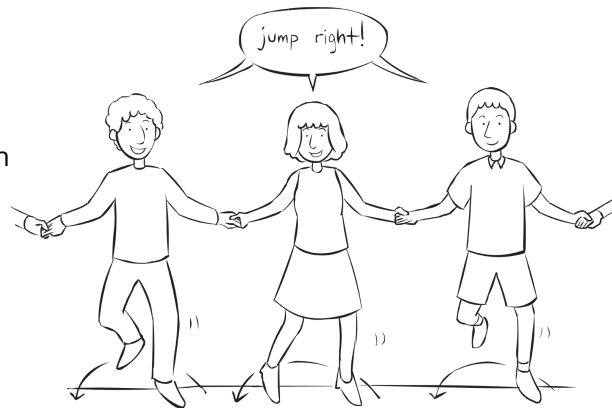
SCAN ME

JUMP IN JUMP OUT

Contagiously fun energiser game for large groups.

Benefits

- Hilarious energiser
- Triggers tons of laughter
- Simple to explain, difficult to accomplish
- Circle game
- No props

People   10+

Time   5-10 mins

Instructions

1. Form a circle, holding hands, facing in to the centre.
2. Announce that you want the group to – "SAY WHAT I SAY, AND DO WHAT I SAY."
3. Practice this skill with one of four commands – "JUMP IN," "JUMP OUT," "JUMP LEFT" or "JUMP RIGHT."
4. Call out a series of 'Jump' commands, one after another for 20 seconds.
5. Re-form the circle, and announce that you now want the group to – "SAY THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT I SAY, AND DO WHAT I SAY."
6. Continue with a series of 'jump' commands, one after another for 20 seconds, or until the circle breaks up too much.

Video Tutorial
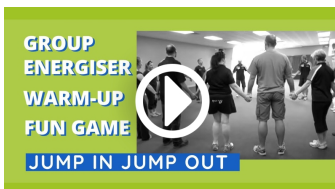
Variations

- Re-form the circle, and announce that you want the group to "SAY what I say, and DO THE OPPOSITE of what I say." For example, if I say "Jump Left" the group is invited to say "Jump Left" as they jump to the right.
- Add extra commands, such as "JUMP TWICE" or "JUMP HIGH" or "JUMP TWO TO THE LEFT/RIGHT."
- Invite people to jump anywhere they choose (while still holding hands and keeping everyone around them safe) no matter what your command is – crazy, random fun.

Reflection

- What did you notice as the group moved with each instruction?
- How much were you influenced by the movement of others?
- What might this exercise reflect about empathy and leadership? Does it teach us anything about effective leadership?

SCAN ME

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Simple ice-breaker to connect group members to others.

Benefits
- Simple to understand
- Terrific get-to-know-you game
- Inspires critical-thinking
- Circle game

People 8+

Time 2-5 mins

Instructions

1. Gather your group in a large open space.
2. Ultimate objective is to create one large circle in which every person is physically linked with two others.
3. Ask one volunteer to stand with one hand on their hip, and then share one or more statements about themselves to the group.
4. When someone from the rest of the group hears a statement that they have in common with the first volunteer, they are invited to link elbows with them.
5. This second person then shares something about themselves to the larger group, to attract a new person to link elbows with them, and so on.
6. This process of sharing and linking continues one one by one.
7. To complete the circle, invite the last person to join the long chain of connections to share something about themselves to link with the very first volunteer.
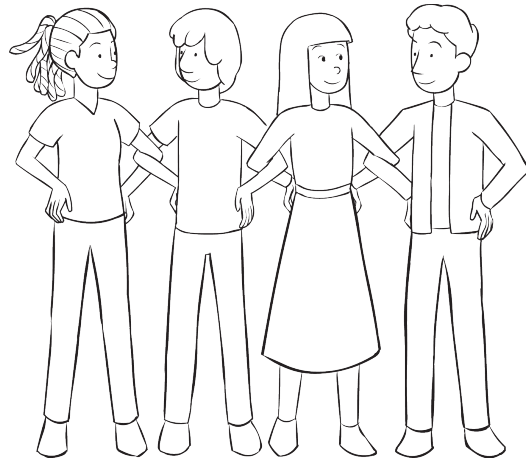
Video Tutorial

Variations

- In very large groups, start with several 'first' volunteers, and invite just as many smaller circles to be formed. Allow the groups to form organically, or instruct each group to only attract a specified number of people.
- One person shares one sentence to begin a (fictional) story, and with each new volunteer who links up, the story continues to build.

