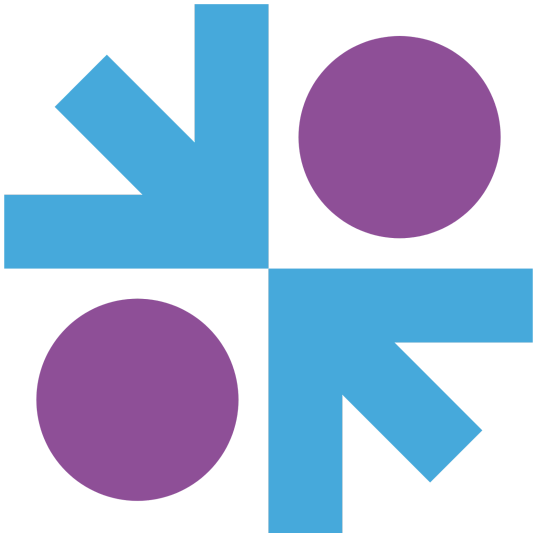
Resolution Ready

FREE GUIDE · FACILITATION

Icebreakers for team meetings and workshops

Ten icebreakers, five activities with a few LEGO® bricks, five energisers and five closing rounds for teams in charities and public services, chosen so nobody is put on the spot.



What an icebreaker is for

An icebreaker helps people arrive. It moves attention from the last meeting or the journey in to the work of this session, lets everyone hear their own voice early, and starts to show people how the session will run. The best ones are short and link directly to what the session is for.

In teams that work with children, families and people in difficult circumstances, people often arrive carrying a great deal. The activities in this guide are chosen with that in mind.

Five things every activity here has in common

1. **Nobody is put on the spot**
   Everyone can pass, and passing is treated as an ordinary answer.

2. **Nothing personal is asked for**
   The questions are about work, the session or neutral things. Nobody is asked about their family, their past or their feelings beyond what they choose to offer.

3. **Everyone can take part**
   No activity depends on touch, reading aloud, standing for long or speaking English as a first language. Where one involves moving, there is an alternative.

4. **It links to the purpose**
   Each activity sets up the work that follows, so the time is not lost.

5. **It is short**
   Most take five to fifteen minutes. If an icebreaker runs longer than the work it introduces, it has become the session.

Choosing the right one

Start with what the session needs, then check the group size, the time and whether you are in a room or online.

If the session needs to	Try
Help people arrive quickly	One word in, Chat waterfall
Connect people to the purpose	What brought you here, A headline from next year
Help a mixed group see who is in the room	Line up, Where your work sits
Agree how the group will work together	The best meeting you have been in
Get people talking in pairs or small groups	Common ground, Picture postcards
Give people a choice about how much they share	Question bank

Running any of them

1. **Explain why**
   Say in a sentence why you are doing it and how long it will take.

2. **Go first**
   Model the length and depth of answer you want. A short, light answer from the facilitator gives everyone else permission to do the same.

3. **Say that passing is fine**
   Say it before you start, and mean it.

4. **Keep it moving**
   Thank each person and move on. Nobody needs to comment on anyone else's answer.

5. **Link it to the work**
   Close with one sentence that connects what you heard to what the session will do next.

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Icebreakers

1. One word in

5 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person or online

Each person says one word that describes how they are arriving today. Go round in order, or invite people to speak when ready. The facilitator writes the words up without comment.

Why use it

- Everyone speaks within the first five minutes.
- It shows the facilitator the mood of the room.

Watch for

- Words that suggest someone is struggling. Follow up quietly at the break, never in the room.

Variation

Online, ask everyone to type their word in the chat and press enter at the same time.

2. What brought you here

10 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person or online

Each person says what they hope to leave the session with, in a sentence. Write each one on a flipchart or shared document and keep it visible. Come back to it at the close.

Why use it

- It ties the opening directly to the purpose.
- It gives you a way to check at the end whether the session did its job.

Watch for

- Hopes the session cannot meet. Say so honestly at the start rather than at the end.

Variation

With a large group, collect the hopes on sticky notes and read out the themes instead of every one.

3. Line up

10 minutes · 8 to 30 people · In person

Ask people to arrange themselves in a line by something neutral, such as how far they travelled today or how long they have worked in the sector. Ask a few people at each end and in the middle to say a sentence about where they stand.

Why use it

- It gets people moving and shows the range of experience in the room.
- It works well for mixed groups who do not know each other.

Watch for

- Anyone who cannot easily stand or move. Offer the same question as a show of hands on a scale of one to five.

Variation

Online, draw the line on a shared whiteboard and ask people to place a dot where they stand.

4. Where your work sits

10 minutes · 8 to 30 people · In person or online

Draw a simple picture of the organisation or the service on a large sheet or shared board. Each person puts a sticky note where their own work sits and adds one word about it.

