

Ice Breakers and Energisers for use in Sikh Youth Camps, Meetings and Forums

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2 Icebreakers

2.1 Introduction

Ice Breakers can be an effective way of starting a training session or team-building event. As interactive and often fun sessions run before the main proceedings, they help people get to know each other and buy into the purpose of the event.

But have you ever been to an event when the ice breaker session went badly? Just as a great ice breaker session can smooth the way for a great event, so a bad ice breaker session can be a recipe for disaster. A bad ice breaker session is at best simply a waste of time, or worse an embarrassment for everyone involved.

As a facilitator, the secret of a successful icebreaking session is to keep it simple: Design the session with specific objectives in mind and make sure the session is appropriate and comfortable for everyone involved.

If an ice breaker session is well-designed and well-facilitated, it can really help get things off to a great start. By getting to know each other, getting to know the facilitators and learning about the objectives of the event, people can become more engaged in the proceedings and so contribute more effectively towards a successful outcome.

2.2 When to use an ice breaker?

As the name suggests, an ice breaker session is designed to “break the ice” at an event or meeting. The technique is often used when people who do not usually work together, or may not know each other at all, meet for a specific, common purpose.

Consider using an ice breaker when:

- Participants come from different backgrounds;
- People need to bond quickly so as to work towards a common goal;
- Your team is newly formed;
- The topics you are discussing are new or unfamiliar to many people involved; or
- As facilitator you need to get to know participants and have them know you better.

2.3 What is the Ice?

When designing your ice breaker, think about the “ice” that needs to be broken.

If you are bringing together liked-minded people, the “ice” may simply reflect the fact that people have not yet met.

If you are bringing together people of different grades and levels in your organization for an open discussion, the “ice” may come from the difference in status between participants.

If you are bringing together people of different backgrounds, cultures and outlooks for work within your community, then the “ice” may come from people’s perceptions of each other.

You’ll need to handle these differences sensitively. Only focus on what’s important to your event.

And as you move on to design and facilitate the event, it’s always best to focus on similarities (rather than differences), such as a shared interest in the event’s outcome.

2.4 Designing or selecting an ice breaker

The key to a successful ice breaker is to make sure the ice breaker is specifically focused on meeting your objectives and appropriate to the group of people involved.

Once you have established what the “ice” is, the next step is to clarify the specific objectives for your ice breaker session.

For example, when meeting to solve problems at work, the ice breaker objectives may be:

“To establish a productive working environment for today’s event with good participation from everyone involved, irrespective of their level or job role in the organization.”

With clear objectives, you can start to design the session. Ask yourself questions about how you will meet your objectives. For example:

- *“How will people become comfortable with contributing?”*
- *“How will you establish a level playing field for people with different levels and jobs?”*
- *“How will you create a common sense of purpose?...” and so on.*

These questions can be used as a check list once you have designed the ice breaker session:

“Will this ice breaker session help people feel comfortable... establish a level playing field... etc”

As a further check, you should also ask yourself how each person is likely to react to the session. Will participants feel comfortable? Will they feel the session is appropriate and worthwhile?

2.5 Types of ice breakers

There are many types of ice breakers, each suited to different types of objectives. Here we look at a few of the more popular types of ice breakers and how they can be used.

2.5.1 Fun ice breakers / Energizers

Serve only to provide a bit of fun or regain the attention of a group of people after a break

2.5.2 Introductory ice breakers

Introductory ice breakers are used to introduce participants to each other and to facilitate conversation amongst the participants.

2.5.3 Team building ice breakers

Team-building ice breakers are used to bring together individuals who are in the early stages of team building. This can help the people start working together more cohesively towards shared goals or plans.

2.5.4 Project focused ice breakers

This type of ice breaker is used when the group of people coming together to perform a task are already familiar with one another and so the ice breaking is focused around activities and not people.

3 Ice breaker examples

3.1 Fun ice breakers / Energizers

These can be used as a way of breaking up an exercise or moving from one exercise to another or to focus people after they have come back from a break

3.1.1 Shoulder massage

When people are e.g. in a circle or in pairs, get everyone to give the person next to them a shoulder and neck massage

3.1.2 Hugs

When people are in small groups get everyone to hug each other which is a heart centred meditation. It's a great feeling!

3.1.3 Quick stretching and pranayama

Get people to do some stretching exercises while standing up and deep breathing (pranayama)

3.1.4 Data Processing

Ask participants to line up according to:

- Alphabetical according to favorite food
- Shoe size
- Birthdays
- Number of letters in last name

3.1.5 Silent date of birth line up game

Ask participants to line up according to their birthday from January to December in order without speaking

3.1.6 Famous person game

People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. Person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous place instead of famous person.

