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# ICE-BREAKERS, EXPECTATIONS AND GROUND RULES

This sheet provides an explanation and examples of ice-breakers, expectations, ground rules, and energizers. Although time consuming for short training programmes, acknowledging participants expectations, creating familiarity through ice-breakers and establishing respectful ground rules are vital for creating an atmosphere conducive for learning.

## ICE-BREAKERS

Ice-breakers are short activities (can be from 5 – 20 min) that allow participants to get to know one another. Ice-breakers are essential at the start of the training process to begin the process of breaking down boundaries and helping participants relax and open themselves us to learning.Ice-breakers are essential for relieving the initial tension that is to be expected among a new group of people and help the participants play and learn together and set the stage for continued training together.

By ‘warming up’ the group with enjoyable ice-breakers or energizers, facilitators help participants relax, be more responsive, and participate more positively.

**First Job -** Have participants introduce themselves, sharing their name and something they learned from their first job that has helped them in their current role.

**Developing Yourself -** Have each person introduce himself or herself and share one action they have recently taken to improve or further educate themselves related to the topic of the training. This can be done as a group or in small teams.

**Piece of the Puzzle -** Facilitator should cut a puzzle out of poster paper ahead of time. (There should be one piece for each member of the group.) Have participants decorate their piece to represent who they are and what they feel they can contribute to the group. Once participants are done, have them share what they have on their piece. Participants should then assemble the puzzle. Facilitator should initiate a discussion on the power of everyone coming together, how much more of an impact a put together puzzle can have, than separate pieces, and how a final product could not be reached without a contribution from every piece of the puzzle.

**Brain Teaser -** Use a quiz as an ice-breaker. Ask questions of common knowledge about any topic, or a number of topics. There should be both easy and difficult questions. Ask members to answer individually, and then give them a few minutes to work in small groups to finish answering the questions. The groups should be able to answer more questions than any one individual. This is a good demonstration of synergy and can lead into a discussion of the importance of teamwork. Sample questions:

* What are the names of the planets, starting from the one closest to the sun?
* What are the five most populous countries in the world?
* What are the five least populated countries in Africa?
* What are the five most commonly spoken languages in the world?

**Globe Trotter** – Define a space (even outdoors) which will represent the globe/the world, the facilitator stands in the “globe” where the training is located. The facilitator then asks a geographical question, such as “Where are you born?” The participants physically move to their birthplace in relation to where the facilitator is standing. It helps participants talk to each other to see where they are located and if it is in the same region or area as they are. Repeat with more questions. Examples include:

* Where was your favorite workplace?
* Where have you always dreamed of traveling to?

**Travel Game -** Give people a minute or two to think of three clues that describe, but don’t give away, either the country they are from (if different from the one you’re in) or their favorite foreign place they have visited or dream of visiting. When ready, each person gives their name and their three clues, and the rest of the group guesses where in the world they are describing. Give each person a minute or two to explain what they like best about their favorite place in the world. Start with yourself so they have an example.

If you want participants on their feet and moving, require that one clue be a physical motion like swimming, hiking, golfing, etc. This clue may include verbal help or not. You choose. Debrief by asking for reactions from the group and asking if anybody has a question for another participant. You will have listened carefully to the introductions. If somebody has chosen a place related to your topic, use that place as a transition to your first session or activity.

**Guess Who -** Prior to the session, have each participant complete and return to you a survey with answers to five-to-seven questions about him or herself. For example:

* Favorite type of food
* Last movie you saw
* Last book you read
* Where you would love to visit
* Favorite activity

During the session, read the clues and have the rest of the class guess which person is being described.

**Have You Ever -** In two facing lines, tape small pieces of paper to mark spots for people to stand on. If you have 20 people, make 19 spots. Leave enough room between the lines for plenty of movement. The person without a spot stands in the middle and asks a question. “Have you ever eaten a kiwi?” Anyone who can say, “Yes”, must then leave their space and find a new one. They can’t stay in the same spot or move to a spot immediately to their left or right. Whoever is left without a spot now asks the next question. As a moderator of the game, don’t be afraid to “accidentally” not find a spot and be in the middle. In doing so, you can change the tone of the game to more serious questions or more humorous questions, depending on the group dynamic.

## EXPECTATIONS / PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK EXERCISES

Prior (via email, webinar or survey), or at the beginning of a training programme (latest after introductions/ice-breakers), participants should be given an opportunity to speak about their expectations for the training and to state any concerns they would like to have addressed. Facilitators should assess which expectations are likely to be met in the course of the training and which ones may go beyond its scope, explaining what will happen during the training sessions.

Some activities aim to help the facilitator gauge the expectations of participants about the training and can help gather information on individual or collective understanding and experience with the topic of the training. Similar to a pre-test questionnaire or survey, this information is important for informing facilitators how and what content to deliver ensuring relevant information is covered in the sessions and time is not wasted on basic or irrelevant topics.

At the end of the training, a review of these initial expectations should be part of the evaluation.

**Questions -** Have each person write a question they want answered in the training on a sticky note or piece of paper. Have them introduce themselves and their question or alternatively (if introductions have already been done), participants could post their question so they are all together on a wall chart. In plenary, review all the questions and try to group them. During or at the end of training, ask the group to answer the questions.

