



Breaking Down Barriers: Icebreakers & Activities

by Bill Gavin

Back Art. Give the person who starts a picture that they have to draw and then on down the line. Whichever group comes closest wins.

Frantic. Object of the game is for a group to keep all the tennis balls rolling in the room. When one ball is located not rolling there is a whistle blown. Add up the time (after three whistles) to see whether the next team can break the record. Balls begin in the middle of the room. You can use balloons if you want instead. *Can use an application by saying this is like life, trying to keep all our balls in the air. “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You” (Is. 26:3).*

Caterpillar tag. Choose three or four people to be “it”. Whenever they tag someone, they link up holding each other’s waists and try to tag others (not including the other lines being formed). When all the players have been joined to one of the “it” lines, call out “Caterpillar Tag” and point to one of the lines. That line becomes the caterpillar. The caterpillar tries to tag anyone in the other lines. Whenever another line is tagged, those kids must link up with the caterpillar and begin chasing the lines that remain. The game is over when everyone has become part of the caterpillar. As a fun variation, at the end of this game, try to have the caterpillar catch its own tail--then a circle is formed.

Toilet paper relay run. Teams line up, paper is wrapped around one person legs, then unwound to the other end, wound around another person legs, and so on and so forth. I run ahead, tie it around someone’s legs, unravel it back, but if it breaks, I return and start over. Then when I bring it to one end, it is wrapped around my legs, and the next person moves to the other end where his/her legs are wrapped.

What a Mess? Have participants pair up and give each person a piece of paper. Tell them to just make scribble marks on the paper--giving a minute or so. Then give the paper to the other person and have them try to make something out of the scribbling that was made. Lesson on how God writes straight with our crooked lines.

Freeze frame. Have participants get together in different groups to come up with a freeze frame of something they like to do. Have the other groups guess what the freeze frame is. Also, could have them imitate machines. Give out a list of machines and see if other people can guess what the machine is. They are only to play parts of the machine, not humans using the machine.



Don't Laugh. Participants break into 2 sides-- Coin is tossed; if it lands on heads, the heads team has 3 seconds to laugh as loudly as it can. Meanwhile the tails team can't laugh or smile at all. If the coin lands on tails, etc. If someone doesn't laugh on the team that is supposed to laugh, that team loses a point. Get 2 points for not laughing, and lose one point for not laughing when you are supposed to laugh.

Continuous story. Begin telling a story and then pass it on to the next person to continue it. Change to a new person when the leader says to, or when someone moves an object to the next person → when they are done, have someone come up and tell the story (make sure it is clean).

Mingo-Bingo. A variation on traditional Bingo. Create a Bingo sheet with various things that people need to do for that block to be filled. Such as untie your shoe and tie it again, do 5 push ups, 10 jumping jacks, leap frog with someone wearing white shoes (get their initials), get a person to do a somersault, etc.

Coordinated jump. Have the entire group stand in a circle with arms on the shoulders of the person in front of them. On the count of three see if everyone can jump at the same time. Then bring in a jump rope and have the person in the middle jump rope with everyone jumping with them in unison.

Mummy wrap. Team to have their mummy completely covered wins



Present wrap. (done best around Christmas time). Team with best looking Christmas present wins.

Shouldered Out. Masking tape circle is formed -- ask participants to each stand in the circle with their arms crossed over their chest. The object is to shoulder other people out of the circle. Anyone whose arms unfold is out. Anyone who gets too rough is out. Another good way to do this is by having people blindfolded. ---> This is a good way to introduce talking about cliques. Ask the last person left to pull someone back into the circle (nicely); then another, then another, till everyone is back in the circle.

The Answer Is... "As groups you have 3 minutes to come up with as many questions that can be answered with the word, "God." E.g. Who made us? Who was here before anything else was? etc. The team that writes the most wins.

Gorilla, Karate Fighter, Army soldier. A new version of "rock, paper, scissors" except the participants have to act out a Gorilla, Karate fighter, or army soldier. Gorilla beats Karate fighter, Karate fighter beats Army soldier and Army soldier beats Gorilla -- pair up, then winners play each other (maybe you are out once you lose twice).

Brother and Sister. Activity where two friends or siblings compete with one another like on the “Newlywed Game” -- one person leaves, and has to answer questions about the other -- e.g. What is the dumbest thing he has ever done? What is his favorite food? What do you like the best about this person? Describe this person in one word. What does he spend most of his time thinking about? If you had one wish, what would you wish about this person? How often does this person take a bath?

Name Scramble. Everyone writes their name on a name tag, and then on another piece of paper scrambles the letters of their name. Each person gets someone else’s paper and then tries to find that person (e.g. gbaivliln)

Farm Animals. Everyone is given a farm animal (whispered in their ear), and then the whole group has to walk around making that noise with their eyes closed till they find all those who are in the same group. Cat, dog, sheep, cow, pig, etc.

