8: Icebreakers, energisers, closing and evaluation

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct.  
Carl Jung, psychologist, psychiatrist

You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.  
Plato, philosopher

Play is the highest form of research  
Albert Einstein, physicist

This is a small collection of activities used in the first major workshops in Kenya, but there are many more. These playful, often silly, activities are used to raise energy, bond the group, and offer a change of rhythm. Importantly, though, Turning the Tide also uses them as additional learning opportunities, for example to link to a new topic like group communication, or decision making. We try to choose activities appropriate to where we think the group is. Some we borrow, some we just make up.

Icebreakers – morning opening sessions.

- Animal activist
- Communication mingle
- Favourite meal
- One thing I’m thankful for today
- Touch blue
- Wake up in the jungle
- Weather report
- What I said I’d bring today

Energisers – middle of the day, typically after lunch

- Face to face, back to back
- Group chant: to to to....
- Group clap
- Group count 1-8
- Group count 1-20
- Group count, leg and arm
- House, tenant, earthquake
- I like you friend but I just can’t laugh
- Mix up shoes
- Mime the lie
- Rainstorm
- Sam went to Venus
- Simon says
- Snake, dog, cat
- Telephone call

Closing activities – closing ritual

- Affirmation circle
- Affirmation wall
- One thing I will bring tomorrow
- One thing I’ve learned today/ that has changed my thinking
- One thing/ word that describes the day for me
- Paper on back affirmation
- Silent circle hold hands
- Thumb circle
- Volcano whoosh

Evaluation tools

- Circle shuffle
- Evaluation grid
- Flips with questions
- Pie chart
- Smiles, frowns, suggestions
- World cafe
- Workshop evaluation: did you enjoy the workshop?
- Workshop evaluation: Star, circle, triangle
Icebreakers

- Animal activist
- Communication mingle
- Favourite meal
- One thing I’m thankful for today
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- Weather report
- What I said I’d bring today

**Animal activists**
*Purpose:* a good one to start the day and encourage thinking about diversity and different characteristics necessary for activism.

Invite the group to reflect individually on their approach to activism and think of an animal that most closely represents that. Offer an example like a dog that is faithful to the group and can be fierce to those who threaten it. Or a tortoise who may be slow but never gives up. Give a moment for reflection and start with yourself. You can choose whether or not this is a go-round.

**Communication mingle**
*Purpose:* to energise and bring attention to communication, encouraging creative responses. Good one to use when exploring communication themes.

Play some lively music and invite participants to dance around the room. Let participants know that when the music stops they should find a partner and have a one-on-one conversation about how they are feeling today. BUT, they are not allowed to use English, Swahili, or vernacular in their conversations.

After 3 or 4 times, you might want to debrief:
- Why do you think we have activities like these in the workshop?
- What do you think was the purpose of this exercise?

**Favourite meal**
*Purpose:* for fun, plus to encourage communication in forms more than speech.

Ask people to think of their favourite meal and invite them to describe it to the group, miming the actions and making the sounds of eating it. Give a moment for reflection, then start the go-round yourself.

**One thing I’m thankful for today**
*Purpose:* a reflective opening activity to start the day by sharing positive personal thoughts and feelings. To create a positive atmosphere and help build the container for personal sharing.

Invite the group to stand and reflect on one thing they are grateful for today. After a moment, begin the sharing. This does not need to be a go-round.

**Touch blue**
*Purpose:* a good energiser to connect/reconnect a group coming back together.

Ask the group to stand and clear away any obstacles. Explain the rules: when you call “Touch blue!” everyone will rush quickly to something blue or someone wearing blue and touch it. Keep touching it until someone else calls “Touch red!” (or another colour.)
Wake up in the jungle
**Purpose**: to help people wake up, encourage a playful spirit, acknowledge diversity.

Invite everyone silently to think of a jungle animal: what action do you think it makes when it wakes up? What sound does it make? Explain that this activity is a go-round called waking up in the jungle. You will start and one-by-one we will go-round and add our animal to the jungle. Start the go-round by miming the animal and making its sound. Keep doing it and invite the person next to you to add theirs. Keep them doing it with you. Then invite the next, and so on, building up the noise to a cacophony.

Weather report
**Purpose**: to build the container; encourage sharing of feelings, encourage creative thinking by using a metaphor. Good to use at the beginning of the day.

