

Brain Breaks & Ice Breakers for Virtual Meetings:

A National Council for Behavioral Health Staff Compilation

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Please enjoy this collection of brain breaks and ice breakers, which can be used for virtual meetings, presentations, and gatherings. While they are organized by theme, they are otherwise listed in no particular order. Enjoy!

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GETTING TO KNOW OTHERS

Show and Tell

Participants add to a PPT pictures to do show and tell or bring an items or object to talk about. Have everyone grab one item that is close to them/that they can reach/always have on their desk/etc. and show it

Health Check

What’s the last thing you did to support your health (physical, social and/or emotional)?

Achievement

What achievement are you proudest of so far this week?

What are you feeling?

Start every meeting by having people state two things they are feeling using one word
 "Would You Rather"

Check my House

Give a tour of your “work-from-home” environment

Coffee chat

3-5 minutes of non-work conversations

Take a Picture of Your Shoes/Object at Desk

Ask each person to take a picture of their shoes and upload it ahead of your meeting. This activity is best for video calls, but it can work on audio calls as well, as long as everyone can see each other's pictures.

At the start of the meeting, ask each participant to discuss their choice of shoe, and the "story" behind it. For example, one person might be wearing running shoes because they're into sports, or someone else might wear flip flops because they love to travel.

You can vary this exercise by asking each team member to take a picture of an object on their desk and getting them to talk about it.

Share a Picture

Share a picture and take 3 minutes to describe it (what you like about it, if it represents something to you, if it's from a favorite place, favorite person, etc.)

The Time Machine

Ask the following question, to one participant at a time: "If you were able to travel through time, either forward or backward... :

- Where would you go?
- If backward, to which time period? Why?
- If there was a person you could go back in time and meet, who would it be, and why?
- Would you just want to visit and come back, or would you stay?"

Ask me about ...

Everyone can say one thing they enjoy doing/are interested in/know a lot about. E.g. “Ask me about running marathons. Ask me about cooking Indian food.” This is a good one because it's a conversation starter for breaks or other gatherings they can discuss similarities or ask about unique contributions.

Have everyone share their favorite snack, pizza toppings, superhero, ice cream flavor, superpower they wish they had, etc.

Most Unique: Everyone shares one thing that is unique about themselves that likely no one else has in common (award they've won, a hobby that no one has heard of, etc.)

Share an "old school" photo of you when you were younger

Take a second to share a quote that inspires and motivates you

Introduce yourself

Give people one of the following prompts as they introduce themselves:

- Ask people to share the story behind their name (this is Mohini's prompt)
- Ask people to share what brings them to this work today (experience, passion, etc.) This may be useful for an implementation team meeting with a smaller group
- Ask people to share in the chat the weather where they are, along with how they are feeling today
- Large group – ask people to share in the chat where they are from

Can I ask you a Question?

Ask each participant either the same or a different ice breaker question.

What was your first job?	What's your favorite season and why?
What's your favorite food/drink?	If there was a movie made about your life, who would play you?
What's your biggest guilty pleasure?	What do your surroundings look like?
What's your favorite place to go on vacation?	What's your favorite movie or book?
What's your favorite smell?	What music do you like?
If you were an ice cream, what flavor would you be?	When I dance, I look like ___ [fill in the blank].
Do you have any pets?	What have you achieved this week that you feel proud of?
What was the last movie you watched that made you laugh?	What's the story behind your name?
What's your favorite sport to play/watch?	Take a picture from your window and have people guess where you are.