3.1.7 Knots of people

This is really fun activity. Divide the group into teams of 8 to 12 members. Have each person joins right hands with another person in the group, but it has to be someone who is NOT standing immediately to the left or right. Then have each person join left hands with another person in the group, but it has to be someone who is NOT standing immediately to the left or right and someone other than before.

Now the groups have to untangle themselves without letting go of hands. They may have to loosen their grips a little to allow for twisting and turning. They

may have to step over or under other people. The first group to untangle their knot is the winner.

SPECIAL NOTE: There are four possible solutions to the knot.

1. One large circle with people facing either direction.
2. Two interlocking circles.
3. A figure eight.
4. A circle within a circle.

3.1.8 Who Am I?

For this activity you will need one sticky note per person. On each note write the name of a celebrity, political figure, cartoon character, book character, etc. You can choose one category or mix them up. Use a different person for each note.

Place a sticky note on the back (or forehead) of each participant. The participants are to figure out who they are, but can only do so in the following manner. Find a partner and read each other's sticky notes. You may ask the other person three questions to which there are yes or no answers.

Once your questions have been asked and answered, make a guess as to your identity. If you are correct, move the sticky note to your chest and you become a "consultant" who gives clues to those still trying to figure out their identities. If you are not correct, find a new partner and repeat the process.

SPECIAL NOTE: Be sure to choose characters that are appropriate to the age of the participants to avoid "generation gap frustration."

3.1.9 Animal scramble

There is some preparation for this activity. On a slip of paper, write the name of an animal that makes an obvious noise. Create five to ten slips for each animal.

Give each participant a slip of paper, but tell them to keep their animal a secret. The participants are to find the rest of their kind, but there is no talking. So how do they find the others? They have to make the noise of the animal. Once two of the same kind have found each other, they stay together to find more. Continue until all of the like animals have created one big group.

3.1.10 Confusion

Great high energy game to help participants begin to feel more comfortable in new group. Give each participant a sheet with various tasks and ask them to complete it when you say, "GO!" Here is a sample:

- Get a male to do five push-ups and sign here
- Stand on one foot with your arms outstretched for 20 seconds.

- Have someone time you and sign here
- Leap frog over someone 5 times
- Get someone to whisper the pledge of allegiance and sign here
- Play “Ring around the Rosy” with two other people and have them sign here
- Get a female to recite a nursery rhyme
- Shake hands with someone you do not know and continue holding hands while debating the merits of your favorite ice cream flavor
- Have someone teach you a dance step (even if they make it up)

First person to complete the entire sheet wins.

3.1.11 Hum that tune

Each person in the group is given a small piece of paper with the name of a nursery rhyme or other song written on the paper. (i.e. “Row, row, row your boat,” “Rock-a-bye baby,” etc.) All of the people who are given the song must hum that tune and find everyone else singing the song. They then form a group.

3.1.12 Solemn and silent

The instructor explains that this exercise will take self control. Members pair back to back. On the count of three, everyone must face their partner, look each other in the eyes, and then try to remain solemn and serious. No speaking! The first to smile or laugh must sit down. All who remain standing then take a new partner and the activity continues until only one person has not smiled or laughed. (Second round of playing can involve two teams competing to outlast each other.) If you get a pair at the end who are both keeping a straight face, the rest of the group can act as hecklers to disrupt them.

3.1.13 Dress the mummy

Set up teams with 2-4 players on each team. One person on each team will be the mummy and each team will be given 2 rolls of toilet paper. They will have 5 minutes to complete the game. The team players are to circle around the mummy and pass the toilet paper to each other while wrapping the mummy in it. The leader of the group will be the judge and decide which team has created the best mummy design.

3.2 Introductory ice breakers

When participants are meeting for the first time, start with an icebreaker that helps everyone to learn names and personal/professional information.

3.2.1 Introduce myself

Participants introduce themselves and tell why they are there. Variations: Participants tell where they first heard about the class, how they became interested in the subject, their occupations, home town, favorite television program, or the best book they have read in the last year.

3.2.2 Introduce another

Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about him/herself to the other, sometimes with specific instructions to share a certain piece of information. For example, "The one thing I am particularly proud of is..." After five minutes, the participants introduce the other person to the rest of the class.

3.2.3 I've done something you haven't done

Have each person introduce themselves and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has done. If someone else has also done it, the student must state something else until he/she finds something that no one else has done.

3.2.4 Beach ball introduction

Get a large inflatable beach ball and use a permanent fine or medium point marker to write all of the following questions on it. This will take quite some time, but you can do it some night in front of the television. The resulting tool is an "icebreaker ball" that you can use for years to come.

You can use it in a large group and throw it around. The person who catches it has to answer the question touching their left thumb. They then say their name, answer the question and throw it to someone else.