Invite the group to share how they’re feeling by describing it in the form of a weather forecast. Start the go-round by saying something like: “In Steve Town, it’s been raining, but now the sun has broken through and it might be a fine day”.

What I said I’d bring today
**Purpose**: to link with the previous day and share what is the same/ different. This is only used after a closing activity the previous day of “One thing I’ll bring tomorrow”.

Ask people if they remember last night’s activity “One thing I will bring tomorrow”. Invite them to remember what they said and share it, saying if they have brought it today. Or if not, why not.
Energisers

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Elephants and Palm Trees

Purpose: a communications activity to stimulate quick thinking and responses.

Invite the group to stand in a circle and stand in the middle. Point to someone and say “elephant.” That person bends over and puts their hands down to make a trunk. People on either side of him or her curve their arms up to make his elephant ears. If the person in the centre says “Palm Tree,” the person pointed to holds hands straight above his/her head. People on either side make branches going out from the tree. If the person in the centre says “skunk,” the person pointed to turns around with a hand behind for a tail. People on either side turn away and hold their noses. The person in the centre points to people and calls an action at random. The person pointed to and the two sides have to make the appropriate gesture. If one of them gets it wrong they become the new person in the centre.

Face to face, back to back

Purpose: to help break down physical and other barriers between participants.

Ask the group to clear away any obstacles. Invite everyone to find a partner and stand face-to-face somewhere in the room. This requires even numbers so you will be the only one without a partner. When you call “back-to-back!” they quickly turn around and stand back-to-back with their partner. Then call “face-to-face!” so they turn back again. You can repeat the calls so the pairs are constantly changing their positions to each other. When you call; “Change!” everyone finds a new partner, including you. The person left over then does the calling. Repeat. Once they’re warmed up you might want to add a bit of spice by calling other actions like “nose-to-nose!” or “knee-to-knee!”

Group chant: to, to, to …

Purpose: to encourage teamwork, both in a small group and the whole group.

Divide the group into three and invite them to stand. Identify which is Group 1, 2 & 3.
- Ask Group 1 to chant together the word: “to, to, to” repeatedly.
- Ask Group 2 to chant together the words: “To whom do, to whom do” repeatedly.
- Ask Group 3 to chant together: “To whom do this belong to. To whom do this belong to” repeatedly.

Give them time to practice, then start Group 1 off at a steady tempo. Bring in Group 2, then Group 3 until you have a rhythmic 3-part chant.
Group clap

**Purpose:** to experience the phenomenon of individuals coming together as a group, feeling the group mind. We sometimes use this immediately after Simon Says, to open up thinking about power.

Invite everyone to stand and silently think of their own rhythm to clap. Check everyone is ready then start the clapping. Keep it going until the individual rhythms fall into a single group rhythm. This nearly always happens. Debrief by asking:
- What happened there?
- Why do you think it happened?
- How do you feel about that?

Group count 1-8

**Purpose:** energiser to help group co-ordination and togetherness.

Ask the group to stand. Explain that this is a number game and each number has an action: One = hands in the air. Two = hands on head. Three = hands on shoulders. Four = hands parallel to floor. Five = hands on hips. Six = hands on knees. Seven = hands on ankles. Eight = hands on floor.

Practice 1-8 until everyone’s got it. Then vary it by calling out numbers at random. You could close by counting 1-8, 2-8, 3-8 and so on until you reach 8.

Group count 1-20

**Purpose:** to encourage listening and tuning into the group to complete a task together.

Explain that we’ll be counting to 20 in a group. It’s more difficult than you might think because only one person can say the next number. If more than one person speaks at the same time, we must all start again. Close your eyes if it will help. Start the counting. Each time the group starts again try to beat the last record.

Group count, leg and arm

**Purpose:** to encourage group synchronisation

Invite the group to stand and explain the rules. Everyone raises their right arm together and counts to 10; then raise left arm and count to 10; then lift right leg and count to 10; then lift left leg and count to 10. Back to right arm and count to 9, left arm count to 9 and so on until you get to 1. If there is still energy and enjoyment, you might want to count back up to 10.

