

A collection of energisers, name games, and ways to break into small groups

When using the below exercises, it is essential that you use tools that work for the group that you are working with. Be thoughtful about any mobility, hearing, sight or other impairments that participants may have.

Some activities can be adapted to make them inclusive for your group. For example, adapting an exercise to have the group sitting rather than standing or sitting around a table rather than on the floor.

Kotare includes a question on our enrolment forms about participants comfort in workshops and we may have some knowledge about participants needs prior to a workshop. However, there are likely to be needs in the group that we are unaware of and it's important to check out participant comfort, offer options, invite feedback and be responsive throughout the workshop.

Many energisers are especially reliant on physical mobility. When you learn energisers that are more inclusive, please forward them to us and we'll add them to this resource.

Also be aware of cultural differences (for example, around touch, use of language, etc). The key is to always be thoughtful about the group you are working with!

Our learnings about what helps energisers work well:

- Give clear instructions. It can often be useful to practice beforehand. Ensure that you are speaking clearly and at a volume that all participants can hear. It is often useful to give a demonstration. You could prep one or two participants beforehand to help with a demonstration.
- Be as succinct as possible. Give instructions one at a time, adding detail progressively, rather than giving a complex set of instructions all at once.
- Ask for participations to contribute to creative variations of energisers. For example, in 'evolutionary papers, scissors, rock' below you could ask participants to generate categories and/or actions, rather than providing them yourself.
- Be flexible and responsive. Utilise 'mistakes' as opportunities to explain.
- Get yourself energised beforehand and contribute your energy to the energiser. The group is more likely to dive in with you if you believe in the energiser.
- Encourage laughter. If you are asking the group to do something that is 'silly' it can be helpful to be 'silly' yourself first.
- Connect the activity to the group – make up a blurb that weaves the exercise into the context of the work you are doing with the group. For example, when using 'trains smash' with groups working on climate change, we might link it by talking about how we like public transport and the way that it contributes to cutting emissions.
- Adapt, adapt, adapt :) Adapting a tool for the group you are working with is often more effective than simply using a tool that someone else has designed for use in another context.
- Be thoughtful about the length. Tune in with the group and stop the exercise when you

- think the group is energised.
- Read the group before using an energiser and choose appropriately. For example, does the group need to use their voices? Connect with one another? Wake up after lunch?
 - As above, be thoughtful about accessibility and culture.

Name Games:

Two people to your left

One person starts by introducing themselves "I'm" The person on their right then introduces the person who went first and then themselves, "this is and I'm". Then the third person introduces person one and two (the two people to their left) and then themselves. E.g. "This is, this is and I'm" Person four doesn't introduce everyone who has already been introduced, just the two people on their left (person two, three and then themselves). Person five also introduces the two people on their left and then themselves (e.g. person three, four and themselves) and so on. Let people know at the beginning that this isn't the scary game where they have to try and remember everyone, they only need to remember the two people to their left. This exercise works well as the group will hear everyone's names three times.

Source: We learnt this game from Auckland Workers Education Association, Aotearoa NZ

Name and Action

Have everyone in a circle. First person starts and steps forward into their circle saying their name and doing an action at the same time (e.g. Tanya and a curtsy). They step back into the circle and then the whole group then steps in and says the first persons name while simultaneously doing their action (the whole group says Tanya and curtsies). Continue until everyone in the circle has had a turn. This is particularly useful for kinaesthetic learners.

Name ball throw

Once everyone has already introduced themselves to one another and heard each others names, get everyone into a circle. Have one person start and throw the ball to someone else while saying their name. Continue, with each person having to throw the ball to someone who hasn't already received the ball. Once the ball has made its way to everyone in the group, start again from the beginning following the same sequence of people (saying the names as the ball is thrown), this time a little faster, encouraging people to also remember the name of the person that threw the ball to them. Once you have finished, you can then try doing this in reverse, with each person throwing the ball back to the person that threw it to them. For added complexity you can add another ball.

Competitive name game

Once you have played one of the name games above, you could also play this competitive name game. Divide the group into two groups of roughly equal size. Have them sit on either side of the room and then, along with your a co-facilitator or a helpful participant if you are solo-facilitating, hold up a blanket across the middle of the room. Ask participants whether they can see each other. If they can, get the groups to clump together more closely. Now, explain that the groups will need to silently agree on a person to represent their team, who will then position themselves at the front of their group. On the count of three, the facilitators will drop the blanket and the selected representatives will call out the others name. Whoever is fastest, and gets the name correct, gets a point for their team. Repeat, with different people representing their team each time. Each of the facilitators/blanket holders will keep score for one team.

