ICEBREAKERS FOR TEAMS

This Emory Flourishing at Grady Tip Sheet provides background information about icebreakers for teams and offers an array of icebreakers that can be incorporated at the outset of meetings or other gatherings.

Background Information about Icebreakers

What are Icebreakers?

Icebreakers are short, engaging introductory activities or prompts at the start of a meeting or gathering (e.g., team/faculty/staff meetings, huddles, change of shift reports). They are designed to create a welcoming and psychologically safe atmosphere, build trust, promote psychological wellbeing, foster belonging and connection, and bolster teamwork. In high-pressure environments where people frequently encounter emotional stressors and trauma, icebreakers can facilitate the strengthening of relationships and building of a sense of community.

Planning Icebreakers

Before introducing icebreaker activities, it's important to consider the context. Teams in healthcare often include individuals from diverse roles, disciplines, and backgrounds who are working under intense pressure and time constraints. Icebreakers can be incorporated into team gatherings to support connection, reflection, or transition into group discussion. When selecting an activity, it may be helpful to consider the following:

- **Group Size**: Group size may influence the structure or flow of an activity. Smaller groups may allow for more in-depth participation, while larger groups might benefit from clearer facilitation or simple formats that maintain focus and engagement.
- **Time Availability**: The amount of available time can affect the choice of the icebreaker and how the activity is experienced. Brief activities may need to be more structured or focused, while longer time blocks allow for activities that include discussion or individual reflection.
- **Setting (In-Person or Virtual)**: The physical or virtual environment can influence how people engage. In-person settings may allow for the use of physical materials or gestures, while virtual settings may rely more on digital tools such as polls, chat functions, or screen sharing.

Tips for Facilitating Icebreakers

This section outlines practical considerations for leading short icebreaker activities in team settings. The following points are intended to support clarity, consistency, and

ease of participation when incorporating brief moments of connection into meetings or huddles:

- **Prepare the Prompt/Activity Ahead of Time**: Have the wording written out or on a slide if possible and consider using visual prompts.
- **Provide Clear and Brief Instructions**: Be specific about the activity and the steps involved.
- **Give an Example First**: Offer a sample response before opening the floor. This helps participants understand what's expected and provides an open tone.
- **Set Time Expectations**: Indicate how long the activity will take (e.g., "We'll spend just 2–3 minutes on this") and continue, ensuring respect for time.
- **Make Sharing Reactions to the Icebreaker Optional**: Remind the group that sharing their responses to the icebreaker is optional. Individuals may share aloud or in the chat, pass, or just listen.

Example Icebreakers

The following are an array of icebreakers that people at Emory at Grady have found valuable.

<u>Fun Questions</u>

Ask light, conversational questions, such as:

- What's something fun or unexpected people might not know about you?
- What city were you born in?
- What was your high school mascot?
- If you weren't in healthcare, what would you be doing?
- What's a small joy that's gotten you through the week?
- If you could instantly become an expert in anything, what would it be?
- What's your favorite meal or snack you've had recently?
- What song always boosts your mood?
- If you could spend a day anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What's a hobby or interest you'd love to explore more?
- What's a movie, TV show, or book you've enjoyed lately?
- If your week had a theme song, what would it be?
- What image do you currently have as your phone's homescreen and why?
- What's a simple pleasure that never fails you?
- What's something fun or unexpected people might not know about you?
- If you could swap jobs with someone for a day, just for fun, who would it be?
- What's your favorite way to spend a quiet day off?
- If you had a completely free afternoon, how would you spend it?

- What's your go-to comfort activity when you need to recharge?
- If you could learn a new skill instantly, what would you choose?

- **Two Truths and a Lie:** Each person shares three statements about themselves - two that are true and one that is false. The group guesses which statement is the lie.
- **Show & Tell (Pets or Personal Stories):** Team members share photos or stories about pets, hobbies, or personal life.
- **Fortune Cookie Icebreaker Prompts:** Team members anonymously submit engaging prompts (e.g., "What inspires you?"), which are randomly selected and shared aloud.

Gratitude and Kindness

- **Gratitude Circle:** Team members share 1-3 things they appreciate or are grateful for in their lives or at work or in terms of other term members, etc.
- **Inspirational Quotes Reflection:** Participants are shown or read a meaningful, uplifting quote and reflect briefly on how it resonates or applies to their work or experience.
- **Positive Affirmation / Gratitude Board:** A communal space (physical or digital) where team members post uplifting affirmations or acknowledgments to share positivity.
- **Do Something Kind:** Ask each person to name one thing they could do today to brighten someone else's day—or share a recent act of kindness they gave or received.
- **Shift Your Perspective:** Each person recalls a recent difficulty and identifies three positive outcomes or lessons that came from the experience.
- **Celebrate Another's Joy:** Invite team members to share something positive, fun, or inspiring. After each share, the group responds with a quick cheer, gesture, or creative form of acknowledgment.

Mindfulness and Meditation

- **Seek Out Awe:** Invite each person to pause and name someone or something they genuinely appreciate or find amazing. Encourage a few seconds of quiet reflection before sharing aloud.
- **Tune into What Matters:** Present four values—virtue, fairness, goodwill, and unity—and have each person rank them in personal importance, then share one example of how one value shows up in their life.
- **Mindful Minute:** Ask the group: "If you had one minute of peace today, what would you do with it?" Each person responds with a brief, calming idea or image.

- **Guided Meditation (5-Minute Breathing)**: A facilitator leads a brief mindfulness exercise focused on breath awareness or body scan to promote relaxation and present-moment awareness.
- **54321 Grounding Technique**: Participants identify 5 things they can see, 4 they can feel, 3 they hear, 2 they smell, and 1 they taste to anchor attention and reduce anxiety.
- **Desk Yoga / Stretching Breaks**: A short, guided stretch or yoga break to release tension and support physical wellbeing at workstations or during meetings.

Reflection Questions

- **Reflection Prompts (Emotional Awareness):** Use open-ended questions like *"What is causing you moral distress and how are you navigating this distress?*
- **The Miracle Question:** Imagine you woke up tomorrow and the wellbeing challenge you've been facing was completely resolved. What would be different, and how would you know the change had happened?
- **Resilience Bank (Deposits & Withdrawals):** Individuals share what they consider their "withdrawals" (stressors) and "deposits" (restorative actions) to assess wellbeing balance.
- **Sharing Resilience Story**: Voluntary storytelling in small groups (or anonymously) about personal resilience, promoting empathy and shared strength.
- **Wellbeing Pledge**: Participants write a short personal pledge (e.g., "I'll take a five-minute pause daily") to reinforce self-care intentions and accountability.

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