FREE RESOURCE

Ice Breakers

25 Activities That Build Connection

Practical, Ready-to-Use Activities for Recreation Therapy Professionals

BY

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Introduction: Every Great Group Begins with a Connection

Imagine walking into a room filled with people who have never met one another. Some may feel excited. Others may feel nervous, uncertain, or reluctant to participate. Before meaningful interaction can occur, people first need an opportunity to feel comfortable, welcomed, and connected.

That's where ice breakers can make a difference.

Ice breakers are more than simple games or conversation starters. When used intentionally, they help reduce anxiety, encourage participation, build trust, and create an environment where people feel safe engaging with others. Whether you're leading a recreational therapy group, classroom, support group, community program, or team-building activity, a thoughtful ice breaker can help set a positive tone for everything that follows.

This workbook contains **25 practical ice breaker activities** that are easy to prepare, simple to facilitate, and adaptable for a variety of populations and settings. Some activities encourage conversation. Others promote teamwork, creativity, movement, or reflection. Each one is designed to help participants become more comfortable while creating opportunities for meaningful interaction.

As you use these activities, remember that no two groups are alike. Feel free to modify the activities to match the interests, abilities, and needs of the individuals you serve. Often, the best activities are those that become uniquely your own through small adaptations.

Thank you for the important work you do each day. I hope these ideas help you create welcoming environments where participants feel valued, connected, and ready to engage.

Enjoy the activities—and keep making a difference.

Danny W. Pettry II, M.Ed., M.S., LPC, NCC, CTRS-BH

Ice Breaker #1: Two Truths and a Dream

Purpose

- Help participants become acquainted while encouraging conversation and identifying shared interests and future goals.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Invite participants to think of two true statements about themselves.
- Ask each person to share one dream or goal they hope to accomplish in the future.
- After everyone has shared, invite group members to ask one or two positive follow-up questions.
- Encourage participants to discover common interests or similar goals.

Processing Questions

- What did you learn about someone today?
- Did anyone discover a shared interest?
- What dream are you most excited to pursue?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Encourage participants to share dreams they genuinely hope to accomplish. Positive future thinking often creates meaningful conversation.

Ice Breaker #2: Common Ground

Purpose

- Help participants quickly discover similarities and build rapport.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 4–25 participants

Time Required

- 10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Divide participants into pairs.
- Give each pair three minutes to identify at least five things they have in common.
- Encourage participants to think beyond obvious similarities.
- Invite each pair to share one or two interesting discoveries with the group.

Processing Questions

- Which similarity surprised you?
- Was it easier or harder than expected?
- How can discovering common interests strengthen relationships?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Encourage participants to move beyond surface-level answers and discover shared hobbies, values, experiences, or interests.

Ice Breaker #3: Favorite Things

Purpose

- Encourage conversation while helping participants learn about one another's interests.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- List of favorite categories (optional)

Instructions

- Ask participants to share their favorite.

  In example a Favorite: Movie, Book, Vacation, Restaurant , Hobby ,Season , Holiday, Recreational activity

- After each response, invite others to comment if they share the same favorite.

Processing Questions

- Did you discover any shared interests?
- Which answer surprised you?
- What new activity would you like to try because of today's discussion?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Select favorite categories that relate to your group's goals or current treatment themes whenever possible.

Ice Breaker #4: Would You Rather?

Purpose

Promote participation through fun decision-making and group discussion.

Population

Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

Any size

Time Required

10–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

Prepared "Would You Rather?" questions

Instructions

- Read one "Would You Rather?" question aloud.
- Ask participants to choose one option.
- Invite volunteers to explain why they selected their answer.
- Continue with additional questions.

Examples:

- Would you rather visit the mountains or the beach?
- Would you rather travel by train or airplane?
- Would you rather own a kayak or a bicycle?

Processing Questions

- Which question was most difficult?
- Did anyone change your opinion?
- What did you learn about your fellow participants?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Use questions that encourage conversation rather than debate. Keep the atmosphere light, respectful, and enjoyable.

Ice Breaker #5: Find Someone Who...

Purpose

- Increase interaction while encouraging participants to meet and learn about others.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 6–30 participants

Time Required

- 15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

- Create a "Find Someone Who..." worksheet
- Pens or pencils

Instructions

Prepare a worksheet with statements such as:

- Has visited another country. Enjoys fishing. Has a pet. Likes coffee. Can play a musical instrument. Has gone camping. Enjoys gardening. Has read a book this month.

