SURE-FIRE

Ice-Breakers & Group Games

by Mark Collard

playmeo

Introduction

Hi, my name is Mark Collard.

On behalf of your group, I want to **thank you** for downloading this ebook...

…because, if you're looking for a bunch of **sure-fire, high-energy, interactive, leave-them-wanting-for-more activities** for your school, conference, training, camp or youth-based program, then you've come to the right place.

If you enjoy the energy and sheer craziness that only group games can give, you are also about to embark on a wonderful journey.

After thousands of programs with people all over the world, I can assure you that the extraordinary ice-breakers and group games contained within this ebook sit at the tippy-top of the enormous list of group activities that I know and love.

These activities are the ones I always call on whenever I feel that my group is a little too 'cold' or needs to 'loosen up' a little. Within moments of introducing these simple, easy-to-present ice-breakers, you too, will visibly see your group start to relax, interact, smile and, most importantly, laugh.

It doesn't matter if you're a novice, an experienced facilitator, or work with children, adults or young people. These activities have universal appeal, require no equipment and are totally success-oriented.

Be sure to check out the seven *'Secret Tricks of the Trade'* that will make you look like an expert.

And, discover the four words that explain why most ice-breakers and group games fail, and what you can do to prevent this from happening to you.

Have fun,

Mark Collard
Experiential Trainer & Author
www.playmeo.com

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Illustrations by Michelle Dybing

The Seven Secret Tricks of the Trade
or What The Experts Won't Tell You

Many years ago, I started to record a list of all the activities I had been exposed to – mostly as a participant – during my many years of program leadership experiences. Reflecting my fastidious inclinations, I grouped like activities together, so that as the list grew longer and longer, I would find it easier to access them when I needed a good idea. Ice-breakers, de-inhibitizers, warm-ups, initiatives, trust exercises, games – I recorded the lot.

Twenty-two years later, the list has grown into what I refer to now as my *'Book of Tricks,'* or, when feeling particularly enamoured, my *'bible.'* There are simply hundreds of great activity ideas contained between its seriously dog-eared covers.

Yet, as much as it represents a chronicle of what I have played over the years – and continue to draw benefit from – it would fail to inform even the most learned of my colleagues – or YOU for that matter - the slightest glimpse of what I have discovered along the way. Most importantly, what I believe to be more significant than the games themselves – the tricks of the trade.

I know for a fact that my briefing, presentation and understanding of many of the earliest recorded activities has changed significantly – for the better – since I first played these group activities.

It's true, I have added many new and wonderful variations to my list of games, but this is not the difference I speak of. Rather, I refer to the philosophies and general comprehension of how play can develop positive relationships that now envelop my facilitation style and overall program delivery approach.

As an international facilitator and author of literally thousands of programs world-wide, I often muse about these differences for the benefit of training participants. Now, I think it's time to write them down...

(The full text of this conversation can be found in my most popular group games and activity publication titled ***No Props: Great Games with No Equipment****.)*

1. Frame, Frame, Frame

In other words, prepare, prepare, prepare.

Appropriately framing an activity – that is, 'setting the scene,' or providing a context in which the activity will take place – is one of the most valuable tools I employ to help groups achieve their goals, i.e., be successful. Otherwise, your group may be emotionally under-prepared for what is about to happen.

People have a natural proclivity to want to know why they are doing what they are doing.

Framing goes a long way toward answering these questions, as well as reducing anxiety, providing clarity, and generally coaxing people forward into your program.

Everything you do programmatically provides the context in which the next activity is framed. For example:

- Your language – it's not just what you say, but how you say it – check out the next paragraph for a more thorough discussion.

- Lead-up activities – like building blocks, every activity should aim to complement the next, rather than subvert it. To illustrate, leading into a serious discussion with a very energetic, bounce-off-the-wall type of activity is unlikely to result in a settled, composed or focused group of people.

- Your general approach to facilitation – if you operate under the premise of Challenge by Choice (a universal philosophy of allowing people to participate at their own comfort level), but your overall demeanour says there is no choice, you are likely to turn people off.

Ask yourself, "Have I done everything to prepare my group – emotionally and physically – for this experience?" "Do they know what they are getting into, and why?"

If not, think about what lead-up activities you could use to prepare the way, or perhaps what introduction / briefing might be necessary to soothe the group into the activity.

2. It's All In How You Say It

As a participant, which would you prefer to hear?

"….and if you're too slow, or get the wrong answer, you're 'out' and you have to come into the centre of the circle….."

Or, *"…and if the time expires, or you make a gaffe, you are invited to take your turn in the centre of the circle and have some fun….."*

Perhaps each statement is saying the same thing, but for many people, they will hear a big difference. The first implies that I have no choice ("you have to"), so I might feel under pressure because I don't want to be 'slow' or 'wrong.'

