

Reunion warmer-uppers

Icebreakers

I'm Edith Wagner, editor of *Reunions magazine*, and this time I'd like to talk about icebreakers

One of the most frequently asked questions I hear is how to introduce and mix relatives who've never met or meet rarely, and classmates or buddies who haven't seen one another in years.

Icebreakers! Silly games! Activities to loosen everyone up!

One goal for reunion organizers is to have everyone talking and enjoying themselves as quickly as possible because there is so little time to do it. Even adults can find it hard to strike up a conversation. A nice touch when everyone is arriving at your reunion is to have committee members circulate, welcome newcomers and instigate conversations.

Reserve a hospitality suite or small meeting room for a "meet and greet" welcome event and begin icebreakers right away. The person who facilitates icebreakers and introductions at your reunion must be enthusiastic and able to sell everyone on the fun to follow.

One family asked the oldest generation to introduce themselves, their families and share special events that occurred since the last reunion. Read letters and show pictures from members who are not able to attend.

Many icebreakers can be arranged easily and quickly. Others require time, effort and collection of supplies and materials. Do, if you intend to do icebreakers, plan ahead and be prepared.

Forrest S. Clark of Kissimmee, Florida, writes that a feature of one Buck Family Reunion was a 40-part questionnaire based on little-known facts about each family member; everyone was asked to answer. This generated lively discussion and prizes were awarded for those who got the most answers correct. A reward for everyone was that each person learned information about others.

Connect people who have similarities, such as hobbies, jobs or interests. Shout out ideas, ask everyone involved or interested to stand. Allow time for everyone to look around, see who else is interested and then sit down. For everyone, list sports ... golf, tennis, softball, swimming, basketball ... ask everyone interested to stand, then ask only those who actually play to remain standing. For kids, state grades for the next school year and ask them to stand, or call out favorite characters (Sponge Bob, Spiderman, the Little Mermaid) or popular video or board games kids are playing. List hobbies, jobs, types of music or art enjoyed, dogs or cats (or both); even tastes, everyone who loves chocolate or artichokes or peaches!

Make a scavenger hunt for information, not for items. Give family members a list of others' accomplishments, such as *he jumped out of airplanes in World War II* or *she was the first person in the family to graduate from college*. *Who has a tattoo? What are the great-grandparents' first names? What country did our founders come from? Who went to the University of Wisconsin?* Then have them circulate until they find each person who answers the question.

J. Lynne Wilson Jenkins, Simpsonville, South Carolina, says the Douglass-Blount Reunion plays icebreaker games that force people to mix and mingle. They ask everyone to introduce themselves and state how they are related to the family. They recognize the oldest and youngest, the member who traveled farthest and the family with most immediate members present. They always do a memorial for those who died since the last reunion and share family history.”

Carol Idalski says the Darga Family Reunion encourages kids to sit at different tables and talk to all the aunts and uncles.

Nametags help extended family, family who meet infrequently or classmates and buddies who haven't seen one another in years.

Louise Hawley, Lillian, Alabama, reports that the Thomas Stanton Society meets every three years for a three-day reunion on property in

Stonington, Connecticut, owned by the family since the 1640s. They provide nametags with lineage so young cousins who meet for the first time find out that another family member might share the same lineage for a number of generations. The first evening is always given over to family members with stories to tell.

Summer Terry made this ice breaker for the Cotten Family Reunion. She asked adults to bring a current business card to display on a board at the reunion so they can connect on business and interest opportunities. In addition, she asked kids to design and bring along a “business card” that lists current interests, abilities and contact information. The kids’ cards Summer suggested, can be archived so at later reunions they can be reviewed to see how the children’s interests change over the years.

These are icebreakers other reunions have done.

- ***This Is Our Life.*** Ask each family to bring photos of their home, yard, activities, sports, hobbies and pets for a display. Then, at the reunion ask kids to present and explain the pictures.
- **Display genealogy.** Family photos or artifacts and special remembrances will quickly get members remembering and mingling. At a class reunion, items from schools days on display will have the same affect.
- Tape **baby pictures** to a poster, then try to guess who is who and while doing that you can marvel at family resemblances. For a class reunion, elementary school photos will generate lively guessing.
- Make a **word search puzzle** using all your cousins’ names. This is a good icebreaker to even precede the reunion in a newsletter or sent with a mailing encouraging attendance. We’ve posted links to word-find puzzle websites in the games section of reunionsmag.com.
- **Guess the numbers.** Fill a jar with peanuts or candies, pasta or any small objects, and ask everyone to guess how many are in the jar. But, of course, someone will have to count them! But the good thing

about this is that the contents of the jar can be the prize. The Seidemanns include a watermelon to guess the weight of.

- **Ancestor Search.** Each parent/child team receives a list of ancestors and has 15 minutes to collect signatures from those ancestors' descendants. Winners are those who gather the most correct signatures.

- Select couples who have been married longest and play “the oldywed game.” The couple who are best at guessing their spouse’s answers are the winners.

- Ask everyone to stand, face the person to the right and **give** him/her **a compliment**. Then, to double the positive vibe, turn left and give another compliment.

Still some members may be uncomfortable or feel they don’t fit in. Give them a job. Ask someone to help hand out awards, greet and direct new arrivals, — any job that helps them feel involved.

We, at Reunions magazine, are always looking for ideas you’ve tested at your reunions. Feel free to email them to reunions@execpc.com or send them to Reunions magazine, PO Box 11727, Milwaukee WI 53212 or post them at our forum at <http://forums.reunionsmag.com>.

Lots of ways to communicate about reunions.

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