Icebreakers and Introductions

The first day of a course is essential to the success of the course. It is important to start the course on a positive note by making sure all of the participants feel comfortable and get to know each other as soon as possible. The activities the trainer or facilitator uses at the beginning of a course to help the participants get to know each other are known as icebreakers or introductions. Here are a number of icebreakers and introductions you can use.

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Unique Characteristics - Even if the participants already know each other, the clinical trainer must get to know them. Instead of asking participants to say their names, the trainer can divide the group into pairs and give participants a few minutes to interview each other. Then, each participant should introduce their partners by name and to share at least two unique characteristics about them.

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Your Favorite Things - The trainer divides the group into pairs and ask participants to tell each other their favorite food or name the animal they feel best describes them and why. This information is shared with the group when participants introduce their partners.

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Ball Toss - Participants and the clinical trainer form a circle and toss a soft ball around the circle. Participants state their names as they catch the ball. After a few minutes, when they catch the ball, they call out the name of the person who tossed it to them. This activity can also be used throughout the course by substituting a quick information exchange for people’s names. For example, the clinical trainer may ask, “What are the indications for IUD use?” The ball is tossed around the circle and participants call out a different indication as they catch the ball.

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Three Questions - Participants write down three questions and find someone in the room they do not know well. Each participant then asks questions of the other. The participants then introduce their partners to the group by sharing both the questions and the answers.

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Nametags - The trainer prepares a nametag for each participant and places the nametags in a box. Each participant picks a nametag from the box. Participants locate the person whose nametag they drew and introduce themselves. (This is especially useful for larger groups—20 or more.)
Find the Missing Piece - The facilitator prepares pieces of paper, enough for everybody in the group. The papers include words that are split into two, for example:

COCOA BUTTER
MILE STONE
ICE CREAM

Each person picks one piece of paper and then begins to look for the person who has the matching word. When the participant has found her/his match, s/he should to know the other person. Then, they will be asked to introduce one another to the rest of the group.

An alternative is to use words that are opposites. For example:

BLACK WHITE
UP DOWN
LEFT RIGHT
HOT COLD

Fact or Fiction - Each person writes down four facts about themselves, one of which is not true. Each person takes turns reading their list aloud and the rest of the group writes down the one they think is not true. When all are done reading the lists aloud, the first person reads their list again and identifies the fact, which is not true. The group should compare their written responses with the correct answers.

Everyone's a Liar -

Step 1: The facilitator writes three statements on the board. Two statements are true, and one is a lie. Example:

I have been training for 10 years.
I have a pet dog called, "Dog."
I lived in Switzerland for a year.

Step 2: The participants ask "lie detector" questions to get further information, in order to determine which statement is false.

Training - Where have you conducted training? What have you taught? What year did you start?
Pet - How old is Dog? What does Dog eat? Where do you keep Dog?
Switzerland - Where did you live in Switzerland? What language was spoken in that part of Switzerland?
Step 3: Participants vote on which statement is a lie. The facilitator reveals which are truths and which are lies.

Place participants in small groups (3 or 4 works well). Small groups repeat steps 1 - 3. Have participants introduce each other to the large group.

What's the Question?

Step 1: The facilitator writes some facts on the board. Example:

- Purple
- 16 months
- Kenya

Step 2: Participants try to think of the question that matches each fact.

- Purple - What's your favorite color? What color is your car? What color is your favorite clothing?
- 16 months - How long have you lived in this city? How old is your child? How long have you been married?
- Kenya - Where were you born? Where have you worked? Where are you going on vacation?

Step 3: When participants have discovered all of the questions, place them in small groups (3 - 4). Repeat steps 1 and 2. Have participants introduce each other to the large group.

Nonsense Name Game - Introduce yourself to the group with a sentence based upon the first letter of your name. Examples:

- "I'm kooky Katherine. I like kissing kittens."
  (Pattern: I'm ADJECTIVE NAME. I like ACTION-ing NOUN)

- "I'm darling Dorothy. I like dancing daily."

Participants introduce themselves to the group with their sentences.

- "I'm generous George. I like giving gifts."

Name Chain - You can play "Name Chain" as a followup to the “Nonsense Name Game.”
Introduce yourself and the person to your right.

“I'm kooky Katherine. This is darling Dorothy.”

The person to your right repeats previous introductions and introduces the person to their right.

“She's kooky Katherine. I'm darling Dorothy. He's generous George.”

Continue with the next person to the right, until all names have been repeated. Challenge volunteers to rhyme off all names quickly!

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**The Magic Wand** - Ask the participants what they would do if they just found a magic wand that allows them to change three work-related activities. They can change anything they want. How would they change themselves, their job, their supervisor, those they work with, an important project, etc.? Have the participants discuss why it is important to make the change. Another variation is to have them discuss what they would change if they become the supervisor for a month. This activity helps them to learn about others’ desires and frustrations.

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**Marooned** - Divide the participants into teams. Ask the participants to pretend they are marooned on an island. Have the teams choose five (the trainer can use a different number, such as seven, depending upon the size of each team) items they would have brought with them if they knew there was a chance that they might be stranded. Note that they are only allowed five items per team, not per person. Ask each team to write their items on a flipchart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group. This activity helps them to learn about other's values and problem solving styles and promotes teamwork.

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**The Interview** - Break the group into two person teams (have them pick a partner that they know the least about). Have them interview each other for about 20 minutes (You can also prepare questions ahead of time or provide general guidelines for the interview). They need to learn about what each other likes about their job, past jobs, family life, hobbies, favorite sport, etc. After the interviews, have each person introduce their partner to the group. This exercise helps them learn about each other.

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**Finish the Sentence** - Ask each person to complete one of these sentences (or something similar):

- The best job I ever had was...
• The worst project I ever worked on was...
• The riskiest thing I ever did was...

When starting a course and you want everyone to introduce themselves, you can have them complete "I am in this course because..."

You can also move on to a new subject by asking a leading question. For example, if you are training trainers, "The one time I felt most stressed because I did not plan was ..."

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**Ball of Yarn** - For this exercise the trainer will need a ball of yarn. The trainer should say her/his name and an interesting fact about her/himself. Then, holding the end of the yarn, toss the ball to a participant. The participant will say his/her name and an interesting fact, then, holding on to part of the yarn, toss the ball to another participant. By the time everyone has spoken, there will be a large web of yarn. This activity can also be used as a review tool - each participant says something about the topic, then tosses the yarn.

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**What Do We Have in Common?** - Split the participants into pairs. Each pair will have 30 seconds to think of five things they have in common. At the end of the 30 seconds, put two pairs together and give the group a minute to find something all four participants have in common. Finally, each group can present the list of things they have in common.

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**Tell Us About Yourself** - Pass around a bag of candy. Tell the participants to take as many as they want. Once all the participants have candy, tell them that for each candy they took they have to say one thing about themselves. For instance, if a participant took 10 candies, they would have to say 10 things about themselves.

*Note:* You can also pass around a roll of toilet tissue. Ask the participants to take as many individual sheets or squares as they think they might need (do not tell them the purpose of the sheets).