This may manifest itself as, "I don't want to make a mistake, so perhaps I won't play."

While the second statement is all about options (you may decline the invitation), and fun is introduced as an integral part of the consequence of "going out."

As program providers, our language is one of our most potent tools. It can work for us or against us, and I don't just mean the use of 'politically correct' terms.

Beware that everything you say, from the moment you introduce yourself to the moment that you wave good-bye will fan the flames of invitation and play, or snuff them out.

Ask yourself, "Have I introduced this activity in the most appealing, inclusive, way?" Provide choices to people so that they can find a level of participation that is comfortable for them.

3. Inject Lots Of Humour

This is such a critical element of delivery, and the key to opening up your group. Observe the crazy, menial little things people do, and serve it back to them in a manner that says, *"Have you ever noticed this?"* Of course, they have, they just don't want to admit it.

For example, the insistence some people have for tagging one another after the game has stopped, or the understated crawling on knees when a simple pivot in place was called for. Or, at a more serious level, the subtle glance over the shoulder to check that your spotters really are there behind you to catch your fall, even though the command *"Ready, fall away!"* was given.

What about the way we (notice, I'm using the royal 'we' here, so as to not draw attention to myself) avert our eyes and attention away from someone whose name we have once known, but now that they are coming our way, cannot for all the rice in China remember it? I could go on and on….

Suffice it to say, people love this stuff – it was the essence of the TV show Seinfeld. Our programs are made up of so much normalness, perhaps nothingness, it can be hilarious to sit back and look at it for what it really is at times.

Of course, how you deliver these moments is key – what could appear to some as a diamond in the rough, may just be a rock to others. Focus your humour so that you encourage your group to laugh with rather than at others.

Oh, and inject tons of FUNN too – it will act as a magnet for many more moments of people simply being human! See a later section about this dynamite programming tool.

4. How Not To Pick A Partner

Have you ever noticed how the seemingly innocuous words *"Okay, everybody pick a partner..."* can strike terror into the hearts of many participants? In my experience, it is one of the most frightening things you can ask a group to do.

Questions such as "Should I pick someone, or wait to be picked?", "What if I pick somebody, and they don't want to play with me?", "Does she really want to play with me, or is she just being nice", or "If I pick him, will he think I'm coming on to him?" will be roused among many others.

Sadly, the instruction to "pick a partner" is too-oft interpreted as "find someone you are attracted to." This thought is as embarrassing as it is open to the anxiety-laden prospect of people feeling left out. There are just too many other ways to ask people to get into smaller groups, including pairs, to risk these outcomes.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you should *never* use the words "pick a partner" again. Certainly, as a program develops and your group becomes more comfortable with one another, the panic-inducing reaction to simply 'picking a partner' will diminish. But, with most groups, especially if they have just met each other, you are well advised to avoid the typical "pick a partner" suggestion.

Check out the activities in this ebook such as **Categories**, **Psychic Handshake** and **Clumps** later on for some amusing, often random methods to help in the selection of partners or small groups.

5. Always Ask For A Volunteer

There is always, no matter how long you wait, someone willing to step into the ring of fire, and help you do whatever you need. Perhaps you need help to demonstrate the next move, or need someone to break the ice and start the activity, whatever – it never fails, there is always someone willing to step forward.

But why bother, you might ask, when you can often save time and potential embarrassment by doing it yourself, or asking a colleague to step in? The value is hidden in the invitation.

It can be as simple as observing the initial humour of no one stepping forward, or everyone but one poor soul stepping back. However, beyond the humour, there is extraordinary value in using a volunteer from your group. Having one or more of your group step forward says "I am willing to… take a risk, have fun, give it a go, look silly," etc, etc.

These are huge transformative messages that are broadcast loud and clear – yet subtly – to the rest of the group. It will frequently open up further opportunities for more of this, from more of your group.

Asking for volunteers is part of the fun, it's suspenseful ("what's he/she gonna do?"), and it's a true adventure, especially if you don't telegraph what they are going to be doing. Besides, I get to be up-front all the time. I want to share the limelight from time to time.

6. Stop An Activity Before It Wanes

Leave them wanting for more. Stopping an activity just as it reaches its peak, and perhaps a tad further will give you many useful programmatic starting points. Moving on at this juncture keeps the energy of the group up, and their spirits high.

It's easier to slide into the next activity if you have their attention, even if they are complaining that you stopped too soon. Better this than having no complaints because everyone left the scene on account of eventual boredom!

You can always go back to the activity if it really is that good (and it fits your program goals), but it's often better to move onto something new while you have them in the palm of your hand.