Participants walk around the room finding someone who matches each statement and write that person's name beside it.

Processing Questions

- Which person surprised you the most?
- What new fact did you learn?
- How did this activity help everyone become acquainted?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Remind participants that the goal is conversation—not simply filling in the worksheet. Encourage them to spend a few moments talking with each person they meet before moving on.

Ice Breaker #6: Human Bingo

Purpose

- Encourage participants to interact with multiple group members while discovering shared experiences and interests.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 8–30 participants

Time Required

- 15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

- Human Bingo worksheet
- Pens or pencils

Instructions

- Create and gGive each participant a Human Bingo worksheet.
- Each square contains a statement (e.g., "Has visited another state," "Likes to cook," "Owns a pet.").
- Participants walk around the room finding someone who matches each statement.
- A person's name may only be used once unless otherwise specified.
- Continue until someone completes a row or the activity ends.

Processing Questions

- What interesting things did you learn?
- Which square was the hardest to complete?
- Did you discover anything you had in common with someone new?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Create statements that are appropriate for your specific population and encourage meaningful conversations rather than simple yes-or-no responses.

Ice Breaker #7: My Name, My Story

Purpose

- Help participants introduce themselves while sharing something meaningful about their name or identity.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Ask each participant to introduce themselves.
- Invite them to answer one of the following:
- How did you get your name?
- Do you like your name?
- Is there a nickname you prefer?
- Does your name have a special meaning?
- Encourage respectful listening and curiosity.

Processing Questions

- What surprised you?
- Did anyone have an interesting story?
- Why is learning names important in building relationships?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Remembering and using participants' names helps create a welcoming and supportive group environment.

Ice Breaker #8: Stand If...

Purpose

- Encourage movement while helping participants discover common experiences.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Invite participants to stand if a statement describes them.

Examples:

- Stand if you've been camping.
- Stand if you enjoy coffee.
- Stand if you've traveled outside your state.
- Stand if you enjoy reading.
- Stand if you've ever gone fishing.
- Stand if you have a pet.

After each statement, encourage brief conversation among those standing.

Processing Questions

- Which statement had the most people standing?
- Which one surprised you?
- What did you learn about your group?

Recreation Therapy Tip: For participants with limited mobility, invite them to raise their hand or hold up a card instead of standing.

Ice Breaker #9: The Object Story

Purpose

Encourage storytelling and self-expression while helping participants become acquainted.

Population

Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

4–20 participants

Time Required

15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

Basket of everyday objects

Examples:

- Key , Spoon, Toy Car, Baseball, Coffee mug , Shell , Deck of cards

Instructions

- Ask each participant to select an object.
- Invite them to explain how the object reminds them of a memory, hobby, or meaningful experience.
- Encourage follow-up questions from the group.

Processing Questions

Which story stood out to you?

Did anyone's story remind you of your own experience?

How do everyday objects connect us to important memories?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Objects often trigger memories that participants may not have thought about otherwise, making this an excellent activity for reminiscence and relationship building.

Ice Breaker #10: The Perfect Day

Purpose

- Help participants share personal interests while encouraging imagination and positive conversation.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Ask participants to describe their perfect day.
- Encourage them to include:
- Where they would go
- Who would be with them
- What activities they would enjoy
- What they would eat
- How they would spend the evening
- Invite group members to ask follow-up questions.

Processing Questions

- What activity appeared most often?
- Did anyone inspire you with an idea?
- What small part of your perfect day could you do this week?

Recreation Therapy Tip: This activity naturally identifies participants' leisure interests, making it useful for recreation planning and person-centered programming.

Ice Breaker #11: The Name Challenge

Purpose

- Help participants learn and remember one another's names while improving attention and recall.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 5–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Have everyone stand or sit in a circle.
- The first participant says his or her name.
- The second participant repeats the first person's name and then says his or her own.
- Continue around the circle, with each participant repeating all previous names before adding their own.
- Encourage the group to help one another if someone forgets a name.

Processing Questions

- Was remembering everyone's name easier or harder than expected?
- What helped you remember names?
- Why is using someone's name important?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Name-learning activities help create a welcoming atmosphere and encourage participants to feel recognized and valued.