This exercise can be done with people standing behind the blanket or with chairs on each side. Think about which option you are going to use before the exercise and whether the space is sufficient to rearrange chairs if needed.

Energisers:

Elephant, Palm Tree, Toaster, Cloud

Gather the group into a circle and explain that people will be working with the people on either side of them to act out the following in trios:

- Elephant: person the middle bends over to be the elephant trunk; people either side make big ears with their arms, their bodies facing towards the elephant trunk.
- Toaster: person the middle is a jumping on the spot (toast popping out of the toaster); people either side hold their arms around the jumping toast person to form the toaster.
- Cloud: person the middle makes a circle with their arms over their head; people either side loop their arms around the middle circle to create a cloud.
- Palm Tree: person the middle is the strong tree trunk, with their arms above their head; people either side make big branches with their arms, backs towards the trunk.

Ask a few people to demonstrate so that people are clear on how each trio acted object looks. Highlight that the key to distinguishing elephant ears from palm tree fronds is the way that you are facing. Person in the middle points to people and says one of the objects and people make them in trios. Either one person stays in the middle and just gets faster and faster or whoever is the slowest to join their acting trio is out and swaps with the person in the middle.

Source: We learnt this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Sam went to Venus

Have the group stand in a large circle and explain this active warm-up activity.

The first person says: "Did you hear about Sam?" The second person (the person to their right) says: "No, what did she do?" First person: "Sam went to Venus!" Second: "Really? How did she get there?" First person: "She went to Venus like this!" – and the first person proceeds to make some repetitive motion. Everyone in the circle repeats the motion. Then, the person to the left of the first person repeats that same series: "Did you hear about Sam?/ No, what did she do?/She went to Venus. /Really, how did she get there?/She went to Venus like this" and makes his/her own motion (which the whole groups repeats).

The process continues around the entire circle until ending when everyone has done it. (In large groups, this can be done in several separate groups simultaneously.)

You can add a name game element to this by asking everyone to use each others name. So, the first person says 'hey (name of second person)' and the second person says 'hey (name of first person)' before the first person asks the second "did you hear about Sam?"

Source: We learnt this game from Training for Change, USA

Why... Because...

Have people on one half of the group write down a why question ("Why is the grass green? Why is

there suffering?" etc). Have the other half write down a Because answer ("Because I said so. Because it can float." etc). Give no indication for the purpose or what types of why questions or because answers people should write. Then – and this can be a hilarious exercise – go around the room and have the Whys ask a question and get their answer from the Becauses.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency. It came from Gerald Gomani, Zimbabwe.

Something about me

Have everyone write something true about themselves onto a piece of paper, don't share this with anyone else. Put all the pieces of paper in a hat and have everyone pull one out. If you pull out the fact that you put in, put it back and choose another one. Once everyone has a fact, get the group to mingle and find the person that put that fact in the hat. For example, if someone put in a piece of paper that said "my childhood cat was called tinkerbell", you would circulate with other participants and ask "did you have a childhood cat called tinkerbell?" If that is true for someone, but it wasn't what they wrote down, they need to reply by saying "yes, but that wasn't mine". Once you have found the person that matches your piece of paper, link arms with them. Continue until everyone has found their match and linked arms. This sometimes results in a circle with arms linked, or a few small circles, a couple of lines, a collection of pairs or various combinations of all of these.

Big Wind Blows

There are just enough seats in the circle for everyone but you. You are the big wind, and whoever you blow on has to move. Instead of blowing, you call out, "The big wind blows on everyone who..." and then add your own description; for example, "on everyone who wears black socks," or "everyone who has two ears." Everyone who fits the description must get up and change seats; in the general commotion, you try to get a seat also. Whoever is left standing there, gets to be the Big Wind next time. If the Big Wind calls "hurricane" then everyone has to change seats.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia and Training for Change, USA.

Bump Tag

Get into pairs standing shoulder to shoulder, scattered around the room. Choose one pair and make one person "It" and one person the runner. "It" chases runner to tag him – if tagged, runner becomes "It". Runner may escape at any time by lining up with any pair, the person on other end of that pair (which is now a trio) has to let go and now becomes the new runner.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

"Have you ever"?