And my advice, if at the end of the day you have waned more often than you waxed, "Get a new job."

7. Play On

Ever been left out of a group? Ever felt that everyone else was having fun, but you weren't? You're not on your own – I've been there, and done that, especially when I was younger. So I make it a point not to introduce too many activities that eliminate people, especially early in a program.

Games that eliminate folks can be great fun; I still use many of them today. But when used at the wrong time, or in the initial stages of a group's development, it risks alienating certain people, not to mention losing a lot of useful energy. Also, it is not unusual to watch the same people get eliminated over and over again. Beware of the message this may send to the group – and the individual – if this does not occur within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Clearly, the more people you have involved, the more energy and good times you can develop – which is my next point...

(Okay, I know this will be the eighth 'Trick of the Trade,' but it's really important, so I just had to squeeze it in.)

8. Keep People Bunched Together

The wall-flower syndrome – you know, those folks who like to stand with their backs to the wall – is a real killer of energy and enthusiasm, especially in the beginning stages of your program (when it seems everyone is reading the same script). Always invite people to come closer to you, get them to bunch up a little.

Circles work fine, but when you don't need a circle, collapse them in, and invite them to move closer to you. You and they will bristle with energy, which is a wonderful way to kick-off.

My style is very much *"Hey, come over here. I've got a secret to tell."* People move in. They lean closer. Their attention is piqued. I love that. They are now primed, and ready to rock-n-roll. Yet, at the same time, the group has started to unconsciously break down some barriers, not to mention, trust and share. This is all good.

Try speaking a little softer. That often works a treat. Your group will have to bunch up together simply to hear you. And all those folks who can't hear you because they are too busy talking, will suddenly gasp when they realise the group has gone quiet! I love the humour of that moment too.

Having FUNN?

or Why Most Ice-Breakers & Group Games Fail

Obvious fun is very hard to stand away from, and so the FUNN – a whimsical acronym for **Functional Understanding Not Necessary** - element of a program goes a long way towards involving everyone's participation.

FUNN is <u>THE</u> most critical element of every group experience in which you want people to mix, share and laugh. Applied liberally throughout your program, it says "If it's fun, I want to be a part of it."

FUNN means that it's okay to be involved in an activity for no other purpose than to enjoy it. You, or your participants, do not need to have a special reason to do an activity. Do it for the laughs, the play and the good feelings it creates. You will be surprised by the results.

We should take fun more seriously!

On the face of it, having fun during the course of a series of group ice-breakers and activities can appear to some people (dare I say, many decision makers) as folly; a serious waste of time and resources.

Or, in other words, *"Why are we playing childish games when we should be ... [feel free to add whatever serious intent you care to name here]?"* This school of thought would have us believe that playing and learning is tantamount to throwing a bucket of dollar bills into the wind, and trying to catch as many of them as you can with oven mitts. You can't be serious, and I rejoin – that's exactly the point.

It is absolutely essential to inject a heavy dose of FUNN style activities into your 'ice-breaking' program for, ironically, lots of valid, intrinsic reasons. I can not stress this enough.

Programmatically, there are many reasons for injecting FUNN into your program – to invite people to laugh, to share, to play, loosen up, set the tone, or to change the pace, etc – all of which contribute manifestly to your overall group objectives and the development of trust. Full stop.

Yes, FUNN is good, agreeable, contagious, its own reward, etc, etc. But it will also help facilitate your program goals – and, the beauty is, your participants don't need to understand that this is what's happening. It just goes on around them.

I often remark that *"If in the midst of having an outrageous time today, you should stop and ask yourself 'Why are we doing this?,' I suggest that you don't work too hard to find an answer – simply enjoy it for what it is."*

You see, I want the budding trust to sneak up on them. They'll see it as just having fun, but I know better. The old 'you-have-to-trust-each-other' while I wag my finger trick just doesn't work.

Oh, and it's no fun either.

Injecting FUNN into your program will give your participants the permission they crave to play – truly play – and happily for you, the motivation to generate a safe place...

… which inspires good sharing...

… which leads to trust...

… which can stimulate learning.

Voila!

The Ten EASIEST & MOST SUCCESSFUL Ice-Breakers and Group Games EVER!

Okay, if you're looking for dozens of sure-fire, high-energy, interactive, leave-them-wanting-for-more activities for your group, then you have everything you need in the pages which follow.

To make it easy for you, all of the activities I will describe can be played right now – because they require no equipment whatsoever.

Here's what else you'll discover:

- Dozens of fun, innovative ways to split your large group into smaller groups;

- A bunch of the most contagious, interactive games that will 'break the ice' and energise your group; and

- THE ten most successful, proven and funnest group activities I know, each accompanied with at least one variation.