**Challenges and Objectives -** Divide the class into small teams. Instruct teams to identify their challenges in the topic and their objectives for the training. Post work on flip charts. Have them introduce their team and share their work with the rest of the class.

**I Noticed -** An activity for the second or third day of a training, have each individual share one thing he or she has learned since the last session that they know they will use in their current role.

**Something New -** On the second day of training, ask each person to share one thing they learned about another participant on the previous day. Have the rest of the group try to guess who is being described.

**Learning from Experience -** Have participants introduce themselves and explain one thing they have learned (the hard way) about the topic you are covering. Post their “lessons learned” on a flip chart. Refer to them throughout the training.

## GROUND RULES

At the beginning of a training session, the group needs to identify and agree upon ground rules or guidelines for its work. The facilitator should ensure that certain common rules are included. An especially important rule in a workshop dealing with sensitive issues is to respect all participants’ privacy and confidentiality; it should be made clear that no one is allowed to share personal information about other participants outside the group.

**Ground Rule Setting Exercises**

Individual – Hand red paper to each participant and ask them to write their preferred ground rule (one per paper). Ask them to stick it on the wall near the entrance of the training room. While sticking it, cluster their responses and read them to the group for discussion. Leave only those agreed upon by all.

Small Group - Divide everyone into small groups and provide with each with coloured paper. Ask them to write down the rules they would like followed during the training. Bring everyone together and have each group share.

Plenary - Ask all participants to provide rules they would like followed during the training. Write these down on a flipchart and post somewhere visible. Discuss/add any rules as required.

Reverse psychology – similar to individual, ask all participants to write down ideas that would ruin a training. The facilitator in advance writes on a sticker “What NOT to do”, displays it face down on the designated area. Once all participants have stuck their ideas on that area, the facilitator flips the “What NOT to do” sticker.

Examples of common ground rules are:

* Respect each other, even when you disagree.
* Use sentences that begin with ‘I’ when sharing values and feelings (as opposed to ‘you’).
* Agree to participate actively.
* Have the right not to participate in an activity that makes you feel uncomfortable.
* Listen to what other people say without interrupting them.
* Not using ‘put-downs’ (i.e., snubbing or humiliating people on purpose).
* Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses — they can be as disrespectful as words.
* Respect confidentiality.
* Be on time for sessions.
* Turn off cell phones.
* Do not use laptops or tablets

It is very helpful to post the ground rules somewhere visible during the entire course of a class or workshop. The facilitator can challenge the participants on the ground rules early and often. If the facilitator does not set a tone of strict adherence (and complying with them him or herself) to the items early in the process, it may become impossible to enforce them later.

If a particular ground rule is routinely broken, the facilitator can bounce it back to the participants. A fruitful discussion can often arise from a close examination of why the participants are not adhering to particular items. Ground rules can be revisited occasionally, and if time allows, the facilitator can ask whether the participants would like to add any new item.

## ENERGIZERS

Energizers are usually used to begin a session on a positive note or to ‘recharge’ if the group’s energy seems to be low. Some groups begin with a simple stretching exercise to get warmed up. At other times, short, fun activities may be introduced. Energizers can be any activity used to wake up the participants (especially after lunch!). Even when people are interested and concerned about the subject being covered, they can get tired and sleepy. Energizers give people a quick break and may add some humour, contributing to a positive group spirit.

It is preferable to combine energizers with a learning component (see *7. Informal level two evaluation activities* in 1.Guidance and Evaluation).

**It's raining, It’s pouring! -** The group is going to make rain! Here’s how! The leaders explain that through an ancient series of movements, the gods would recreate the sounds of rain hoping for a plentiful crop and future growth. The group will recreate this activity by doing five simple things in sequence:

* Have the group rub their hands together
* Have half the group snap their fingers slowly
* Have the other half begin snapping their fingers quickly
* Have the group lightly slap their thighs
* Finally have them pound their chests
* Now, put all of this together!

**Line ups -** You can use this general idea with many options. The idea is for the group to line up in a particular order without speaking. Speed and safety are key! Try any of these:

* Birthday line-up
* Timeline line-up (by who has been working in the humanitarian field longest, to shortest length of time.)
* Number of siblings
* Who lives nearest and farthest from this point

Be sure to move any obstacles and watch that participants are safe! Variation: if you are outdoors, have the participants blindfolded.

**Knot Us!** - Have the group come together in a circle, as closely as possible, extending their arms into the circle. Each person takes the hands of two different people (that are not standing next to you) until each person is connected to two other participants. Now the fun begins! Without letting go of any hands, the group needs to untangle the knot so that everyone is facing the same direction in the original circle. Be sure to watch for obstacles in the room!

**Sit down if -** Good for larger groups, this one starts with everyone in the group standing up. The facilitator then reads a statement and all those to whom it applies sits down (eg Sit down if you have eaten chocolate today). The last one standing is the winner!

* Sit down if you have eaten chocolate today
* Sit down if you are wearing purple
* Sit down if you were born in September
* Sit down if you have blue eyes
* Sit down if you are the youngest child
* You have broken a bone
* Gone for two weeks without a shower
* Can speak more than two languages