Form a circle of chairs (one for each person) and then take one away. One person stands in the middle and calls a question beginning with "Have you ever", for example "Have you ever eaten watermelon". Everyone who has eaten watermelon then jumps up and moves to a place vacated by someone else who has moved. The last person who is left without a seat remains in middle to call out something else beginning with "Have you ever.....?"

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

"What are you doing?"

Participants stand in a circle. One person moves to the centre and begins acting an activity, such as

building a sandcastle. It is important that the participants really do the activity. A second person enters the circle and asks, "What are you doing?" The first person then responds, while still doing the original activity, with another activity: "Brushing my hair." The second person then begins brushing their hair, and the first person leaves the centre. Another person enters and asks, "What are you doing?" The person in the centre, while still doing her activity, replies: "Climbing a tree" (or any other activity whatsoever), etc. etc.

It can be suggested that actions relate to workshop content to consolidate/have fun with learnings. This one's good to use once people at least slightly know each other. As the game grows there are lots of laughs. It is good to encourage people not to think of "what to do" and just say/do anything.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Train smash

Standing in a circle holding hands. 3 or so people are nominated as "train stations" (TS) and 2 as "junctions" (J) (depending on the size of the group). One person squeezes the hand of a person next time the "pulse" (train) travels around the circle. When the train reaches a TS they make a sound ie: "toot" and when it reaches a J it changes direction. A person is in the middle of the circle and has to guess where the train is at by touching the person they think has it. When they are correct they swap with that person and the game continues.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Ozone and sun

Before the game begins each person chooses someone who is their sun and ozone and keeps this to themselves. People start to move around the space and make sure that for the entire time the ozone is between them and the sun.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Rain

A facilitator talks the group through this energiser. Get everyone to stand up. Start tapping your head lightly with your fingers imagining soft rain. Let it slowly get heavier the further you move your hands down your body. Let the rain turn into a thunderstorm on your calves. Clap them hard with your hands. Then move your hands back up you body, ending with soft rain on your head.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Clapping game

This game mixes the logical and creative sides of the brain. It is a good preparation for tackling complex issues that require both logical analysis and creative solutions.

Sit in a circle on the floor or around a table. Everybody then places their hands flat on the surface, the arms crossing over with those of the neighbours. Start the game by clapping one hand on the surface. Let the clap run around the circle, so that always the hand claps that is next to the one that clapped last. After practising this for a couple of rounds, introduce a complication. If a hand claps twice, the direction of the clap changes direction. Again, practice. When everyone has understood the rules, start the game proper.

Now, any hand that claps out of turn or doesn't clap is 'out' and should be put behind the person's back. When somebody has both hands out of the game, then they have to drop out of the game. Increase the speed of the game as you go along. The more people there are in the group, the less exciting it is for the individual player. It is a good idea to form two or more groups for the game if there are more than twelve people.

Evolutionary Paper, Scissors, Rock

Check that everyone in the group knows how to play 'paper, scissors, rock'. This is a game where two players compete against each other. Each person holds their fist out in front of themselves and both players bump their fist up and down three times while counting together 'one, two, three'. On the fourth time that their fists come down, both players simultaneously form the shape of paper (hand laid out flat), scissors (use index and middle finger to form scissors) or rock (stay in fist). They then compare these two shapes and one player wins based on the following rules: paper beats rock because paper can wrap a rock up, rock beats scissors because it can blunt the scissors, and scissors beats paper because they can cut the paper up.

Now that everyone understands the basic rules of paper, scissors, rock you can move on to the instructions for this version of the game. Everyone will start off as an amoeba (wave arms out to sides to make a blobby jelly like creature). Play papers, scissors rock with another amoeba. The winner becomes a fish (put hands together in front of body and make them swim like a fish). Fish then play other fish and losers remain amoebas and play against other amoeba. When a fish wins against another fish, they become an ape (long arms, scratch at armpits, make monkey sounds) and the fish stays a fish. When an ape wins, they become a human and strut about – they have now finished the game. Everyone else keeps playing. At the end, there will be one amoeba, one fish, one ape and one human.

This game is particularly useful as an active energiser for large groups. You can make up whatever kinds of roles you like, it doesn't have to be 'evolutionary'. Once I played a game where the winners were rubbish collectors.