House, tenant, earthquake

**Purpose:** to encourage quick thinking and teamwork.

Invite the group to stand and clear any obstacles away. Ask them to form groups of three, then ask two of them to form an arch with their partner, with the third standing in the middle under the arch. Explain that the third person is the tenant and the other two form the house. When you call “Tenant!” all the tenants have to run and find a new house. When you call “House!” those forming the house have to find a new tenant. When you call “Earthquake!” everyone breaks away to form random new houses and tenants.
### I like you, friend, but I just can’t smile
**Purpose:** to lift the mood and loosen up a serious group. You’ll need to judge whether if this will work if the group is very serious.

Place a chair in the middle and sit on it. Explain that whoever sits in the chair is very glum and must not laugh. One by one, people try to make the sitting person laugh – they can use any means except touching. If s/he manages not to laugh, they say “I like you, friend, but I just can’t smile.” If s/he laughs, s/he is out of the game and whoever made him laugh sits in the chair. Continue until everyone is laughing.

### Mime the lie
**Purpose:** to highlight that truth is about our words matching our actions.

Stand round in a circle. One by one everyone goes into the middle of the circle and mimes an action, such as bouncing a ball. The next person asks them what they are doing. They lie and say, for example, ‘I’m riding my bike.’ The person who asked now goes into the circle and mimes whatever the previous person said. When they are asked what they are doing they again lie, and so the game continues.

### Mix up shoes
**Purpose:** to encourage quick thinking and action. It can be a good diagnostic activity to see how co-operative or not the group is.

Ask everyone to take off their shoes and put them in the middle of the room. Then ask them to turn their backs or close their eyes while you mix all the shoes around. Now invite them to find their shoes, giving them a time limit, say thirty seconds for a group of 20. On your call, they must find their shoes, get back to their seat and put their shoes back on within the time limit. Encourage the group to help each other. The more people, the better the game is. If the group is small, have them do the exercise blindfold.

### Rainstorm
**Purpose:** to create a group sound performance. Requires concentration and teamwork.

Invite the group to stand in a circle. Stand in the middle and explain that we’re going to create a rainstorm by copying the actions and sounds that you make. Ask participants to copy the actions and sounds you make when you turn to face them and keep it going until you come round again. Start by rubbing your hands together and turning slowly around to face in turn everyone in the circle. One by one each person then rubs their hands and keeps rubbing as you turn to others. Go around the circle nine times in this order: **First:** turn around rubbing hands together; go all around. **Second:** Snap fingers when you get to the first person again. **Third:** clap hands; **Fourth:** Slap thighs. **Fourth:** slap thighs and stamp feet. **Fifth:** back to slapping thighs. **Sixth:** back to clapping hands; **Seventh:** back to snapping fingers; **Eighth:** back to rubbing palms together. **Ninth:** turn in silence. Rainstorm is over.

### Sam went to Venus
**Purpose:** a communications activity that encourages participants to lose some inhibitions.
Ask the group to stand in a circle and introduce the activity. Demonstrate what is to be done in turn around the circle. Turn to the neighbour on your left and say: “Hey did you know that Sam went to Venus?” Neighbour says: “Did you say Sam went to Venus?” You say: “Yes, Sam went to Venus!” Neighbour says: “How did Sam go to Venus?” You say: “Like this!” and do a silly action and sound. This is then repeated by your neighbour to the neighbour on their left, making up another silly action and sound. Continue round the circle.

**Simon says**

**Purpose:** to encourage concentration and teamwork. Can also be used with Group Clap to explore power. (Simon says represents authoritative “power over”, Group Clap represents “power with”).

Invite the group to stand and place yourself in the middle. Ask if anyone knows the game “Simon says” and invite those that do to explain the rules: the person in the middle calls “Simon says do this ….” Followed by an action (eg jumping, shaking, turning around). Everyone must copy the action. If the person in the middle varies this In any way, say by using different words, eg “Simon says do that/ Do this/ Simon says all do this/ Simon says put your hands on your head …”, anybody copying the action drops out of the game. The game continues until only one person is left in.

**Snake, dog, cat**

**Purpose:** to experience quick decision-making in a group. We often use this as a fun start to a session on group process themes.

