

## 19 - Breaking the ice and building group confidence

**Aim:** To offer guidance on how to help a new group of refugees to feel at ease with each other and work together to improve their basic language competence as well as their confidence.

Here are some activities that can be used or adapted as ice-breakers to help refugees feel more at ease with one another. Some of the activities are based on sharing personal information. You can take the lead from what refugees choose to share, which will indicate what topics are suitable. Make sure refugees are not asked for personal information which could be difficult or upsetting for them.

A. Name games: Getting to know each other's names is a good way to break the ice and start group-building. It's important that everyone can use the form of their name they feel most comfortable with. For example, some refugees may prefer to use their full name or family name with a title. Others may be happy to be called by their first name. Some may want to call you 'teacher' or to use a title and your family name rather than your first name.

1	Alphabetical order: Tell refugees your name. Get everyone to practise and repeat: <i>What is your name?</i> Ask everyone to stand up, ask each other the question and get into alphabetical order by name across the room, starting with A on one side and ending with Z on the other. When everyone is in a line, ask them to introduce themselves. Everyone checks that the order is correct. If it is incorrect people change their position as appropriate.
2	Something you don't know: This can be a good follow-on to the alphabetical order activity. Practise sentences with 'I can', 'I have' etc. beforehand. Refugees say their name and something other people don't know about them, e.g. <i>My name's Abida and I can speak four languages/I have 3 brothers.</i>
3	Introductions: Practice language for making introductions (mention that it is not necessary for people to shake hands). Refugees then divide themselves into two groups of equal size and form two circles, one inside the other. Those in the inner circle face outwards and those in the outer circle face inwards. Refugees take turns to introduce themselves, e.g. <i>"Hello, I'm Aysha. Pleased to meet you."</i> - <i>"My name is Habiba - it's nice to meet you."</i> The outside circle then moves round while the inside circle stays still. Repeat until everyone has had at least one turn. Then ask half the people in the outside circle to change places with the same number of people in the inside circle. They can then take turns to introduce people to each other; e.g. <i>"Hello Ayisha. This is Khaled"</i> . - <i>"Hello. It's nice to meet you"</i> etc.
4	What my name means: This gives refugees the opportunity to tell each other a little more about themselves, e.g. <i>"My name's Barakat. It means blessings. My grandfather chose my name."</i>
5	More information: Divide refugees into pairs and ask them to tell each other a little about themselves, giving only information they are happy and comfortable to share, e.g. likes, dislikes, skills etc. Refugees then introduce each other to the group, e.g. <i>"This is Hakim/Mr He comes from Afghanistan. He can speak Pashto and Arabic. He likes playing football. He supports Manchester United."</i>

B. Picture activities: Images can be a very good way to provide a neutral context for group-building. Guidance on choosing and preparing pictures for use in language support is offered in Tool 22 *Selecting pictures and 'realia' for language activities*.

6	Put a selection of pictures on the table. Each refugee chooses a picture and then, in pairs, they tell each other about the picture according to their language skills, e.g. what it is, why they like that picture etc.
7	Divide refugees into small groups or pairs. Give each group three or four pictures, which they place face up on the table. Each refugee chooses a picture to describe without touching it or telling the others which they have chosen. They take turns to describe their picture. The others have to guess which one it is, e.g. "There are some people. They are talking. They are in a shop" etc.
8	Put several pictures on the table. Explain that the refugees are going to make up a story together. Invite anyone to select a picture and use it to begin a story, e.g. "One day some women are in a community centre." The next person picks up another picture and uses it to continue the story, e.g. "They talk about food" etc. Depending on the linguistic competence of different refugees in the group, the story can be in the present (easy) or in the past (more difficult).
9	Word association: Refugees take turns to say a word that is related to one of the pictures and connected in some way with the previous word, e.g. <i>window, glass, clean, bucket, water, hot</i> etc. (this activity is suitable for use with refugees who have low levels of literacy).