Body Language. Have everyone form a big circle of chairs with the chairs facing outward. Remove one chair. Have music ready. When the music starts everyone must walk around the chairs (again it's fun if you make them jog). When the music stops, a caller yells out a body part. Then everyone races to touch that body part to a chair, one person per chair only. If they touch a chair before the body part is called, they are out. The one person who doesn't get a chair is also out. To speed it up, you can remove more chairs. We usually start out simple - nose, hair, left elbow, etc. but towards the end we get more complicated - your bare feet, someone else's left hand (they must grab one of the people who are already out). The object is to be the last one left.

Guess the Gargle. All it requires is a glass of water. Secretly show a volunteer the name of a well know song or tune, it can be anything, chart song, worship song, nursery rhyme etc. Get them to take a sip of water and they must gargle the tune and the others try to guess what it is.

Toe Fencing. Cool activity and if set to music, looks like a new kind of dance. All players pair off and lock hands and try to tap the top of one of their partner's feet with their own feet. Players hop around trying to avoid being stomped on. After being tapped 3 times, that player is out and the winning partner challenges another winner. The game continues till only one player is left. Sounds interesting!



Domino Race. Get a bunch of dominoes. In a small group, give each participant 20 dominoes and have a race challenging them to set them up in a line, on edge (you know, so they tumble and knock each other over...). Tell 'em it's a race to see who can set them up first. *Applications:* *The domino effect as it relates to lying, drugs, sex ... any sin. It always has its effect on other aspects of life. Start them off on a carpet to make it more difficult. Tell the participants that their dominoes have to be less than 3 inches from the floor at all times (no tables). Participants may figure out to use books, board-games or something else as a more stable foundation. Then the discussion focuses on putting Christ as the foundation to our lives.*

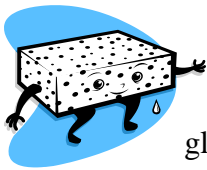
Sandman. Sandman goes around in a room where people are mulling about, and winks at people--when you get winked at, you put your head down. If you want to guess the sandman you can, but if you do, you need one person to back you up, and if you are wrong, you both have to put your head's down.

Four square cone war. Four large squares are set up with 4 teams in each. Each set of squares has a number of cones set up (players cannot go within 2 feet of cones). Object is to knock the other team's cones over. When your area has lost all its cones, you can run to whichever other team you wish.

Who's got my shoes? Everyone takes off their shoes and places them in the middles. At signal players grab two shoes and put them on. Then after everyone is wearing two shoes, they are to go around and find their shoes, greeting people as they go around.

Bible Balderdash. Regular balderdash, but using strange words from the Bible.

No Rules Game. Small groups, rule making rotates clockwise. For example, "You can't say 'if.' When you do, you have to stand up and crow like a rooster for 5 seconds." The group becomes self-monitoring. If a consequence sends a player away from the group--e.g. to interact with another group--rules continue to be made. Play ends when pandemonium ensues.



Sponge relay. move water from one end to the next by transferring the water in a sponge -- first to fill bucket wins. Variation on this is to move water from one end to the next with a spoon, filling up a small cup/wine glass.

Activity Songbirds This is one of those great youth activities even your more jaded high school students will have fun playing. Divide equally into two to four small groups. Tell them you're going to give each group a chance to sing 10 seconds of a song with the word *love* in its lyrics. Give the groups a couple minutes to brainstorm songs, then point at a group and have them sing in unison. A team is out if they can't think of song to sing within 10 seconds or if they repeat a song already sung by any team. (A stopwatch will make timing easier.)

Create something with marshmallows, toothpicks, graham crackers, etc. Good for exercise for a WorkCamp meeting. Can make into a contest by saying whomever builds the tallest building using one of the above...

Search and find. Leader says, "Stand up and search the room and find an object that is small, flat, solid and round. Don't let anyone know when you've found it. When you do, come whisper in my ear and if you are right I'll nod. Then you need to shout, "I see the light!" Then participant stands by the leader. The object is a coin. Continue until all

participants have found the object and are standing by the leader. Then the leader reads, Luke 15:8-10 about the woman who loses one coin and searches carefully till she finds it.

Game. Tie a small group together and then they have to do some task as a team -- Come into the dining room, pour kool-aid for everyone, pass out cookies, say grace, eat and drink, walk to the kitchen and each person helps to wash the dishes. Then cut the string and have a discussion regarding this.

Bill Gavin lives in Bristow, VA with his wife Gina and their 4 boys. Bill has been active in Youth Ministry since 1992, including ministry at Queen of Apostles, Bishop Ireton, Princeton University, Paul VI High School, Saint Mary of Sorrows and now Holy Trinity in Bristow. Bill attended Mary Washington University, Catholic University and Princeton Theological. When he is not coordinating the 'romper room' for his boys, he loves to lead people in worship with his trusted guitar.