Reflection

- What new things did you learn about other members of your group in this exercise?
- Were you nervous for it to be your turn? Why?
- How did creativity come into play in this activity? What's an example?
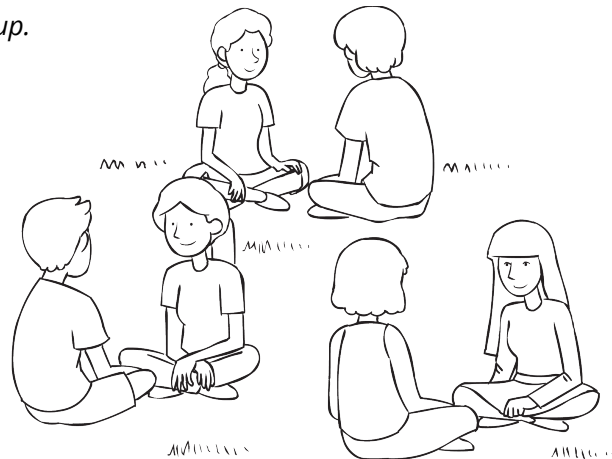
SCAN ME

PAIRED SHARES

Non-threatening strategy to invite sharing in a group.

Benefits
- Very simple
- Non-threatening
- Promotes communication
- Partner activity

People   2+

Time   1-2 mins

Instructions

1. Form into small groups of two or three people.
2. Pose your question, and invite each person to share their response(s) with their partners.
3. Continue to ask questions and/or swap partners.

Video Tutorial

ICE-BREAKER GAMES
PAIRED SHARES

Variations

- If you have a series of questions, invite your group to mix often, so that each person has the opportunity to share with many others, but still within the relative safety of a pair.
- Form two circles comprising an even number of people, one inside the other. Pair people in one circle to the other circle. After one or more questions, ask one circle to rotate a specified number of people to the left (or right) to initiate a conversation with a new partner.

Reflection

- How did it feel to share with your partner or small group? Why?
- Did you learn something you did not know a few minutes ago?
- Describe the type of environment you think is conducive to sharing openly with others?

SCAN ME

PDQ TEST

Hilarious whole-group exercise involving quirky movements.

Benefits
- Very playful & fun
- Inspires creativity
- Celebrates diversity
- Ideal time-filler

People 2+

Time 10-15 mins

Instructions

1. Assemble your group in front of you, sitting or standing.
2. Introduce the idea that you are about to demonstrate a series of physical 'tests' which you would like each person to attempt.
3. This is a self-assessed test, and only the individual will know if they passed or not.
4. Start by clicking your fingers, first your dominant and then less-dominant hands and fingers.
5. Next, invite everyone to attempt to whistle through their lips, and then pop their cheeks with a finger, whistle into their cupped hands, etc.
6. Demonstrate as many nonsensical 'tests' as you can perform yourself.
7. Conclude by inviting one or more volunteers to demonstrate a unique 'test' which they can successfully perform.