Did you have any imaginary friends when you were young?	What's the weather like where you are?
What is one thing you keep by your home workstation/spot?	Show something that's on your desk and tell a story about it?
What's your biggest "pet peeve"?	What new thing have you learned this week?
What's one interesting and/or unique fact about you?	What's your favorite color?
If you could do anything without worrying about injury or danger, what would you do?	If you could travel anywhere outside of the US regardless of cost, where would it be?
If you could have any mythical creature as a pet, which would you have?	What's your favorite scent or a scent that makes you feel at peace?
If you had to eat the same non-perishable item for the rest of 2020, what would it be?	What is one stress reliever you are engaging in during the quarantine?
If you could tour with any band, which band would you choose?	What was your favorite band 10 years ago?
What are you most grateful for today?	What was your first memory?
What is your hidden hobby? (e.g. collecting stamps)	What song gets you motivated to work or exercise?
What job would you have in another life?	What did you want to be when you grew up?
What animal would you like to have as a pet besides a cat or dog?	What is your favorite season?
What really made you laugh recently?	What is something silly about yourself that you do over and over again when you're rushing
What is your favorite ice cream flavor?	What really made you laugh recently?
What is one of your guilty pleasures?	What is one strange, but true fact about yourself?
What are your movie, tv show, or book recommendations?	What is your idea of a dream vacation??
What is one thing you like about virtual work or meetings?	What is something new you learned about yourself or a household member by working at home?

LIGHT-HEARTED/FUN/ENGAGING

Guest Attendee

Take a break to share your pet with the group

Pictionary

Playing a version of Pictionary using the video conferencing white board. It could be a fun brain break, or even a short competition with teams.

Color Push

An immersive online experience where you can create and download generative art
<https://colorpush.wetransfer.com/>

Invisible Pictures

Have a person draw a picture in the air while their partner (or the whole group) guesses what it is. You could give them categories such as foods or places, or other ways to narrow the guessing.

Story Starters

A person begins a story for one minute, then calls upon the next person to continue it. Finish the story with a happy or silly ending.

Sporcle

Quiz Games
<https://www.sporcle.com/>

Scattergories

<https://swellgarfo.com/scattergories/>

I am puzzled

Have people do Optical Illusions, Riddles, Visual Puzzles

Debate it

A bogus debate about (humorous) controversial opinions

Finish This Sentence

Place a statement on a blank slide and ask participants to chat their response (like mad libs)

What's Your Band Name

Color of the pants you are wearing right now + last thing you ate = your band name

Keep It Up

People must keep an imaginary beach ball from hitting the ground. A person starts off and calls out to another people and then throws the imaginary ball to that person – this continues until all have had a chance to catch and throw the ball. Add in an extra prompt when someone catches the imaginary ball -like “name your favorite food”, etc.

Find It Fast

Call out a color or other trait (e.g. something round, something made of wood), and people must find an object in the room they are in that fits the trait and get to it quickly (ideally bringing it back to screen with them).

Fill in the blank

Fill in the blank to one of these statements and then spend 5 minutes writing about it. have people share if they want. People can choose each other's to add more fun.

<http://www.alexandrafranzen.com/2013/08/08/dont-know-what-to-blog-about/>

Would you rather

Have the group convene in a central area of the room and pose a few thought-provoking ‘would you rather’-style questions. Would you rather never have chocolate again or never have ice cream again? Would you rather have the superpower of flight or invisibility? The options are endless!

5-4-3-2-1

Option 1: the leader has them do five different movements in descending order. For example the leader would say: “Do five jumping jacks, spin around four times, hop on one foot three times, walk forward and backward two times, and give someone 1 virtual high-five (pausing in between each task for people to do it).

Option 2: Ask individuals to gently close their eyes for a few seconds and then take turns sharing aloud 5 things that they hear (lights humming, cars outside, the radio, their clock ticking, and their cat meowing in the other room), 4 things they see (computer screen, sun outside their window, letters to open on their desk, a bottle of water), 3 things they feel (warm sweater they are wearing, stomach growling, and breeze from a fan nearby), 2 things they smell (their own perfume, lemon scented candle) and 1 thing they taste or imagine the taste of (coffee from their morning java).

Option 3: 5 favorites movies, 4 things that make you happy, 3 pet peeves, 2 favorite snacks, 1 place they have traveled.

Fun Fact

What is one fun fact that has stuck with you over the years?

Bingo

make and share a bingo board for participants before the meeting and let them work through it during the meeting (boxes could be like: someone talks while on mute, dog barks, significant other walks in the background, etc.)

I Spy

Do an I spy with things you can see in each other screen. One person goes – “I spy something red” and then others try to identify until someone spots the right thing. If it goes fast, you can do multiple rounds.

