

Initiative games, or ice-breakers, are a great way to bring a group together, particularly at the beginning of a trip when setting the tone is so important. They can help people get to know each other and begin that elusive process of establishing trust. Keep in mind that there is a level of interpersonal risk in some of these games and gauge the comfort level of the group before you start any activity.

### **Initiative Games Teaching Outline**

1. Use games which are appropriate to the "level" the group has reached. If you push too much with games before the group has developed an identity, you may turn some people off.
2. ***Safety comes first!*** In any situation in which people are off the ground they should be spotted *at all times*. It is too easy for someone to fall and injure an ankle, etc. which could ruin the rest of the trip for them. Also be aware if things start to get too rambunctious and out of hand; this can often lead to an accidental injury. Slow down the activity or stop it ***before*** something happens. *Any unsafe practices such as hanging upside down, diving headfirst, throwing people, or overstraining must be stopped immediately.*
3. Consider things such as the weather and the physical condition of the group to decide the type of activity.
4. Be careful of such things as glasses, watches and jewelry which can get broken (and can also inflict wounds).

**The Name Game** - Each member of the group must invent some action to go with their name (a graceful bow, somersault etc.). Each person says their name and demonstrates their action, and then says the name and performs the action of the others in the circle. This continues around the circle until each member has "performed" everyone else's name and action. This is a great tool to break the ice and get people to know everyone's name.

**Name Game II** - Each member is asked to give their first and last name and some history or some special thing for them about the name. (e.g. I am named after my great grandmother who immigrated from the moon, or I am named after my dad's first cat, etc.).

**2 Truths and a Lie** - Going around in a circle, have each person introduce themselves and tell two truths and one lie about themselves. They then pass the paper to the group and have the others guess which statement is the lie.

**Human Knot** - Stand the group in a circle. Have everyone put their right hand in the center of the circle with the thumb up. Then everyone should reach in with their left hand and grab someone else's right thumb. Make sure that right hands are attached to left hands and make sure that two people don't have both of each other's hands. Send a pulse around the group to make sure that everyone is connected (if not, exchange a few hands to connect everyone). Then try to unscramble the knot back into a circle. This is another great game to do at the very beginning of a trip to get people to "unwind." The knot should untangle unless you have an overhand knot (which cannot be undone, except by creative reconnecting).

**Lineup** - Whisper to each member of the group the name of a particular animal. The group must line up from the largest animal to the smallest by making the animal's sound and/or acting like the animal. No talking. Then when they have lined up have each person present their animal to the group and the group must guess the person's animal identity. See how close the group came in its size lineup. This can also be done blindfolded by just using noises.

Another variation is to have everyone line up based on some piece of personal information. One example is for everyone to line up by shoe size without talking. This can also be done as a race by splitting the BCM team in half (teens against adults, for example).

**Circle Sit** - Have the group stand in a circle facing in, then have everyone turn 90 degrees to the same side so that they are facing the back of the person in front of them. Tighten up the circle and have the group all sit at once so that each person sits on the lap of the person behind. Once sitting, try to get the group to move the circle around by having everyone lift the same foot and shuffle it forward, then move the other foot and "walk." Then have the group stand back up simultaneously.

**Group Stand Up** - Sit the group in a tight circle with their backs to the center and have them link arms and then try to stand up as a group. You can start with only part of the group then slowly add more and more people.

A variation of this is to have two people stand up together by putting their feet together, holding hands, then pulling themselves up with mutual tension. This teaches an immediate trust and reliance on someone else.

**Camp Setup** - Have the group set up camp without talking and only using one hand per person. This should go on for a specified period of time or until some event (like the tarp setup) has been completed. *For safety, all stove and fire activities will be performed using 2 hand, minimal talking is permitted.*

**A What?** - Sit in a circle facing the center. One person starts the game by taking an object, turning to the person on his right and saying "this is a \_\_\_\_\_." That person then turns and responds, "A What?" The first person says, "A \_\_\_\_\_." Then the second person says, "Oh, a \_\_\_\_\_." The second person turns to the third person and the entire exchange repeats until it has worked all the way around the circle. Once people have the hang of it you can confuse everyone by calling the object some other name (for example pass a rock and call it a fish) and/or by starting another object going in the opposite direction from the first object.

**Killer** - The leader should explain the rules of the game and then when everyone's eyes are closed s/he should pick a Killer by tapping the person on the head. (If the leaders want to play, slips of paper can be passed around and the one with the X is the Killer). The Killer kills by blinking one eye at his victim. The victim must see the blink in order to be killed and must wait for 5 seconds after the blink before "dying". (Be melodramatic!) Once killed you become a spectator. The survivors must try to figure out the identity of the Killer before they are killed. If someone has a suspicion one can announce, "I have an accusation." Unless someone else says, "I second the accusation," the game continues. If someone does second the accusation, the two accusers count to three and then each point to the person each one suspects. (*Without conferences, gestures, etc. before pointing.*) If they both point to a person who is innocent or if they both point to different suspects, (even if one of the suspects is the Killer), they are both dead because of poor detective work. If both point to the Killer, s/he must confess and the game is over.