Why use it

- Mixed groups of trustees, managers and staff see who does what.
- It shows the gaps and overlaps before the session starts.

Watch for

- The picture becoming a debate about the structure. Keep it light and move on.

Variation

For a partnership meeting, draw the partnership and ask each organisation to place itself.

5. Common ground

10 minutes · Groups of 3 or 4 · In person or online

In small groups, people find three things they all have in common about how they like to work, such as the time of day they think best or the kind of meeting they find most useful. Each group reads out its three.

Why use it

- It gets small groups talking before the first piece of group work.
- It surfaces working preferences that help the session run well.

Watch for

- Groups drifting into personal topics. The prompt keeps it to work.

Variation

Ask each group to find one thing they would all change about the meetings they go to.

6. Picture postcards

15 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person

Spread a set of picture postcards on a table. Each person chooses one that says something about the team or the work right now, and explains their choice in a sentence or two.

Why use it

- Pictures give people an easier way into a harder conversation.
- It suits sessions that are about how a team is working together.

Watch for

- Choices that open a sensitive subject. Thank the person and note it for later in the session rather than exploring it at the start.

Variation

Online, share a slide of numbered pictures and ask people to type the number they have chosen.

7. The best meeting you have been in

15 minutes · Pairs, then the whole group · In person or online

In pairs, people describe the most useful meeting they have been in and what made it work. Each pair offers one thing, and the facilitator builds the list into ground rules for the session.

Why use it

- It produces ground rules the group has written for itself.
- It starts the session on what works rather than what goes wrong.

Watch for

- Lists that grow too long. Agree no more than five.

Variation

Ask about the least useful meeting instead, then turn each answer into a ground rule.

8. A headline from next year

10 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person or online

Each person writes a headline they would like to read about the team or the organisation a year from now. Read them out and put them on the wall.

Why use it

- It suits strategy days and planning sessions.
- The headlines often show the themes the day needs to cover.

Watch for

- Headlines that are really complaints about today. Take them as useful information and park them for later.

Variation

Ask for the headline the people you serve would write about you.

9. Question bank

10 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person or online

Put the question bank from the back of this guide on the wall or the screen. Each person chooses a question, from any of the three columns, and answers it in a sentence or two.

Why use it

- People choose how much they share.
- It works for groups who meet often and need something different from the usual round.

Watch for

- Everyone choosing the same easy question. That is fine, and the choice is theirs.

Variation

With a team that meets every week, let a different person choose the question each time.

10. Chat waterfall

5 minutes · Any size · Online

Ask a question. Everyone types an answer in the chat but does not press enter until the facilitator says go. All the answers appear at once. Read a few aloud.

Why use it

- Everyone answers, including people who rarely speak in online meetings.
- Nobody is influenced by the first answer.

Watch for

- People who join by phone and cannot use the chat. Ask them to answer aloud.

Variation

Use it again to close the session, asking for one thing each person will do next.

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Activities with a handful of bricks

A small bag of bricks gives people something to do with their hands while they think, and a model to talk about instead of themselves. These five need no experience and no more than ten bricks each.

What you need

Six to ten bricks per person, in a mix of sizes and colours, in a small bag or cup. A clear space on each table and a timer, because building time is kept to between one and three minutes. The same set can be used again and again.

How to run them

1. **There is no right model**
   Say so at the start. A model is whatever its builder says it is.
2. **The builder explains**
   Each person says what their model means. Others ask about the model, never about the person.
3. **Anyone can describe instead**
   Anyone who would rather not build can describe what they would make.
4. **Keep it short**
   Build quickly, talk briefly, and move on to the work.

For a full workshop using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and materials, talk to us about facilitation.

A. Build your arrival

5 to 10 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person

Each person has one minute to build something with six bricks that shows how they are arriving today. Go round the table, and each person says a sentence about their model.

Why use it

- It is an easier way in than One word in for people who find speaking first hard.
- The models stay on the table as a reminder of where the group started.

Watch for

- Models that suggest someone is struggling. Follow up quietly at the break.

Variation

Ask people to build what they want from the session instead.

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B. The same six bricks

5 minutes · Any size · In person

Give everyone the same six bricks. Ask them to build a duck in one minute. Put all the models in the middle and look at them together.

Why use it

- No two models are the same, which makes the point that people hear the same instruction differently.
- It works well before a session on communication or working together.

Watch for

- People apologising for their model. Every version is a good answer.

Variation

Use any simple object, such as a house or a bridge.

C. What a good outcome looks like

10 minutes · Pairs · In person

In pairs, people build a model of what a good outcome from today would look like, then explain it to another pair. Write a phrase from each explanation on the flipchart.