Ice Breaker #12: Desert Island

Purpose

Encourage creativity while learning about participants' interests and priorities.

Population

Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

3–20 participants

Time Required

10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

Ask participants:

- "If you were stranded on a deserted island and could bring only three non-essential items, what would you choose?"
- Invite each participant to explain why they selected those items.

Processing Questions

- Which item appeared most often?
- Which answer surprised you?
- What do your choices say about what's important to you?

Recreation Therapy Tip

Avoid judging answers. The discussion is more valuable than the "right" response.

Ice Breaker #13: Signature Move

Purpose

Increase energy while encouraging laughter and participation.

Population

Children, Adolescents, Adults

Group Size

5–25 participants

Time Required

10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Invite each participant to introduce themselves.
- Ask them to create a simple movement or gesture that represents them.
- The group repeats the person's name and movement together.
- Continue until everyone has participated.

Processing Questions

- Which movement will you remember?
- How did moving together change the group's energy?
- Why can movement help people feel more comfortable?

Recreation Therapy Tip

Simple movement activities often reduce anxiety and increase engagement without requiring athletic ability.

Ice Breaker #14: One Word

Purpose

- Encourage self-expression while helping participants become acquainted.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Ask participants to describe themselves using only **one word**.
- After sharing the word, invite them to explain why they chose it.

Examples:

- Curious ,Loyal , Adventurous , Creative , Optimistic

Processing Questions

- Why did you choose that word?
- Did anyone choose a similar word?
- If you could choose another word next year, what would it be?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Some participants may struggle to describe themselves. Offer examples or allow extra thinking time.

Ice Breaker #15: Picture This

Purpose

- Encourage conversation through photographs and visual storytelling.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

- Personal cell phone (optional)
- Printed photographs (optional)

Instructions

- Ask participants to share a favorite photo from their phone or a printed picture they brought with them.
- Invite each participant to explain why the photo is meaningful.
- Encourage respectful questions and conversation following each story.

Processing Questions

- Why did you choose that picture?
- What memory does it represent?
- How do photographs help us preserve meaningful experiences?

Recreation Therapy Tip: If participants don't have photos available, invite them to describe a favorite memory instead. The conversation is more important than the image itself.

Ice Breaker #16: This or That?

Purpose

- Encourage participation through fun choices while helping participants discover similarities and differences.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Read two choices aloud.
- Ask participants to select one option.
- Invite volunteers to explain their choice.
- Continue with additional questions.

Examples:

- Coffee or tea? Sunrise or sunset? Mountains or beach? Pizza or tacos? Books or movies? Dogs or cats? Camping or hotel? Board games or video games?

Processing Questions

- Which choice created the most discussion?
- Did you have more in common with others than expected?
- What did you learn about someone else?

Recreation Therapy Tip: There are no right or wrong answers. Keep the discussion positive and encourage everyone to participate.

Ice Breaker #17: What's in Common?

Purpose

- Develop teamwork by encouraging participants to identify shared experiences.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 4–20 participants

Time Required

- 15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Divide participants into groups of 3–5.
- Give each group five minutes to discover as many things as possible they all have in common.
- Encourage them to avoid obvious answers such as clothing or hair color.
- Invite each group to share their list.

Processing Questions

- Which common interest surprised you?
- Was it easier than expected?
- How can shared experiences strengthen a group?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Challenge groups to discover similarities related to hobbies, values, experiences, or recreation interests.

Ice Breaker #18: Pass the Smile

Purpose

- Create a relaxed, positive atmosphere while encouraging eye contact and engagement.

Population

- Children, Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 5–10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

1. Ask participants to stand or sit in a circle.
2. One participant smiles at the person beside them.
3. That participant returns the smile before passing it to the next person.
4. Continue around the circle.
5. Repeat while adding a greeting or compliment.

Processing Questions

- How did the activity affect the mood of the group?
- Why are smiles contagious?
- How can small positive interactions improve someone's day?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Simple activities often have a powerful impact on group comfort and participation.

Ice Breaker #19: My Hidden Talent

Purpose

- Increase confidence while helping participants discover unique strengths.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

- Invite each participant to share one talent, skill, hobby, or interesting fact that many people may not know about them.

Examples:

- Playing an instrument, Gardening, Baking, Speaking another language, Woodworking , Photography
- Encourage follow-up questions from the group.