You may also choose to use these questions as conversation starters in other types of games. The following questions are simply suggestions. You can add more serious or in depth questions, depending upon the level of ice breaker you want this to be:

- If you talking your sleep, what would you say?
- What is the first thing you do when you get out of bed?
- If Satan lived on earth, what would he be called by his friends?
- What is your favorite movie line?
- Approximately how many jokes do you know by heart? and tell us your favorite.
- What do Martians do for fun on Mars?
- If you were to treat yourself to the "finer things" what would you treat yourself to?
- If your life was being turned into a feature length movie, who would play you? And why?
- Where is the worst place you've ever been stuck waiting?
- What is your "15 minutes" of fame?
- If you were invisible where would you go?
- What one object in your home are you most embarrassed about owning?
- Give three adjectives to describe the perfect kiss?
- What is your greatest addiction?
- What song reminds you most of a past or present relationship?
- Approximately, how many books have you read in the past year (excluding school book)?

- Fill in the blank: When I dance, I look like _____ .
- What is the longest work you can think of?
- Who is one person you wish you never met?
- If you could be a famous actor, writer, athlete, artist or musician, which would you choose and why?
- What is the worst occupation in the world?
- What two television channels do you watch most frequently?
- What is your greatest phobia?
- If you were given a canvas and water colors, what would you paint?
- What celebrity irritates you the most?
- Other than the standard items (credit cards, money, driver's license, etc.), what interesting items do you keep in your wallet/purse?
- What is the meanest thing you can say to somebody?
- If you owned an enormous yacht, what would you name it?
- What is your life long dream?

3.2.5 Find someone

Each person writes on a blank card one to three statements, such as favorite color, interest, hobby, or vacations and what they are wearing (later item required). Pass out cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce themselves.

3.2.6 How do you feel?

Ask the students to write down words or phrases that describe their feelings on the first day of class. Then ask them to write down what they think you as the teacher are feeling this first day of class. Note the parallels. Briefly comment on your feelings and then discuss the joint student/teacher responsibilities for learning in the course.

3.2.7 Alliterative Introductions

1. Introduce yourself to the group with an alliterative sentence based upon the first letter of your name. Example:
"I'm kooky Katherine. I like kissing kittens."
 (Pattern: I'm ADJECTIVE NAME. I like ACTION-ing NOUN)
2. Participants introduce themselves to the group with alliterative sentences.
"I'm vivacious Vesna. I like volunteering vodka."
"I'm generous George. I like giving gifts."

3.2.8 Common ground

This works best for small groups or for each small group sitting together as a team (4-6 learners). Give the group a specific time (perhaps 5 minutes) to write a list of everything they all have in common. Tell them to avoid the obvious ("we're all taking this course"). When time is up, ask each group how many items they have listed. For fun, ask them to announce some of the most interesting items.

3.3 Team building ice breakers

3.3.1 The human web

This ice breaker focuses on how people in the group inter-relate and depend on each other.

The facilitator begins with a ball of yarn. Keeping one end, pass the ball to one of the participants, and the person to introduce him- or her-self and their role in the organization. Once this person has made their introduction, ask him or her to pass the ball of yarn on to another person in the group. The person handing over the ball must describe how he/she relates (or expects to relate) to the other person. The process continues until everyone is introduced.

To emphasize the interdependencies amongst the team, the facilitator then pulls on the starting thread and everyone's hand should move.

3.3.2 Everyone's a liar

This is a complete ice breaker in itself required e.g. a group e.g. 50 people to be split up into groups of 5 each.

1. Facilitator writes three statements on the board. Two statements are true, and one is a lie. Example:
I have been teaching for 10 years.
I have a pet newt called, "Isaac Newt."
I lived in Switzerland for a year.
2. Participants ask "lie detector" questions to get further information, in order to determine which statement is false. For example:
Teaching - *Where have you taught? What have you taught? What year did you start?*
Pet - *How old is Isaac Newt? What does Isaac eat? Where do you keep Isaac?*
Switzerland - *Where did you live in Switzerland? What language was spoken in that part of Switzerland?*
3. Participants vote on which statement is a lie. Reveal which are truths and which are lies.
4. Place participants in small groups (3 or 4 works well). Small groups repeat steps 1 - 3.
5. Have participants introduce each other to the large group.

3.3.3 Me too game

This also works best for small groups or for each small group sitting together as a team (4-6 learners). Everyone in the group gets 10 pennies/toothpicks/scrap of papers, etc. The first student states something he/she has done (e.g. water skiing). Everyone else who has done the same thing admits it and puts one penny in the middle of the table. Then the second person states something

(e.g. I have eaten frogs' legs). Everyone who has done it puts another penny in the center. Continue until someone has run out of pennies.