These ice-breakers, energisers, and interactive games work because people love 'em.

It was difficult to whittle my 'Top 200' activities down to such a small list of ten. But, no matter. you're still be getting a treasure trove of totally fun and proven group programming ideas.

So now, listed alphabetically, I proudly share my Top Ten Easiest and Most Successful Ice-Breakers and Group Activities...

Categories

Clapping Game

Clumps

Cocktail Party

Gotcha!

Let Me Introduce

Paired Shares

Psychic Handshake

Spectrums

Thumb-Wrestling In Stereo

> Click the links at left to see the activity in action on **playmeo**…

Categories

The perfect ice-breaker – ideal for mixing people in a fun and non-threatening manner

At A Glance

Your group splits into a variety of smaller groupings, according to a series of categories you announce.

What You Need

10 – 20 mins

What To Do

Ask your group to separate according to the categories or groupings you are about to announce. For example, if the category is *"Colour of your pants,"* everyone wearing blue jeans will group together.

Sometimes, individuals may find themselves alone, but in most cases, small groupings of commonality will develop. Upon identifying each of the groups, announce the next split. You can keep splitting folks for as long as they are having fun, or you run out of ideas.

For mixing purposes, alternate between two-group splits and multi-group splits. The idea is to invite your group to meet as many new people as possible.

To this end, if you have the time and the inclination, as soon as the groups have formed, give the participants a few moments to say hello to one another, or perhaps share something of relevance to the category, e.g., *"What was so cool about being the oldest / youngest / in-between child in your family?"*

Here are just a few sample and fun group categories. There are simply hundreds of them out there, so please, don't hesitate to make up your own, or tempt them from your group.

Simple half-half splits:

- Arm that ends up crossed over the top of the other, when folded on your chest.

- Leg you put into your pants, shorts, underwear, etc. first when dressing.

- Preference for cooking or cleaning up.

- Preference for washing or drying dishes.

- Position of your thumbs, that is left or right on top, when you clasp your hands together so that your fingers interlock.

- Last digit of your home telephone number. All the odd numbers – 1, 3, 5, 7 or 9 – get together, and the even numbers do the same.

- When presented with a 'good news / bad news story,' which do you prefer to hear first?

- Preference for the way toilet paper spills off the roll – like a waterfall, over the top and forward, or against the back towards the wall.

- Number of street you live at – odds and evens.

Simple multi-group splits:

- Month / zodiac sign in which you were born.

- Number of continents you have visited.

- Number of siblings in your family, including yourself.

- Colour of your eyes, hair, socks, etc.

- Type of shoes you are wearing (not necessarily their brand).

- Which shoulder(s) you hold a carry-bag – right, left or both shoulders.

- How often you shave each week?

- Distance you have travelled to get here (use clumps of distances, such as 0-5 km, 5-10 km, etc.

- Number of items you recycle at home, e.g., plastic, glass, tin, paper, etc.

Variation

- Use to divide a large group into roughly random and even teams. If you are looking for an even split, and just don't seem to find a category that fits, simply use the old scientific method of indiscriminately moving a few people (*"Hey, you and you, move over here."*) to even out the groupings.

Clapping Game

A sure-fire energiser that will raise the energy of your group, and make 'em laugh

At A Glance

Standing in front of a group, one person passes their hands in front of themselves in a repeated back and forth motion asking everyone to clap only when his or her hands pass.

What You Need

1 – 2 mins

What To Do

You need one person to stand in front of your group. Maybe that's you? Explain that you want everyone to watch carefully as you move your hands back and forth in a particular pattern.

Perhaps alternating left and right, or up and down, it doesn't matter much. Just make sure that at some point your hands cross during the journey.

The fun part is that you ask your group to clap every time they see your hands cross. It's at this point, I rediscover how much I love this game, energiser, diversion, call it what you like. The intense focus and concentration on people's faces is priceless.

So you start passing, slow at first, then in rapid succession. And then, I suggest, you get tricky. Make out like your hands are about to cross, but they don't. Guaranteed, money in the bank, this lark will cause your group to clap, and then quickly realising their mistake, laugh out loud.

You need only present this exercise for minute or so, and it will produce the desired effect. Your group will now be bubbling with more energy, and there will be smiles and laughter aplenty.

Variation

- Structured as an elimination game, same rules apply. If someone makes a 'mistake,' for example, a person claps when they shouldn't, or is late, etc, they are asked to step aside, sit down or whatever and enjoy the continuing action. Keep going until one person remains, and give them a round of applause!

Clumps

Zany, fast-paced energiser designed to mix people frequently

At A Glance

People quickly form a series of temporary groups matching the number called by the leader.