Scavenger Hunt

Have a pre-populated list of objects and have people go around their space to grab the ones they have. Whoever has the most “wins.” Another way to play would be keeping objects vague and letting people be creative with something they choose in their space and vote on who selected the best object.

It’s Your Birthday

Start by telling folks that “research shows that in a room full of just 23 people there’s a 50-50 chance of at least two people having the same birthday. Folks go around and introduce themselves to each other (name, org, etc.) and share the day/month of their birthday. As soon as someone finds their exact birthday match, the game is over!

THOUGHT PROVOKING

Thank you

Write a thank you note to someone who’s helped you out recently—your assistant who’s gone above and beyond or a co-worker who proofread a report for you. It doesn’t even have to be something big—in fact, bonus points if it’s not.

Reflect on Change

Ask everyone to cross their arms. Then ask them to cross their arms the other way. Reflection – how did it feel when you crossed your arms the other way? Did you have to stop and think about it? Did it feel different than your normal process? Try it again – does it start getting easier?

Come to my Potluck

This is a funny puzzle game. It can be used for fun or to reflect on how there are unwritten rules in life that we expect people to know without ever communicating them (we used with adults to reflect on how we have unwritten rules we expect young abide by, but I can apply beyond that to reflect on equity)

Facilitator kicks it off by saying, “I’m having a potluck, and everyone is invited! I’m going to bring [name a food/drink that starts with the first letter of your name].” Then, you go around one by one and ask each individual what they are going to bring to the potluck. If they get the answer right, you say “Great! [Name], you can come to my potluck and bring [food/beverage they said]” If they get the answer wrong, you say “I’m sorry, you can’t come to my potluck” and move on to the next person (each person can have 2 tries per round). To get the answer right, the person has to say they’ll bring something that starts with the same letter as their first name. That part is the secret that people have to figure out on their own. Eventually, people will start to understand and get the answer right and more and more will pick up on it. You then reflect on how it felt to not be invited when you didn’t know what the right answer was and discuss where it could/does come up in work.

Sum it Up

Share an article that you found interesting and sum it up for the participants (ask for volunteer/find one in advance)

You’ve Got mail

Hand out two postcards to each person.

On one, they address it to themselves and they write themselves a note on what they want to remind themselves of regarding the training or meeting (e.g., “Remember to focus on the person at the center”, etc.)

On the other, they address it to someone that they want to follow-up with or someone they met from the meeting. This works best when it’s a meeting, not a training. They can write something like “we met at the XXXX meeting—let’s get coffee and talk about A, B, and C”. Staff mails out the postcards 2 or 4 weeks after the meeting

I have a question...

- What brought you into this work? What makes you stay?
- Tell us about your first job (part-time job as a teenager and/or your first real job in the field) – what was that like? What did you learn? Any funny stories or memorable moments?
- What would be your dream job if you weren’t doing this?

- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- Who is one of your professional heroes/mentors? Does not have to be someone you know personally. Why does their journey speak to you?
- How have you handled times when things have felt hard in this work, with the volume of things needing done or needing to change? How have you taken care of yourself? What helps ground you?
- When people ask what you do for work, how do you describe it? What do people commonly ask? What do people most want to talk with you about once they learn what you do?
- What's your favorite part about your current role and why?
- What is something you failed at and how were you able to overcome it?
- After quarantine ...“What's the first place you want to go after quarantine ends?” or “What/who do you miss most?” or “What restaurant will you be making a bee-line for?”

MOVEMENT-BASED

Dance Party!

Put on some upbeat music and dance! If you can make the room semi-dark and have a black light or other special effect, your people will love it!

Freeze Dance!

Similar to Dance Party, except that every so often the music stops, and people must freeze and hold the position they are in until the music begins again. Consider standing up or chair dancing.

Dance up a storm

A form of Freeze dance. Play a catchy tune and let people freely dance (or call out instructions to dance in particular ways, such as “Dance as if you have a sore foot” or, “Dance as if you just woke up”). Every so often, pause the music and have the people freeze on the spot, likely in comical poses!

Another variation of this idea is to use your computer to have people dance along with movement songs: The Chicken Dance, the YMCA, the Macarena — you get the idea!