3.3.4 Quick problem solver

Ask participants to work in small groups. Create a simple problem scenario for them to work on in a short time. Once the group have analyzed the problem and prepared their feedback, ask each group in turn to present their analysis and solutions to the wider group. Choose a fairly simple scenario that everyone can contribute to. The idea is not to solve a real problem but to “warm up” the group for further interaction or problem solving later in the event. The group will also learn each other’s styles of problem-solving and interaction.

The format of this ice breaker would be

1. split people in to groups of 4-6 people
2. ask them to provide answers to a statement such as:

“list the top 10 events which have had the greatest impact on human history in the last 100 years”

“List the top 10 most popular cartoons”

“List the top 5 most famous scientists in human history”

3.3.5 Chatter bugs

This quick moving ice breaker allows participants to get to know everyone in the group through brief, mini-chats with each other. Topics are of a personal nature and are predetermined by the trainer.

1. Ask participants to pair up with a buddy and introduce themselves. Total time for this activity can vary and can be decided by the trainer. (The trainer can serve as a participant if there are an unequal amount of people.)
2. Have participants select one of two categories - Ladybugs or Lightening Bugs. (The pair has to consist of one or the other. They both can’t choose the same thing).
3. Have all Ladybugs form a circle with their backs toward the center of the circle.
4. Have all Lightening Bugs face their partners in a larger circle outside the Ladybugs.
5. Once everyone is in place, issue “Chatter Bugs” handouts with suggestions to chat about. (See suggestions below).
6. Have all participants rotate 1 person to their right to face a new partner.
7. Call out a “Chatter Bugs” topic from the handout and instruct participants to begin chatting about it with their new partner. Each person gets 30 seconds to respond.
8. After 1 minute, blow your whistle to single time is up. Instruct participants to rotate 1 person to their right to face another new partner. Call out a

different topic and have participants repeat the process until they have completely gone around the circle and met everyone.

9. Allow a few minutes of free time at the end of the activity for participants to mingle and discuss the things they didn't get to cover with people they'd like to get to know better.

Variations:

10. If the training room you are working with is too small to form large circles, ask participants to form rows of equal numbers and stand in front of each other. You can have various sets of rows throughout the room and have them switch groups once they've met each other. Example: Have 5 people line up in the front of the room with 5 other people in front of them. When the time is up, have them rotate to the right. The person on the end will have to go to the opposite end of the line to meet a new partner.
11. Create a "Chatter Bugs" handout that is themed or specifically geared toward your training or social function.
12. Ask your partner a question when instructed.
 - a) I think the most important thing about spiritual development is?...
 - b) My favorite television show is...
 - c) My favorite type of music is...
 - d) If I could travel anywhere new I would go to...
 - e) The thing that makes me the happiest is...
 - f) My family...
 - g) The most important thing in my life is...
 - h) For a hobby, I...
 - i) I like or hate technology because...
 - j) I have or would like to have a pet...
 - k) I like to read...
 - l) If I could do anything I wanted, I would...
 - m) My dream car is a...
 - n) My favorite type of food is...
 - o) If I could say whatever I wanted to generations past, I'd say...
 - p) My favorite actor or actress is...
 - q) My best piece of advice is...
 - r) If my car could speak it would say...
 - s) My dream job is...
 - t) In ten years I will be...
 - u) Did I ever tell about the time I...
 - v) If I were a millionaire I would...
 - w) My favorite movie is...
 - x) My favorite place is...
 - y) The craziest thing I ever did was...

3.4 Project based ice breakers

3.4.1 Topic exploration ice breakers

Topic exploration ice breakers can be used to explore the topic at the outset, or perhaps to change pace and re-energize people during the even. This is

useful when people within the group are familiar with one another and so an introduction ice breaker is pointless

3.4.2 Word association

This ice breaker helps people explore the breadth of the area under discussion. Generate a list of words related to the topic of your event or training. For example, in a health and safety workshop, ask participants what words or phrases come to mind relating to "hazardous materials". Participants may suggest: 'danger,' 'corrosive,' 'flammable,' 'warning,' 'skull and crossbones,' etc. Write all suggestions on the board, perhaps clustering by theme. You can use this opportunity to introduce essential terms and discuss the scope (what's in and what's out) of your training or event.

3.4.3 Burning questions

This ice breaker gives each person the opportunity to ask key questions they hope to cover in the event or training. Again you can use this opportunity to discuss key terminology and scope. Be sure to keep the questions and refer back to them as the event progresses and concludes.

3.4.4 Brainstorm

This can be used as an ice breaker or re-energizer during an event. If people are getting bogged down in the detail during problem solving, for example, you can change pace easily by running a quick-fire brainstorming session. If you are looking for answers to customer service problems, try brainstorming how to create problems rather than solve them. This can help people think creatively again and gives the group a boost when energy levels are flagging.