What You Need

5 - 10 mins

What To Do

This is so simple, yet so good. Gather your group around, and explain that in a moment you will shout out a number – any number from, say one to ten (the bigger your group, the bigger you can make the top end).

Immediately, everyone must form a group consisting of that number of people. In my experience, groups get very huggy at this point, and form little fortresses with their bodies to prevent others from joining their little huddle.

Naturally, you will often get a few poor souls left over, the so-called remainder, if we speak in the language of long division.

At this moment, you have several options. You can eliminate these folks, move them to the side, and continue with the next shouted number, and so on until you get the lucky 'winners.' This is fine; however, I think it's best to simply shout another number. It keeps the energy up, is much less competitive, and more fun for everyone.

And the look on the faces of the 'dejected' when they hear the next number called ('I'm saved') is priceless.

Move from five to three, then up to nine and back down to four so that a high degree of mixing occurs. Shout *"ONE!"* just to see what happens.

Variations

- Add the proviso that every time a new number is called, a person cannot form a new group with anyone who was in their previous group (as much as is possible). This tweaking of the rules will spoil the plans of those crafty individuals who prefer to stick together, simply opting to ebb and flow in terms of their membership number at any point in time.

- Form a group according to a simple, easily-accessible category, such as dark-coloured tops, brand of running shoes, gender, colour of eyes, etc. Similar to Categories on page 11.

- Once formed, instruct the newly-created groups to use their collective bodies to make the shape of a letter of the alphabet, or numeral, or object, e.g., table, house, care, etc.

Love What You See Here?

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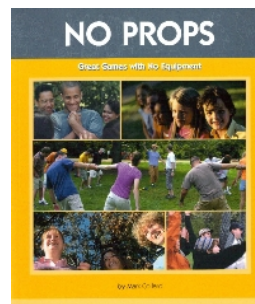
Cocktail Party

A quick name reinforcer, and welcome segue to a drinks break

At A Glance

In a limited time frame, people mingle about shaking hands and greeting as many people by name as possible.

What You Need

1 - 2 mins

What To Do

Looking for a quick way to wrap up a session, perhaps reinforce a few names people may have just learned, or want to simply cut to a drinks break? This is it.

Invite people to bunch around you, capturing the image of palatial surroundings, evening gowns, black ties and cocktails. Suggest that each person holds in their left hand an imaginary drink, or cocktail if they choose.

Then, on your signal, everyone is encouraged to meet, shake the hands of and greet as many people at the party as possible, in say, 43.5 seconds (this is not a magic number!).

On *"GO,"* it will sound something like, *"Oooohh, darling, so good to see you!. I'm having a frightfully good time…..".* Chat for a few moments, discuss drinks, recent holidays to the Swiss Alps, and then in typical cocktail party fashion, interrupt the conversation with a *"Well, Doris, I must keep moving."* Air kiss, kiss (these are not mandatory), and *"...Bye bye!"*… and off you go to greet another party guest.

Suggest to your group that they should use the other person's name as often as possible, enquire about the other person's drink (remember, they are holding on to it), but not spend too long with any one person.

For a bit of fun, ask someone for the time and see if they spill their drink!

When you feel like the heat has started to dissipate from the party, quell the action and ask your group what is odd about the activity.

Someone will usually remark that "There's nothing in my hand", which is your cue to say…."*Let's remedy that situation – time for a drinks break.*"

Variations

- For kids, suggest they are holding their favourite (soft) drink.

- Imagine you are in a swanky Food Hall. Invite people to mingle as they treat themselves to the extraordinary array of fine foods available on people's trays.

Gotcha!

Never fails to produce raptures of laughter

At A Glance

Standing in a circle with their index fingers pointing downward into their partners' open palms, everyone tries to catch the juxta-positioned finger at the same time.

What You Need

5 - 10 mins

What To Do

Ask your group to form a circle, facing inwards and standing side by side. Note, this next bit is best if you demonstrate as you explain it.

Holding your right hand out to your right hand side (about shoulder height) with your palm facing upwards, extend the index finger of your left hand, and place it into the open palm of the person on your left.

Look around, and you should all be inextricably linked. Now, on the command *"GO!"* – which works pretty well to start a game – everyone tries to catch the finger of the person on their right, that which is pointing downward, touching the centre of their palm.

Of course, jocularity prevails, because everyone is also trying to avoid being caught by the person on their left. I just love that bit. Ask people to shout out *"GOTCHA!"* when they catch a finger.

Now, you could try to move on, but I doubt you will want to. There are ample moments of humour here. Observe the way in which the palms of some people, which first started out as flat, are slowly curling with each round. Or the proclivity of folks to not want to touch their finger tip on their neighbour's palm, lest they get caught!! It's all so funny.