Video Tutorial

ZANY GROUP GAME
PDQ
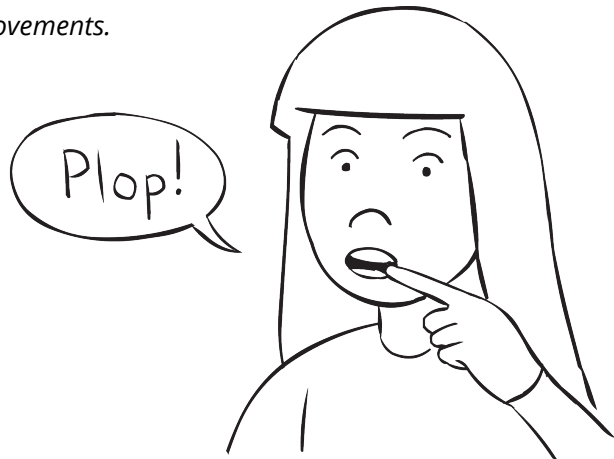
Variations

- Poke out your tongue and curl its sides so that it looks a bit like the letter U. Can you do it the other way, ie an upside down U?
- Extend your two index fingers in front of you so that they touch end to end, then look at the point at which these two fingers touch, and notice the linked sausage. See it? If you can't, try looking beyond your fingers (and not at them) and the linked sausage will suddenly jump out at you (somewhat blurred perhaps.) Then, pull your fingers away from each other slightly, and voila! You'll observe a rack of floating human finger sausages!

Reflection

- Did you pass the test? Does a 'pass' matter?
- Which movement or action did you think was the most bizarre?
- Did you feel silly performing some of the moves? Why?
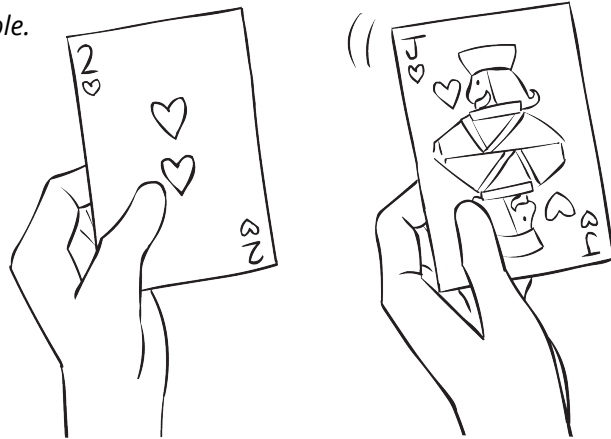
SCAN ME

PLAYING CARD MIXERS

Series of fun, engaging & random ways to mix people.

Benefits
- Highly-interactive
- Fosters communication
- Facilitates random mixing
- Multiple variations

People 12+

Time 2-5 mins

Instructions

1. Grab a pack of playing cards (or two packs if your group is larger than 52 people.)
2. Randomly distribute one card to each person in your group.
3. Invite them to gather with all others who are holding:

   - Card of the same suit, eg hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades;

   - Card of the same value, eg all the 4's get together, all the Kings get together, etc;

   - An odd (or even) card; or

   - The same (or different) colour card.

Variations

- Gather with two, three or four other people so that the value of your cards forms a straight, eg 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or Jack, Queen, King, Ace.
- Invite people to form into groups of five, to form the best poker hand.

Reflection

- Using this strategy, did you find it easier or more comfortable to find a partner/group?
- Why do humans seek out people they know more often than those they do not?
- Thinking of your own experience, describe a time when you intentionally chose to seek out someone you did not know or has nothing in common with.

SCAN ME

THUMB-WRESTLING IN STEREO

Fun variation of the classic thumb-wrestling contest.

Benefits
- Friendly competition
- Highly-interactive
- Triggers spontaneous laughter
- Applies critical-thinking

People 2+

Time 1-2 mins

Instructions

1. Form partners.
2. Instruct each person to extend both their left and right hands and to curl their fingers inside the matching palms of their partner.
3. Starting with opposing thumbs side-by-side, each person aims to pin their partner's thumb under their own thumb first.
4. Best of five rounds wins.
5. Swap partners and repeat.

Video Tutorial

Variations

- Play with three or four people, all curling their fingers into one big clump of palm propinquity.
- Form a circle of thumb-wrestling holds, where every second person crosses their arms in front of themselves to grab their neighbour's matching hands. Once both thumbs of an individual have been pinned, they are eliminated and the circle re-joins. Continue until the Thumb-Wrestling Champion of the World is crowned.

Reflection

- What did you notice playing this classic game with two hands, rather than just one?
- What strategies did you employ to successfully pin your partner's thumb under your own?
- When your thumb was pinned, what was your immediate response, and why?