Divide the group into two and have them stand at opposite sides of the room. Ask which sound and action a snake makes, and come to a group agreement. Repeat for the dog and cat and have everyone practice these sounds and actions until they’ve all got it. Ask what would happen if a snake met a cat (the cat would kill the snake). What would happen if a snake met a dog (the snake would kill the dog). What would happen if a dog caught a cat (the dog would kill the cat). Explain that you will count down from 5 and in that time each group must decide quickly which animal they will be: Snake, Dog, or Cat. Then, when you say go, they turn and approach the other group doing the sounds and actions. Keep a score of who wins each round, ie if Group 1 chooses dog and Group 2 chooses cat, it’s a point to Group 1. Then they return to their respective sides of the room as you do the count-down for the next round. If you see people on the same group being different animals, you might want to introduce a rule saying their group is disqualified and the point goes to the other group. First group to reach 5 points wins.

**Telephone call**

**Purpose:** a communications game to highlight that messages can get lost in the chain.

Invite one person to quickly whisper a message in the ear of the neighbour on their right so that no one else can hear it. The neighbour then whispers it quickly to the neighbour on their right, and so on round the circle. There must be no repeats and each person must pass it on quickly. When the message is passed through everyone, ask the first person what they said, then the last person what they heard.
Closing activities

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Affirmation circle

Purpose:

Explain the process and start yourself. Turn to the neighbour on your right, say their name and what you have valued about them today/this workshop. Offer them a gift (a quality, a hope for them etc). Your neighbour thanks you, turns to the neighbour on their right and repeats. Continue round the circle until it comes back to you. You might want to close by all holding hands.

Affirmation wall

Purpose: to strengthen the bonds between participants and promote feelings of self-confidence, support and being valued. Suitable for workshops of 3-days or more.

Invite participants to write their name on a blank piece of paper as decoratively and creatively as they want, leaving lots of space on the sheet. You might want to prepare your own to show as an example. Then ask them to put their papers up on the wall for everyone to think about a positive quality in, something that you have valued in that person, and write it up on their sheet in the out-of-session times. It’s good to do this well before the end of the workshop so that people have time to think of what they want to write. Monitor the written comments and remind people to write their comments as necessary on all the sheets. When everyone has completed everyone else’s paper, take the papers down and present them individually at the end of the workshop.

Letter to myself

Purpose: to enable individuals to make a commitment to/set a target for themselves and to be reminded of it after the workshop.

Provide a sheet of paper and envelope for each participant and distribute them. Invite everyone to reflect on something they’d like to promise themselves or commit to as a result of this workshop. Ask them to write a letter to themselves saying what they’ve learned and what they are asking of themselves in the future. Fold the paper and put it in the envelope, seal it and write their name and address on it. Now collect all the sealed envelopes and say that you will post them in a month’s time.

One thing I will bring tomorrow

Purpose: a group bonding activity for each person to reflect upon a quality, behaviour, mood or gift they intend to bring to the next day’s workshop and say it as an intention or commitment. We often follow this at the beginning of the next day with the “What I said I’d bring today” activity.
You can do this as a go-round or a random offering, standing in a circle or sitting down. Ask for a moment’s silence before beginning to allow for reflection.

**One thing I’ve learned today/ has changed my thinking**  
*Purpose*: to encourage reflection and sharing on personal learning. To reinforce any learning.

You can do this as a go-round or a random offering, standing in a circle or sitting down. Or as a circle shuffle (see Evaluation tools). Ask for a moment’s silence before beginning to allow for reflection.

**One thing/ word that describes the day for me**  
*Purpose*: a group bonding activity that invites the sharing of experiences and feelings.

You can do this as a go-round or a random offering, standing in a circle or sitting down. Ask for a moment’s silence before beginning to allow for reflection. You could add a bit of play by inviting.

**Paper on back affirmation**  
*Purpose*: to strengthen the bonds between participants and promote feelings of self-confidence, support and being valued.

Ask everyone to write their name on a piece of paper and invite a partner to tape it to their back. Then start a mingle, with background music if you like, so that everyone writes something affirming on the back of that person, what you have valued in them during this workshop. When everyone has written something on everyone else’s back, bring the group together, invite everyone to take the paper off their back and read what has been written about them.

**Silent circle holding hands**  
*Purpose*: a simple closing to encourage thoughts of togetherness in the group. Good for moments when the group has experienced division or conflict.

Stand in a circle, hold hands. Close eyes if you want.

**Thumb circle**  
*Purpose*: to reflect on what each individual brings to the group. Affirms diversity and unity within the group.