My biggest Gotcha group? Two-hundred and fifty! Spectacular.

Variations

- Try this again several times, switching palms from the right to the left (to benefit our left-brained friends), i.e., the left palm is facing upwards, and a right index finger is extended.

- Cross your arms as you play, i.e., extend the right palm in front of your chest to point toward the person on your left, and place your left index finger into the waiting palm on your right.

- Try all variations with your palms upside-down, and index fingers pointing up.

- Regular set-up, but this time each person attempts to catch the finger sitting in their right palm with their left hand. Try it. Hilarious.

- Original set-up, add a further challenge. Instruct people to place their right foot directly above, but not touching the left toes of their right-hand side partner. On *"GO,"* you try to tag the foot of your partner, whilst trying to avoid being tagged and performing the usual finger and palm routine.

- Everything above, but groups of only two or three or whatever.
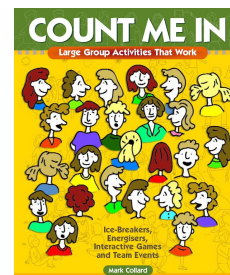
Let Me Introduce

An exercise where you introduce everyone else but yourself

At A Glance

Each person approaches as many people as possible within a specified time limit, introducing each of them to another person in the group.

What You Need

2 – 5 mins

What To Do

I've found this simple re-working of the traditional form of introductions a brilliant way to rid my group of a lot of that tension that most people experience when they first get together. It won't evaporate all of the awkward feelings, but it is fun and is guaranteed to create a ton of energy.

With your group milling about, ask them to casually approach any other person in the group – whether they know their name or not – greet them, and ask for their name. Embodied with a lively demonstration, it will sound something like this. *"Hi, what's your name?"* The doe-eyed person you have just approached says *"Simon,"* and you reply with *"Hi Simon, come with me, I'd like to you to meet somebody."*

At which point you lead Simon with you over to another unsuspecting group member, and say *"Hi, what's your name?"* and it might be Vijay this time. *"Hi Vijay. I'd like you to meet Simon. Simon this is Vijay."*

Having done the job of the Introducer, explain that each person now moves on to either seek a new person to greet, or submit to another person's invitation to be part of their introduction, and so on. Get the idea?

In principle, the person arranging the introductions need not say their name, but we are so accustomed to doing so in our culture, it often happens anyway!

To give the exercise a little vivacity, announce that your group has three (or whatever) minutes to introduce everyone to everybody else. Won't happen, but that's not the point.

Variation

- Following on from the basic set-up, one of the two people who have just been introduced to each other, now leads the other to a new person. For example, Simon leads Vijay over to meet and greet with Rachel.

Paired Shares

One of my most potent tools for spicing up any ice-breaker

At A Glance

At appropriate intervals, you ask the members of a pair or small group to share their thoughts on a particular topic.

What You Need

1 - 5 mins

What To Do

This 'ice-breaker' is a star because it can be integrated into any one or all of the other activities in this ebook. When you invite people to share, you build energy, while the process of sharing itself goes a long way towards chipping away at the ice that is often present in groups, especially when they first meet. Like American Express, I never leave a program without using this technique at some point to help me break the ice. Works like a charm.

Pepper your program, especially at the start, with some well-placed 'paired shared' opportunities. Works best when you have designed lots of mixing and interaction into your program, moving from pairs to threesomes, half-half splits, back to pairs, etc. But, pick your moment – don't bog down every level of interaction as a time to share, or it will get old.

Activities such as Categories (page 11), Spectrums (page 24), and any of the partner activities I present are ideal for dropping in a couple of paired-shares along the way.

What to share? Sky's the limit. Sometimes, it makes sense to invite conversation around the topic at hand. For example, if you asked your group to split according to who is the eldest, youngest or in-between in their family, invite conversation about the good, the bad and the ugly of this relative status.

Or, try some of my favourites below.

Variations

- What did you want to be when you 'grew up?'

- What was your most memorable adventure experience?

- The way I would describe my family is…

- My fondest memories of another person are …

- What was your most embarrassing moment?

- Describe the most irritating driving habit you see on the roads today.

- What is the one talent or skill you wish you had?

- Describe the naughtiest thing you did as a kid.

- Name one famous person (dead or alive) you would love to have dinner with tonight.

- If you were 20 years old again, and knew what you know now, what would you do differently?

- Name three of your most important values.

- Describe the best kiss you ever had.

- The thing that makes me different to other people is …

- If you could ask God just one question, what would it be?

- If you could be invisible for just one hour, what would you do?