Name Moves

A person stands up. In turn, each person says their name accompanied by a special movement. For example, a person might say, “Kayla!” while dramatically dropping to one knee and doing

Jazz Hands. After the person does their move, the rest of the group says the person's name in unison and imitates the move. Then it is the next person's turn.

Trading Places

Call out a trait, and everyone who has that trait must stand up. Examples: "Everyone with curly hair." "Everyone who ate cereal for breakfast." "Everyone who is wearing stripes." Everyone wearing glasses.

Jump Skip Counting

Have people count by twos, fives, tens etc. while jumping with each count. You could also spell words this way.

Walk outside or open a window and take three slow deep breaths

Yoga

Do guided yoga or stretching for 5-10 minutes

RELAXATION / FOCUSING / MEDITATION

Permission Granted

What do you need to give yourself permission in order to (insert the activity or focus of the meeting, etc.)...?

Deep Breathing

Practice a 3-minute deep breathing exercise where people lean against a chair or wall so as not to support their own weight. They breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose and breathe out slowly through the mouth letting all the air out. Then repeat while focusing on the breath and filling up the belly with air and then letting it out.

Colors

Visualize colors while focusing on the breath. Inhale a deep green and exhale a smoky gray. Have people imagine the colors as swirling and alive with each inhale. If a person is de-escalating from an angry moment, the color red is a great color to exhale.

Progressive Muscle relaxation

Practice being a tall stiff statue and then let go and become a floppy ragdoll. Can also become a piece of uncooked spaghetti or then thrown into a boiling pot to become a wet noodle. Repeat a few times each.

Mindful Stretching

Stand up, put your feet flat on the floor, feel all four corners of your feet grounding into the earth. Focus on your breath—breathe in, breathe out....

Do this for 3 or 4 breaths then...

On your next inhale bend your knees and reach up with your arms as far as you can, feel the straightening in your spine and the rooting down in your feet. Breathe here

On your next exhale rain your fingers down as close to the floor with your knees bent and breathe here.

repeat it once or twice.

Ask people to feel their spine, neck and head come into alignment. Breathe----

Move your right ear toward your right shoulder and breathe,

Back to center - breathe

To the left—breathe

do the same with shoulder shrugs. Bring should up – breathe – then down - breathe

Meditation

<https://youtu.be/inpok4MKVLM> - 5 min meditation

<https://youtu.be/4Bs0qUB3BHQ> - 3 min meditation with Deepak Chopra

Loving Kindness Meditation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syKqFFd1Rm0> - 5 min loving kindness meditation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjfCS88Gc7Q> - 5 min loving kindness meditation

Guided Imagery / Visualization

Start with a breath, take yourself to a place where you feel safe---

Go through...

What do you see...?

What do you hear...?

What do you smell...?

What do you feel...?

(repeating in this safe place)

As we come back together using your breath remember this place you love, this place you have now visited and created lives inside you always and at any time you can return here in your mind's eye with just using your breath.

10-minute guided imagery / visualization

https://youtu.be/ar_W4jSzOIM

3-minute guided imagery / visualization

<https://youtu.be/WBYYFbStfHM>

Do Nothing for Two Minutes

<http://www.donothingfor2minutes.com/> 2 min mental break video

5-minute mediation you can do anywhere

<https://youtu.be/inpok4MKVLM>

Inspirational Viewing

Watch an inspirational YouTube video (2-3 mins) and ask for comments

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

List of Ice Breaker Questions

<https://museumhack.com/list-icebreakers-questions/#virtual>

40 Get to Know You Questions for Company Meetings

<https://www.signupgenius.com/business/meetings-get-to-know-you-questions.cfm>

Check-in Question Ideas

<http://amandafenton.com/2014/04/check-in-question-ideas/>

Adult Virtual Icebreakers

<https://sites.google.com/site/adultonlineteachingstrategies/virtualicebreakers/adult-virtual-icebreakers>

ULEAD Cards

<https://uleadinc.org/cards/>

Deck of cards to use for icebreakers and activities. One activity is to give everyone a quote from a card and ask people to share how the quote does or does not resonate with them.