

2. GROUP LAUGHTER ACTIVITIES

HOW TO STRUCTURE A LAUGHTER ACTIVITY SESSION

Being in a laughter session takes us on a journey with changes of energy and changes to our physiology and emotions.

- Prepare yourself and the room for people arriving.
- Welcome everyone as they arrive.
- Start by Introducing what we will do and why.
- Lead warm-ups as needed.
- Run laughter-based activities.
- Prepare for finishing and close the session.

Prepare:

Create your plan. Physically prepare including getting the space ready with a circle of chairs if possible, put on appropriate clothes and do your own grounding with breathing, laughter and smiling exercises. Display notices about health considerations.

Welcome:

Smile, say hello, and invite people to make themselves comfortable.

Introduction:

Introduce yourself, set expectations and agree ground rules. People can introduce themselves with a name game.

Warm-ups:

Lead playful physical exercises, stretches and movement appropriate for your participants and maybe lead voice exercises. These can all lead to laughter too.

Laughter activities:

To start with, lead appropriate activities from our lists. As you gain experience you can add your own ideas. Be playful and put the thought of laughter into people's minds so that laughter follows. We don't use jokes or aim to entertain; this is "laughing for no reason". And never ever ever laugh at other people.

Cool down and close:

You can lead breathing exercises or a relaxation or meditation, and then rest. Check that everyone is fine. End the session.

**You are now ready to learn about activities.
You might like to run just an icebreaker,
or you might run a short set of activities
or a longer set of activities.**



ICEBREAKERS

You may wish to run an icebreaker as part of another meeting or event. Often the aims are to get people interacting and meeting each other, and/or energising, focussing and relaxing the group. The rationale is that laughter is a natural social glue / stress buster / mood changer through the changes it brings to our physiology.

Short (1-5 minutes): Often a single exercise is enough. Give a brief rationale; demonstrate it; and get people doing it. Bring it to a close by thanking people for taking part. The best icebreaker first time round is the Laughter Yoga Greetings Laugh (see below); when people have done this previously you might use other exercises.

Long (3-15 minutes): Run several exercises. For each, give a brief rationale; demonstrate it; and get people doing it. Link them so that people don't feel these are just random activities. To indicate the end of each exercise you can use the Laughter Yoga "Very good, very good, yay!" (see below).

Group size considerations:

- In a small group there is no chance to hide in the crowd so be more sensitive in selecting activities.
- In larger groups one exercise can take off and run for a long time.

Linking with Very Good, Very Good, Yay!

We need a way of getting everyone's attention so that we can move from one exercise to the next, especially in large groups. In Laughter Yoga to encourage childlike playfulness we get everyone to say together with great enthusiasm, "Very good, very good, yay!" We clap on "very good", clap again on the next "very good", then raise our hands to the sky on "yay". Teach this to the group and it can be done three times to indicate the end of each exercise.

Greetings Laugh

If appropriate (and following cultural rules for your group) shake hands, make eye contact, and laugh or pretend to laugh with people. Keep the handshake going if appropriate for 10-20 seconds. Variations might include greeting as if you have not seen the person for ages, or giving a High 5.

Other Laughter Yoga Games

For people not used to laughter icebreakers, lead a game or activity based on adding playfulness to something we already do in our life.

- a. **Imaginary Mobile phone:** Show others hilarious imaginary photos on your imaginary mobile phone. Or imagine listening to something very funny and let others listen in!
- b. **Appreciation and Celebration:**
 - i. **Thumbs up and High Five:** similar to the greetings laugh, high five people with a laugh, or give them the thumbs up with a laugh, with an intention of showing appreciation.

- II. If it is a celebratory event, everyone can have two imaginary cups and **mix a drink** and then drink it with a big laugh.
- III. **Share compliments:** you can ask people to compliment each other and use words like wow, amazing, stunning, fabulous.
- c. Follow the leader:**
 - I. **Hand up laughter:** When the leader raises a hand then everyone laughs. When their hand is down there is silence again. It works best when the hand moves slowly and smoothly.
 - II. **Silent hand up laughter:** This can then be done with silent laughter.

Icebreakers For Large Groups

- a. Try a **Mexican Wave** of laughter.
- b. Have a **Laughter Competition** between each half of the room/group.

An Example Of A 10-Minute Icebreaker

- I. Introduce laughter as a great medicine.
- II. Run a competition in a playful way to see whether one part of the group can laugh longer or more joyfully than the rest. It is best to playfully judge a competition and generally for it to be impossible to choose a winner.
- III. Lead the Mexican wave of laughter.
- IV. Finish with the Greetings Laugh.



Icebreakers in snow gear.

LAUGHTER SESSIONS FOR YOUR GROUP: A SHORT SESSION (5-20 MINUTES)

A short laughter session can strengthen groups because laughter helps break down barriers, gets people to relax, brings people together, can improve communications, creativity and social skills, and can be fun. It is likely to be part of a get-together rather than the focus. It can bring together a group of strangers or a group of people who already know each other.

What we want to achieve:

Friendship, group bonding, improved health and well-being, deal with challenges and have fun.

How we will do it:

People can share the lead. Choose activities from the lists later in the toolkit. Even though it's a short session it's important not to rush; instead select a smaller number of activities and allow time for each to be completed enjoyably.

We still follow the layout of a session:

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Smile, say hello, and invite people to make themselves comfortable. Introduce yourself, set expectations briefly and ground rules as appropriate. Maybe get people to introduce themselves.
- **Warm-ups:** Lead playful physical exercises, stretches and movement for a couple of minutes.
- **Run activities.**
- **Cool down:** Bring people to a rest through a guided visualisation or relaxation activity. Check everyone is fine. End the session.



Nasuko from Japan, a great Laughter Yoga Teacher and friend.

LAUGHTER SESSIONS FOR YOUR GROUP: A LONGER LAUGHTER SESSION

A longer laughter session is usually the focus for people coming together. It is a social event often for health, happiness and lowering stress. Often a shared laughter session leaves good memories that bring smiles in the future. It can bring together a group of strangers or people who already know each other.

Have one leader or share the lead. Plan the session well. It's similar to a short session, but can include more or longer activities (including mediations), for example:

- One name game;
- Several physical warm up activities;
- Some Laughter Yoga activities;
- Several group activities (taken as appropriate from general, movement, music, creativity, spirituality);
- A relaxation or meditation activity.

LAUGHTER AS AN ADD ON AT REGULAR GROUP MEETINGS

Laughter-based activities at the start of regular meetings can get people relaxed and interacting. At the end of meetings, it can help people feel good for when they leave.

Have a few minutes to lead an activity appropriate to the energy of the group and situation. The focus is to enjoy and laugh together. As the group becomes familiar with laughter ideas we can introduce a wider range of activities.

At the start or at the end?

- To energise and bring people together, with mainly the same people at each meeting, you might start with laughter activities.
- If the group has lots of different people each time, then let attendees grow comfortable with the group first, and perhaps end with laughter activities.
- Sometimes laughter activities are not appropriate, for example when dealing with loss, bereavement or certain challenges. Sometimes before we can laugh we need to deal with these issues.

How to lead

- Use encouraging language.
- People can take turns in leading.
- Be relaxed.
- Let people who don't want to join in still be present.
- Select activities that as many people as possible want to do and are relevant to the group.
- Maybe develop a unique catchphrase for your group.
- Create a list of activities to choose from.

Many activities bring about laughter, and putting the thought of laughter in our minds makes laughter more likely to flow.