- Some of the things that make me happy are…

- If you had to forgive one person who wronged you in your lifetime, who would it be and why?

- If you could eliminate one hereditary trait in your family, what would you choose?

- If you had a tattoo on your body, where would you put it, and what design would it be?

- If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?

Psychic Handshake

A really FUNN, random method of forming a specific number of groups

At A Glance

People shake hands a fixed number of times to determine the group they belong to.

What You Need

3 - 5 mins

What To Do

Begin by asking everyone in your group to think of a number, and keep it to themselves. Your choice of number will be determined by the number of small groups you wish to create. So, if you want four groups at the end of this exercise, ask them to think of the numbers 1, 2, 3 or 4.

The idea is for everyone who is thinking of the same number to find each other and gather in one spot. But, unless your group has some sort of extra sensory perceptors at work, I would suggest they will need some further instructions to help them find their designated group. This is where the fun is.

With a number in mind, invite each person to approach another and immerse themselves in a very friendly shaking of hands. Each person will literally shake their own hand (read, arm as well) corresponding to the number they are thinking of, and so will their partner.

The key to this banter is for each person to hold their arm firm when he or she accomplishes the required number of shakes. So, if you are thinking 'three' and I'm thinking 'two,' we will happily shake one another's hands for the first two shakes, and then suddenly my arm and hand will go stiff, and prevent any further mutual shakes.

At this juncture, it will be obvious from the level of grunts and laughter that emanate from you as you struggle with my 'holding firm' position, that we are not on the same wave-length and belong in different groups. It's a good idea to demonstrate what the 'shaking-of-hands' and 'holding-firm' positions look like – in front of everyone before you say *"GO"* to give everyone a clue and a chance to giggle at what is really a very FUNN exchange.

Suggest to your group that it is most effective if they remain silent throughout the frenetic shaking period. That is, no talking, but laughter is permitted.

Also, a few smart folks will think to indicate with their out-stretched fingers, or by clapping, the number they are thinking of. Applaud their ingenuity, but suggest that it's more fun to stick to the shaking.

Variation

- Same set-up, but blind-folded.

Spectrums

A passive 'get to know you more' game

At A Glance

People respond to a series of questions by standing between two imaginary points of a spectrum.

What You Need

10 - 15 mins

What To Do

Create in the mind's eye of your group the concept of an imaginary line that stretches between two points – be it two walls, a couple of trees, whatever. Describe this space as a spectrum, suggesting that if black was at one end and white the other, all the shades of grey would be in between.

Having created this metaphor, announce to your group that you would like each individual to place him or herself along this spectrum according to their responses to a series of questions and scenarios.

They can choose to be anywhere along the imaginary line, but stress that it is their decision, and they should try to not be influenced by where their peers and / or friends are standing.

black ....white

For example, explain that the spectrum represents how we, as individuals, typically view waking up in the morning. On the left-hand side of the spectrum, we have the early risers, those folks who just can't wait to get out of bed, and are pumped as soon as their feet hit the floor.

Then, at the extreme right-hand side, we have those poor souls who hit the snooze button twice and need three cups of coffee to remember even what day it is. And of course, everyone else fits somewhere in between.

Upon announcing each scenario or question, ask people to move where they belong within the spectrum. There are no right or wrong answers. But the depth and breadth of the spread will reflect a number of characteristics about the group.

From time to time, invite the group to observe where the group is generally situated, and perhaps even ask them to share with a few neighbours or with the larger group what this might mean.

Or, of course, you could simply move people from one spectrum to the next solely for the purposes of mixing, getting to know one another and having fun.

Here are a few spectrums to start with, then make up a few of your own.

- Your exercise regime – never to several hours a day.
- Job preference – totally indoors to totally outdoors.
- Car security – never lock your car to always lock your car, even if you are gone for 30 seconds.
- Preferred home – deep inner-city to remote wilderness.
- Preferred landscape – mountains to sea.
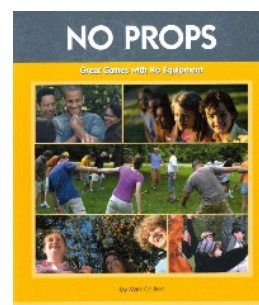- Time of year born – January to December.
- Favourite sport – A to Z.

Variation

- Use this technique to process or debrief a group experience, for example, create a spectrum of *"How well the group communicated"* where one end is woeful and the other is without fault.

Thumb-Wrestling In Stereo

Fantastic variation on an old favourite

At A Glance

Partners form a 'monkey-grip' with their hands, and each tries to pin the other person's thumb under their own first.

What You Need

5 - 10 mins

What To Do

Ask your group to separate into pairs. Using the same hand, instruct each person to hold their partner's hand as if in the typical 'monkey-grip' position, i.e., fingers curled into the palm of the other.