Why use it

- It connects the opening to the purpose of the session.
- People often say more about the model than they would in a round.

Watch for

- Pairs building two separate models. Ask them to agree one.

Variation

Use it at the start of a strategy day to show what each person hopes the day will settle.

D. Build a strength

10 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person

Each person builds something that shows one thing the team does well. Put the models together in the middle of the table and ask the group what it notices about them as a set.

Why use it

- It starts a team day on what works.
- Seeing the models together often shows a theme nobody said aloud.

Watch for

- The conversation moving to what the team does badly. Note it and keep it for later in the day.

Variation

Ask people to build something the people you serve would say the team does well.

E. One brick each to close

5 minutes · Up to 20 people · In person

At the end of the session, each person adds two bricks to a shared model in the middle of the table, and says one thing they will do next. Take a photograph of the finished model and send it round with the notes.

Why use it

- It gives the group one shared picture of the session to take away.
- Everyone commits to one action before they leave.

Watch for

- The model being treated as a work of art. It only needs to hold the commitments.

Variation

Online, ask people to build at home with whatever bricks they have and hold their model up to the camera.

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Energisers

For the dip after lunch, or when a session has been sitting still for too long. Each takes five minutes or less.

1. **Stand if**
   Read out statements about work, such as "stand if you have had more than three meetings today". People stand if it is true for them. Online, use thumbs up on camera. Anyone can stay seated and raise a hand instead.

2. **Count to twenty**
   The group counts to twenty, one voice at a time, with nobody deciding the order. If two people speak at once, start again. It usually takes a few attempts and ends in laughter.

3. **Change places**
   After a break, ask everyone to sit at a different table or join a different breakout room. It mixes the groups for the next piece of work.

4. **Walk and talk**
   Pairs take a ten minute walk together to talk through one question from the session. They come back with one sentence to share.

5. **Silent sort**
   Give each group a pile of sticky notes from earlier in the session. They sort them into themes in three minutes, without speaking.

Closing rounds

How a session ends shapes what people remember. Each of these takes five to ten minutes.

1. **One word out**
   Each person says one word that describes how they are leaving. Set it beside the words from the start if you used One word in.

2. **Did you get it**
   Return to the hopes from What brought you here. Each person says whether they got what they came for, and what is still missing.

3. **One thing next week**
   Each person names one thing they will do in the next week as a result of the session.

4. **Thanks to the group**
   Anyone who wants to thanks the group for something that helped today. Keep it to the group as a whole.

5. **How clear are the next steps**
   Everyone holds up a number of fingers from one to five for how clear the next steps are. Anything below three needs a minute before people leave.

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TOOL · BEFORE THE SESSION

Plan your opening

Use this to choose and plan the opening and closing for any session.

Session

Date

Who will be there, and how many

In person or online

What the session is for, in one sentence

Opening activity, and why it fits

Energiser, if needed, and when

Closing round

Access check

	Yes
Everyone can pass, and I will say so	☐
Nothing personal is asked for	☐
There is an alternative to any movement	☐
Nobody has to read aloud or write in front of others	☐
It works for people joining online or by phone	☐

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TOOL · AT THE START AND THE CLOSE

What brought you here

Record each person's hope at the start and come back to it at the end. Names are optional.

Name (optional)	What I hope to leave with	Did I get it

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TOOL · FOR THE QUESTION BANK ICEBREAKER

Question bank

Print or project this page. People choose a question from any column and answer in a sentence or two. Everyone can pass.

Light

What is the best thing about your week so far?

What is one thing on your desk that you could not do without?

Where do you do your best thinking?

What would you do with an extra hour today?

What is a small thing that went well recently?

What is something you have learned this month?

About the work

What part of your work do people outside the team least understand?

What would make next week easier?

What is one thing this team does well?

What is something you have changed your mind about at work?

Who outside the team helps you do your job?

What question do you wish people asked you more often?

Looking ahead

What would you like this team to be known for in a year?

What is one thing you would like to try that you have not yet?

What would you keep exactly as it is?

What would you stop tomorrow if you could?

What is one thing today could help with?

What would make this session worth the time?

For online meetings

What can you see from where you are sitting?

What is the last thing you wrote down?

What is one word for your morning?

What is one thing you want from this meeting?

What would you rather be doing right now, and why?

What time zone is your brain in today?

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Resolution Ready offers independent review, training, facilitation and improvement support to local authorities, children's trusts and children's charities.

We plan and facilitate team days, workshops and the conversations a team needs to have, in person or online. We hold the space so your group can have the conversation it needs and reach decisions of its own. Each piece of work is shaped with you and costed in advance.

Free resources that go with this guide

- Thinking Differently® prompt cards
- Away day planning template
- Session plan for a difficult team conversation
- How to run a strategy day

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