SCAN ME

TRAIN STATION GREETINGS

Chaotic, interactive game that inspires slow-motion moves.

Benefits
- Very playful & fun
- Highly-interactive
- Inspires creativity
- Builds trust

People 15+

Time 1-2 mins

Instructions

1. Form into pairs.
2. Spread your group throughout a wide, open area, requesting that partners position themselves a long distance away from one another.
3. By demonstration with a volunteer, act out a slow-motion scene involving the two of you greeting each other from a distance.
4. You approach one another slowly until approximately 2 metres (7') apart.
5. Then suddenly, you realise that you have mistaken the identity of this person.
6. Swiftly, you look away and spy another person to repeat the whole greeting-from-afar process again.
7. Continue play for 1 to 2 minutes.

Video Tutorial

Variations

- As above, completely silent, as if it was a silent movie.
- Alter the states in which people greet each other – fast-motion, sleepy-motion, drunken-motion, short-sighted (regular speed,) etc.

Reflection

- Did you feel silly playing this game? Why?
- Is it okay to behave in a silly manner sometimes?
- What sort of atmosphere do you or a group need to behave this way?

SCAN ME

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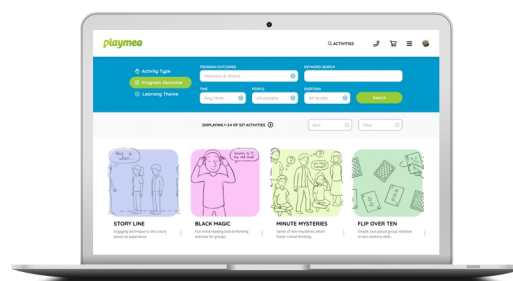
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About the Author

playmeo's Founder

Mark Collard is one of the most respected and experienced experiential trainers and consultants in the world.

Based in Australia, he is the founder and director of playmeo, a small professional development company that creates training workshops and resources that help people connect.

He is best known for his remarkably fun **training workshops**, interactive **keynote presentations** and his five **best-selling activity books** including No Props No No Props No Problem (2018,) Serious Fun (2014) and Count Me In (2008.)
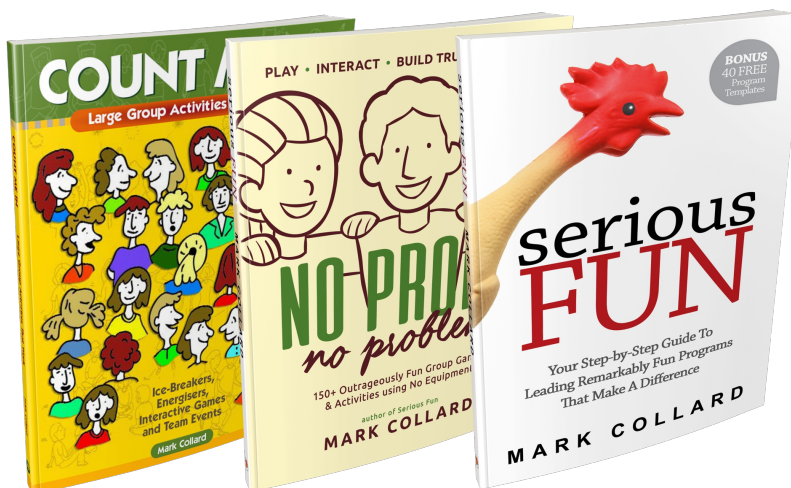
At A Glance

Over the course of his **31+ year career**, he has delivered more than **2,000 program days** and presentations which have **helped 100,000+ people** have fun and connect meaningfully with others in **11 countries** around the world (translated in **4 languages**.)

He has written **5 books** and leverages a massive **repertoire of 800+ fun group games** & activities to exceed his client's expectations.

He has produced **360+ video tutorials** (which have attracted more than **11 million views**), worn-out **3 rubber chickens**, formed over **5,000 circles** and spent **5 months** of his life in an aeroplane crisscrossing the globe to travel and find his groups.

Also by the Author

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