Source: We learned a version of this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

Collective counting – eyes closed

Get group to close their eyes and explain that we will be collectively getting in tune with each other and trying to count as high as we can as a group. One person will start by saying 1, then someone else says 2 and so on. If two people say the same number at the same time, or in the wrong order, we will start again. Facilitator needs to be proactive in leading the counting when you need to start again, or call out for someone to else to begin.

Collective counting – 3 and 7 clap

Explain to the group that we'll be working together to count as high as we can. Group sits in a circle and one person starts by saying 'one'. The person on their right says 'two' and so it continues. However, for any number that has a 3 or a 7 in it, the person needs to clap rather than saying the number. This is not about tricky maths and thinking of numbers that are made up of 3s or 7s (like 14 or 21), just numbers that actually has a 3 or 7 as part of its name (3,7,13,17,23 etc). When someone says a number that has a 3 or 7 in it, the group need to start again from the beginning. The facilitator needs to play an active role in restarting the group. The thirties are often tricky as people don't realise that they need to clap for all of them. That's great! Don't tell them ahead of time, it causes laughter and sharpens their thinking. Try to play until the group reaches 50

or higher. However, if you run out of time its fine to finish earlier. This can be repeated as an energiser later in a workshop as groups like to try and better their previous score.

Chingalaka ching, boomalaka boom

This is a call and response activity. The facilitator says chingalaka ching and the group responds by saying boomalaka boom. If the facilitator is quiet, the group responds quietly. If the facilitator is really loud, the group responds really loudly. The group also repeats the facilitators rhythm. So, if the facilitator says chingalaka, chingalaka, chingalaka ching the group responds boomalaka, boomalaka, boomalaka boom.

This exercise is good for boosting energy in a short space of time and encouraging the group to use their voices.

Source: We learnt this game from Training for Change

Revolution

This exercise needs a lot of space so it can be useful to go outside if possible. Explain that the group is going to be starting a revolution. Explain how this will happen: everyone will close their eyes and the facilitator will then place their hand firmly on one person's shoulder, they are then the spark of the revolution. Everyone will then mill around the space with their eyes closed and bump into each other. When you come across someone else, you ask 'are you the revolution?' If the person is not the revolution, they say no. If they are the person that was selected as the revolution, they stay silent. This indicates that they are the revolution. When you find the revolution, link arms with them. You are now also the revolution and will stay silent when people bump into you. Eventually, the whole group will have joined the revolution.

Explain that the facilitator will need a few health and safety volunteers to help ensure that people don't wander too far away or bump into buildings, steps, trees etc. Ask for volunteers, inviting anyone who feels uncomfortable having their eyes closed or touching others to join that team.

Play. This energiser finishes once everyone has been revolutionised.

Spoon and Fork

Equipment: 2 objects, spatulas, whisks, tongs are our favourites but other random objects can be used.

You can stand, sit on the floor or in chairs in a circle. Pass one of the objects to the person on your left and say 'this is a fork' (best if its not a fork), and then make them ask 'what is it?' and they you say 'this is a fork'. Tell the group that you are the only person who knows what the object is. And then have them pass to next person and say 'this is a fork', and the third person has to say 'what is it?' and the the second person has to turn back to you and say 'what is it?' and you say 'it's a fork' and so on. Once people have got the ball rolling on one side, turn to the person on your right and say 'this is a spoon' and start the whole process again so both forks and spoons head around the circle. It starts getting messy when the objects have to cross over, and you can get people to start again if they make a mistake.

Source: We learned this game from The Change Agency, Australia.

The sky has fallen

This requires a bit of acting from the facilitator, who exclaims to the group 'oh no, something terrible has just happened'. Then, before the group gets too worried explain 'the sky has fallen! But its okay, I've been there when that's happened before and I know how to fix it. What we need to do is all stand up, reach down and grab a piece of the sky, then on the count of three we will all throw it back up into the air. The trick is that we need to make a lot of noise, as that's what makes it stick. Okay? Ready? Let's go!"

Source: We learnt this game from Training for Change, USA

Orchestra

Explain that the group is going to form an orchestra. Facilitator starts off making a noise, then go around in a circle with each person adding a sound until everyone is making different noises together. You can also add to this exercise by then returning back around the circle, with each person stopping their noise as you travel back to the starting point, so that the 'music' happens as a wave.

Beach ball

Use a beach ball or a balloon and explain that the group is going to work together to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible by working together to keep hitting the ball into the air. If the ball touches the ground, you need to start again. Each person is only allowed to hit the ball once in a row. Count each time the ball is hit as the group can then try to better their score.