Processing Questions

- Which talent surprised you?
- What new hobby did you hear about?
- Why is it important to recognize our strengths?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Some participants may struggle to identify strengths. Offer encouragement and examples if needed.

Ice Breaker #20: Memory Lane

Purpose

- Encourage conversation through positive memories while helping participants become acquainted.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–20 participants

Time Required

- 15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

Ask participants to share a favorite memory related to recreation.

Examples:

- A family vacation, A favorite childhood game, Summer camp, A sporting event, Learning a new hobby , A memorable holiday
- Invite group members to ask questions and share similar experiences.

Processing Questions

- Why is that memory meaningful?
- How did recreation play a role in the experience?
- What new memory would you like to create this year?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Positive reminiscence encourages conversation while reinforcing the importance of recreation throughout the lifespan.

Ice Breaker #21: Bucket List

Purpose

- Encourage participants to share personal goals while inspiring others to explore new recreational experiences.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 3–25 participants

Time Required

- 15–20 minutes

Supplies Needed

- Paper
- Pens or pencils

Instructions

1. Ask participants to write down three activities they would like to experience someday.
2. Invite each participant to share one or more items from their list.
3. Encourage group members to ask questions or offer encouragement.
4. Discuss ways participants can begin working toward one of their goals.

Processing Questions

- Which bucket list item excites you the most?
- Did someone inspire you with an idea?
- What is one goal you could begin working toward this month?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Bucket list discussions promote hope, leisure exploration, and goal setting.

Ice Breaker #22: My Happy Place

Purpose

- Promote positive emotions while encouraging participants to share meaningful places and experiences.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

Ask participants to describe a place where they feel happiest.

Encourage them to include:

- What the place looks like.
- Who is with them.
- What they enjoy doing there.
- Why the location is meaningful.

Processing Questions

- What made that place special?
- How did recreation play a role?
- What emotions came to mind while describing it?

Recreation Therapy Tip: This activity often reduces stress while encouraging positive reminiscence and conversation.

Ice Breaker #23: Build the Story

Purpose

- Promote creativity, listening skills, and teamwork.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults

Group Size

- 4–20 participants

Time Required

15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

1. One participant begins a story using one sentence.
2. The next participant adds another sentence.
3. Continue around the circle until everyone has contributed.
4. Encourage creativity, humor, and imagination while keeping the story appropriate.

Processing Questions

- Which part of the story surprised you?
- How did everyone's ideas contribute?
- Why is listening important when working together?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Remind participants there are no wrong answers. The goal is collaboration, not perfection.

Ice Breaker #24: Pass the Compliment

Purpose

- Encourage positive communication while building self-esteem and group cohesion.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- 4–20 participants

Time Required

- 10–15 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

1. Seat participants in a circle.
2. Invite one participant to offer a sincere compliment to the person beside them.
3. Continue until everyone has both given and received a compliment.
4. Encourage compliments about kindness, effort, strengths, or positive qualities rather than appearance alone.

Processing Questions

- How did it feel to receive a compliment?
- Was giving a compliment easy or difficult?
- Why are encouraging words important?

Recreation Therapy Tip: Model appropriate compliments before beginning the activity and remind participants to be sincere and respectful.

Ice Breaker #25: One Word to Remember

Purpose

- Provide a meaningful closing activity while encouraging reflection and personal expression.

Population

- Adolescents, Adults, Older Adults

Group Size

- Any size

Time Required

- 5–10 minutes

Supplies Needed

- None

Instructions

Invite each participant to share one word that describes how they are feeling at the end of today's group.

Examples: Hopeful, Relaxed , Grateful , Encouraged , Connected , Curious, Energized

Encourage participants to briefly explain why they selected that word.

Processing Questions

- Why did you choose that word?
- Did your feelings change during the activity?
- What will you remember most from today?

Recreation Therapy Tip: This activity serves as an excellent closing exercise and provides valuable feedback about participants' experiences while reinforcing reflection and emotional awareness.

About the Author

Danny W. Pettry II is a recreational therapist, licensed professional counselor, educator, and author.

For more than two decades, he has helped individuals improve their quality of life through recreation, leisure education, and therapeutic interventions.

Danny is the founder of **Rec Therapy Today®**, an online continuing education provider dedicated to supporting recreational therapy professionals through practical resources, innovative training, and lifelong learning.

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