Group stands in a tight circle, shoulders touching. You go first to demonstrate. Put your right thumb vertical into the circle and say one skill or quality you bring to the workshop/ campaign/ work/ group. Then turn your thumb sideways so it’s horizontal. The person on your left then does the same and, after saying their skill etc, turns their thumb horizontally and holds your thumb in their hand. Continue round the circle so you build a circle of thumbs. When everyone has spoken and you have a complete thumb circle, invite everyone to reflect on the wealth of skills and talents in the group. Lower the thumb circle then whoosh it up into the air, letting go and giving all the gifts to the world.
Volcano whoosh

Purpose: to leave the group feeling good, positive and energised.

Form a circle and place your hands in front of you on the floor. Make a low rumbling sound and flutter your hands. Build the sound up slowly and all together gradually raise hands. Keep building the sound and raising hands until you are ready to erupt the volcano by going “Whoosh!” very loudly and throwing your hands in the air.
Evaluation tools

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Circle shuffle
This can be used as a joint closing/evaluation activity to get just a sense, rather than a written record, of how people have felt.

Stand in a tight circle, arm-in-arm or all with arms around both neighbour’s shoulders. All shuffle to the right until one person calls “Stop!” The same person shares one thing they have enjoyed/valued/learnt today. Then the circle shuffles the opposite way until someone else calls “Stop!” And so on.

Evaluation grid
List all the activities in a left-hand column on a flipsheet. You could add on other aspects of the workshop like facilitation, venue. Draw columns to the right, headed with evaluation questions, typically: was this valuable/not valuable/don’t know or happy, frowny/neutral face symbols. Invite the group to take marker pens and place a dot against each question in the appropriate column for them. You could share the final result and ask what they notice about this feedback.

Flips with questions
Put up separate flipsheets in different parts of the room each with different open questions, eg What for you was the most valuable part of the workshop? What did you find least useful? What could have been done differently? What did you think of the facilitation/pace/style of the workshop? What will you do differently as a result of this workshop? Invite the group to circulate around the room and write their responses.

Pie chart
A variation of the evaluation grid (above), but using a pie chart with each segment as a different session or aspect of the workshop. Invite people to put a dot in each segment, the nearer to the centre, the more positive their response. Similarly, you could share with the group what’s come out and ask what they notice.

Smiles, frowns, suggestions
Often drawn as 😊😊😊 😞😞😞. Write up in each section according to what’s called out from the group.

World café
Similar to Flips with questions (see above), but the questions are on separate tables around the room and each table is hosted by a volunteer member of the group. You might want to have an additional table with a blank flipsheet for any thoughts and insights that don’t relate directly to the questions. Participants move around the tables having conversations on each question. The host on each table facilitates the conversations, notes key comments on the flipsheet and develops the thinking with
each new conversation. This helps progressively to deepen the feedback. Near the end ask for replacement volunteers so that the hosts can visit the tables as well.

**Workshop evaluation: Did you enjoy the workshop?**
Questionnaire for people to fill in and leave before they go. Sheet for copying below.

**Workshop evaluation: Star, circle, triangle**
Questionnaire for people to fill in and leave before they go. Sheet for copying below.
Workshop evaluation

Did you enjoy the workshop? *Mark on this line*

Very much                      Not much

Did you learn from the workshop? *Mark on this line*

Very much                      Not much

What exercise did you gain most from?

What would you like to have been done differently?

Any other comments?  
*If you need to please continue overleaf or on a separate piece of paper.*

Thank you
Workshop evaluation

Thank you for all your work in this training. We value your opinion and feedback and it helps our own learning. If you have more to say please use more paper. Thank you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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1. How was your overall workshop experience? *Please mark on the line.*

```
[ ] not so good  [ ] satisfactory  [ ] good
```

Additional comments:

2. Which session(s) was/were most useful?

1. How was the style of the workshop e.g. the pace, participation space for the group, useful?

```
[ ] not so good  [ ] satisfactory  [ ] good
```

Additional comments:
4. What could have been different or better?

5. What are new things you learned (star), that were reinforced (circle), and that you see/understand differently, a new perspective (triangle)?

6. How will you used this in your activism/campaigning and/or training and facilitation work?

8. Any other comments? If you need to please continue on a separate sheet of paper.