**Red Handed** - The group forms a circle facing in and one person, who is selected to be IT, stands in the center. The IT person closes his/her eyes while the other players pass some small object (e.g. a pebble) from person to

person in the circle. The sneakiest pass is to hold the pebble in one fist, palm down, and drop it into the palm-up hand of the next person in the circle. After the object has begun to make the rounds IT opens his/her eyes, searching for the object. If IT suspects someone s/he taps that person on one of the person's hands. If the suspect is empty-handed, the game continues with IT searching. If the person has the object, that person becomes the new IT and the old IT joins the circle.

**Trust Walk** - Have the group line up holding hands. One person at one end is the leader. The rest of the group closes their eyes (or is blindfolded) and the leader leads them over, under, around and through various obstacles. The leader must guide the person directly behind him/her by vocal and/or tactile directions and that person must do the same to the "blind" person behind him/her and on down the line. This can also be done in pairs. It is an interesting way to let people explore an environment (trees, bark, leaves, wet moss etc.) *Be careful of people falling, glass etc.*

**Dyads** - Separate the group into pairs, preferably with someone they do not know well and have them find a space together to talk. Each person in the pair will spend X minutes telling his/her partner anything s/he would like the other person to know about home, hobbies, family, things they are good at, goals, Princeton, etc. The partner will simply listen, asking few questions and making a minimum number of comments along the way. Reverse roles. Then have everyone regroup and have each person introduce their partner by saying some of the interesting things they learned about their partner.

## **Minute Mysteries**

These have become a fun thing to do while hiking down the trail. The person presenting the mystery should give the situation and ask what happened. The others participating must solve the mystery by asking questions. The presenter can only answer yes, no, maybe, or it doesn't matter. (Solutions are listed upside-down on the following page)

### **Situations**

1. A man is lying dead in the forest, with a matchstick clutched in his hand.
2. A man walks into a bar, sits down and asks the bartender for a glass of water. The bartender pulls out a gun and points at the man. The man says, "Thanks," and walks out of the bar.
3. A man is driving along a mountain road, listening to the radio. Suddenly, he drives off the road and over a cliff and dies.
4. There is a table with 53 bicycles on it. A man, sitting at the table, is hunched over, quite dead.
5. A man gets on a train in town A and heads to town B. He boards a train back to town A. Halfway there, he becomes distraught and leaps from the train, killing himself.
6. A man wakes up in the morning and reads the headline of his local paper: "Mrs. Smith Dies in Ski Accident in Switzerland," and he announces, "That wasn't an accident. That was murder!"
7. There is a man standing next to a box. Seven people walk in, look in the box, nod to each other and then the man, and walk out.
8. A man goes into a seafood restaurant down at the harbor. He orders the special for the day, albatross soup. He takes one bite, then goes out to buy a gun and kills himself.
9. A man is found dead hanging from the ceiling in a completely empty room with all doors locked from the inside. There is a pool of water on the floor.

### **Solutions**

1. Three soldiers were flying in a balloon on a reconnaissance mission over enemy territory. Unfortunately, the balloon started to lose altitude. Realizing that if they crash they would certainly be caught and killed, they decide to take drastic measures. Since they had

already thrown all their ballast overboard, they decided to draw matchsticks. The person with the shortest match stick would have to jump, allowing the others to escape. The person dead in the fall was the unlucky one.

2. The man who walked in to the bar had the hiccoughs. The clever bartender figured that scaring the person with the gun would be better than a glass of water, and he was right.
3. The man in the car is a disk jockey at a nearby radio station. He had just committed a murder for which he knows he will be the prime suspect. In order to set up an unshakable alibi, he taped his radio show ahead of time and committed the murder while the tape was being broadcast. On the way back to the station he hears the tape machine malfunction and stop on the radio. He realizes his alibi is useless and kills himself.
4. The 53 bicycles are actually a deck of cards, with bicycles on the backs. The dead man was caught cheating (slipping an extra card in), and was shot by another player.
5. The man who lives town A has been blind all of his life. He has an operation performed on his eyes in town B in an attempt to restore his sight. The operation was a success. However, on the way back to town A, the train enters a tunnel and suddenly there is no light. Thinking he has lost his sight forever, he jumps from the train.
6. The man is Mr. Smith's travel agent. Mr. Smith murdered Mrs. Smith while they were vacationing. The agent knows because Mr. Smith, a real penny-pincher, bought a two-way ticket for himself to Switzerland and only a one-way ticket for his wife.
7. The seven people and the man were shipwrecked on an island with no food. Finally, in order to survive, they resorted to drastic measures. They had the man, who was a surgeon, remove one hand from each person so the group would have food. The surgeon kept both of his hands so he could perform the operations. Eventually, the group was rescued. As part of the group's agreement the surgeon had to have one of his hands removed when they returned to the mainland. His hand was in the box in the room. The seven entered, saw that he had fulfilled his part of the agreement, and left.
8. The man was part of the crew of a freighter that sank in the Pacific. He, and two other crewmen, his best friends, were adrift in a lifeboat for weeks. They had no food and all their attempts at catching fish had failed. He became weak and delirious. One of his friends died and the other cut up the body to keep them alive. The surviving friend told the

man that he was eating an albatross that had been caught. When the man ate the albatross soup in the restaurant it didn't taste anything like what he had eaten on the lifeboat. He realized what had happened and killed himself.

9. The man committed suicide in the locked room. He hung himself by standing on a block of ice, which melted.