At this juncture, you could simply launch into wrestle mania, but try these two fun adaptations to add a little pizzazz to an otherwise I-can-see-what's-going-to-happen activity:

- Ask each person to grasp the free hand of their partner to form a second "combat zone" situated on top of or below their already coupled hands. Their arms should now looked crossed, to give that peculiar stereo look.

- Suggest that before play commences, the partners should join in a quick preparative ditty of "One, two, three, four; I declare a thumb war," during which the opposing thumbs alternate side to side across their respective corners of the 'playing field.'

You are now primed to engage in mortal thumb combat. The object is to pin your partner's thumb under your own first.

Note: Slipping out from under your partner's thumb, after having been momentarily pinned, is a breach of the International Thumb Wrestling Convention! Let the games begin.

Variations

- Swap the set of hands that appears on top of the other.

- Try it with three or four people. Continue to apply the 'monkey-grip' posture, but this time all wrestlers curl their fingers in one big clump of palm propinquity. Opportunities to form alliances (i.e., *"Let's work together to pin HIS thumb first."*) adds another level of excitement to the game.

Too Much Fun Is Never Enough!

The ice-breakers and group games I have shared in this ebook
represent only a small number of the most successful activities
I conduct all over the world with groups (young and old) to
generate laughter, promote interaction and develop trust.

If you would like to get your hands on more
of these type of sure-fire activities, go to:

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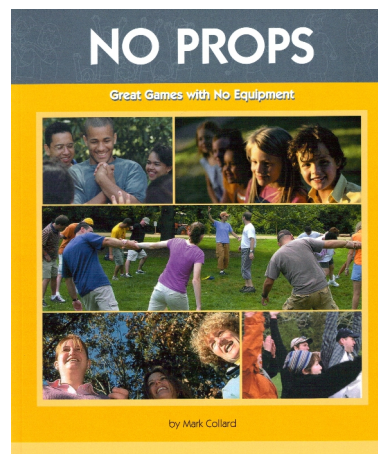
Inside this 220 page top-selling book, you'll discover 300 more fun,
interactive and totally engaging activities for groups.

None of them require equipment (so they'll fit your budget),
they have been used with almost every type of group imaginable
(so, they're proven to work) and they're incredibly easy to use.

About playmeo

playmeo is an innovative online platform of resources that helps experiential educators, teachers & camp leaders lead remarkably fun, engaging and meaningful group-based programs.

We are passionate about **building connections before content**.

We believe that fun group games and activities are one of the most powerful (and attractive) ways to help people connect, and strong relationships amplify the results of whatever you're trying to get done.

To this end, we are best known for hosting the world's largest online database of group games & activities, and offer a variety of professional development resources to help people (like you) create remarkably fun programs that make a difference.

This ebook shares a glimpse of this approach, and we hope you enjoy it.

"A good idea doesn't care who it belongs to" – Karl Rohnke

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About the Author

Mark Collard is an experiential trainer, speaker & top-selling author. Based in Australia, he helps experiential educators learn skills & strategies they need to deliver remarkably fun programs that engage people & strengthen relationships. He developed playmeo's online database of group games & activities.

Mark brings a natural warmth and energy into everything he delivers. His fun and vibrant approach not only makes people feel at home, but also assists them to learn more from their experience.

He is often engaged to provide fun, interactive programs for corporate, professional, school and not-for-profit organisations all over the world. His expertise includes:

- Team development
- Development of adventure programming skills
- Strategic / organisational development
- Conference activity programs
- Master of Ceremonies

A highly sought-after trainer on the national and international circuit, Mark is also a fun and super-passionate keynote speaker, voice-over professional and Master of Ceremonies.

You can read more about Mark on wikipedia and here.

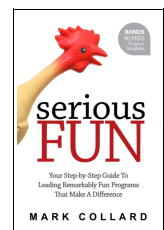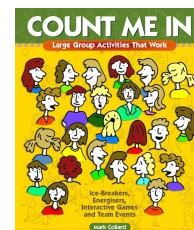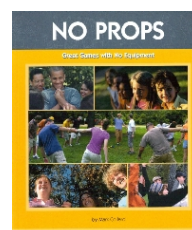## Also by the Author

Mark is the author of three top-selling activity publications:

No Props: Great Games with No Equipment

Count Me In: Large Group Activities That Work

Serious Fun

Contact Mark

hello@playmeo.com

phone +1 646 475 2144   +61 413 075 123

twitter @playmeo

playmeo

www.playmeo.com

@playmeo

+1 646 475 2144   +61 413 075 123

hello@playmeo.com