Source: We learnt this game from Plan To Win, Australia

Interesting ways to break into small groups:

Breaking into smaller groups can be an opportunity to energise the group and add some fun to a meeting or workshop. It's easy to get into the routine of simply numbering people off into groups. While that does work well, it's likely that you will need to break the whole group into smaller groups several times during a workshop and it's a good opportunity to get creative and help the whole workshop vibe stay interesting and upbeat.

Below are a few options for breaking into small groups. However, I encourage you to keep on your toes and use workshop/group references to invent new ways of breaking into groups as you're facilitating. For example, in one workshop where Liz was co-facilitating we had filled rolls for lunch. Liz divided people into groups by 'numbering' the group using filled roll ingredients, e.g. roll, lettuce, tomato, chutney. The group 'numbered' off with these ingredients and then had to 'make a filled roll' by getting into groups with each of the filled roll ingredients.

A key tip with breaking into small groups is that you need to think about how many groups you need and how many people you want in each group, and then make sure your instructions will get you the result you are after. A common mistake is deciding you want four people in each group and then numbering people 1-4, which will create four groups rather than groups of four (unless you have a group of 16, in which case you would have four groups of four :)

Animal noises

Choose a few animals and write their names down on small bits of paper and put these in a hat.

Then go around the circle getting each participant to pull a piece of paper out of the hat and read it. Its important that they don't share this with others. Then, let everyone know that on the count of three everyone will start making their animal noise and cluster into groups with their fellow species.

For this exercise, you need to decide how many groups you want and then match the number of animal options to the number of groups. Then think how many people you need in each group and use that to determine how many of each animal you put in the hat.

Animal families

Think of a few ways of grouping animals. For example, a snake, a crocodile, a tortoise and a frog are all reptiles. Or a giraffe, lion, elephant and hippopotamus are all indigenous to Africa. A dog, cat, cow and chicken are all domesticated animals. You need to think of as many types of animal 'families' as the number of groups you want to form. Then think how many people you want in each group and think of enough animals in each 'family' to make sure the group numbers will work out. Now, write all the different animals on pieces of paper and put them in a hat. Mix them up, then pass them out with one for each participant. Now, get participants to mingle with one another and find out what kind of animal everyone is. Depending on the group, this can be done through acting out animals or simply through saying what animal you are. Now everyone has to get themselves into animal families and ensure that they are divided evenly. This is often a bit of a brain teaser, which helps get people thinking outside the square.

Line ups

There are various creative ways that you can get a group to form a line. E.g. based on age, birthday, height, distance travelled to be at the workshop, a continuum about how much participants like 'Glee', whatever tickles your fancy. Once the group is in a line, you can use simple numbering off techniques to divide them into small groups. This is useful in workshops where everyone sits in the same place all day, as if you don't mix them up simple numbering techniques can result in the same small groups being formed.

Transport types

Before using this tool, you need to think of types of transport that support different numbers of people and think about how people can act out each type. Then get the group standing up and tell them the transport types that you will be calling and how you want the group to act them out.

For example, single modes of transport can be running, freestyle swimming, cycling, roller skating. Transport that supports two people could be a double kayak or a tandem bike. Three people can go on a tuk tuk, with a driver and two passengers. Four people can go in a car, with a driver and three passengers. A bus can fit everyone.

Call out a form of transport and watch as the groups form. Keep calling out different options to keep the pace moving fairly swiftly. Then, when the form of transport is the type that has the right number of people call the group to a stop and let them know that they are now in their groups for the next exercise.

Source: We learnt this game from Training for Change, USA

Matching body parts

Explain that you will be calling out a body part and a number and that the group needs to organise

themselves so that they have that number of body parts touching (e.g. 7 index fingers). One rule is that you can only contribute one of your body parts to each group, so for 7 index fingers you need 7 people. Its important to gauge your group for how comfortable they will be with touch, which many mean checking it out with the group. Body parts that I usually use are fingers, elbows, knees and toes.

Source: We learnt this game from Training for Change, USA

Acknowledgements: Several of the above energisers, name games and ice breakers are not attributed. This is because we have learnt them in multiple contexts (including having them shared with us by workshop participants) and we are not sure of their origins. We are grateful to educators and facilitators, all over the world, whose work contributes to our collective knowledge.

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