

Thumball Facilitation Tips

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BALL

Each ball has different conversation prompts. To choose the right one, consider your goals:

- **Break silences and build energy** – choose easy to answer prompts on one of these: Icebreaker; Energy Break; Favorites; Icebreaker; What If?
- **Get to know each other** – look for prompts that scratch below the surface – Common Ground; Favorites; Getting to Know You; Session Openers; Shaped by our Past; What Makes You You? What If?; Which are You?
- **Build deeper relationships** – Get Happy at Work; Shaped by our Past; What Makes You You?
- **Address specific challenges** – Be a Leader; Building Bridges (trust); Diversity; Get Happy at Work; Onward & Upward (change); Stress Management; Team Dynamics; Toolbox Talks (safety)
- **Reinforce learning** – Create Your Own

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS!

- **REASON:** As with any game or icebreaker, explain why you're doing it – to put people at ease, build relationships, learn names, articulate goals, make deep conversations fun, etc.
- **HOW TO PLAY:**
 - Roll, pass, toss, or kick Thumball™ among players.
 - Specify which thumb to look under for the prompt.
 - Ask players to respond to the prompt.
- **VARIATIONS**
 - Guess how another player might answer.
 - Have multiple players respond to the same prompt.
 - Discuss similarities or differences in replies.
 - Ask players to choose a prompt they really want to answer.
 - Specify that answers should relate to personal or workplace experiences.
 - Have players recall answers given by previous responders, before adding their own.
 - Ask recipient to select a prompt to which all players must respond or contribute.
 - Survey players on several question panels, then create charts or graphs that reflect the cumulative responses.
- **GIVE RELUCTANT PLAYERS AN “OUT”**
 - Some may be able to give quick or pat answers to a prompt; others might want to take some time to discuss or brainstorm best practices
 - Some might benefit wish to discuss why the prompt is difficult to answer.
 - As needed, invite players to take a PASS, ASK A FRIEND, or GROUP CHAT an answer.

- **SET AN EXAMPLE**
 - As facilitator, you start. Model the types of answers you're looking for.
- **TAKE NOTES**
 - Create a parking lot of ideas. For more in-depth conversations, keep a notepad handy in case you happen on an issue you'd like to revisit later.

SET GROUNDRULES, as needed

Explain that conversations can be emotionally charged. The goal is to share experiences and feelings. So that everyone can feel safe, have the group set up their own Ground Rules. Here are some that you might want on the list:

- Only one person speaks at a time
- Speak only for yourself; use "I" statements
- No personal attacks – critique ideas, not people
- Agree to disagree; disagree without being disagreeable
- Listen – make sure everyone feels heard and validated
- Be positive and non-judgmental; open to new ideas

BE PREPARED IN CASE CONVERSATIONS GET STICKY

Expert facilitators suggest these techniques to ease difficult or emotional situations:

1. Pause the conversation so you can review the ground rules with the group.
2. As the facilitator, share how an experience made you feel.
3. Ask others how an experience made them feel.
4. If two parties disagree, suggest that they switch roles and make the counter argument.
5. Keep a flip chart of difficult topics that can be addressed later.
6. Allow attendees to volunteer their participation as they feel comfortable.
7. Ask others for input on how they have handled similar situations.
8. Be ready to share some of your own personal stories.
9. Take a break. Stop for a while and regroup.
10. Thank participants for sharing their personal stories.

NOTES ON SPECIFIC BALLS

- ***Shaped by our Past***
Appreciate that this Thumball may remind participants of both happy and challenging moments in their past. If one question feels difficult, invite them to take a pass, trade questions with another player or toss again.
- ***Which are You?***
This ball requires players to choose between two opposite characteristics. They may find it's easy to choose one extreme or the other. If it is, or if it's not, encourage them to explain where they fall on the continuum and why. Invite them to share examples or expand on their answer with analogies to their personality or work style.

- *Create your Own*

To customize your Thumball™

1. Use a permanent, fine-tip marker so it's easy to write and doesn't smudge.
2. Plan before you write! You have 30 panels to fill up (10 blue; 20 silver). The two pre-printed panels on the top and bottom say "You Choose," allowing players to respond to any panel on the ball.
3. Practice your writing! Be sure your handwriting is big, bold and legible.
4. Fill all the spaces! Write in vocabulary words, questions, key words, and more. If you still have empty spaces, consider one or more of these ideas:
 - Repeat a prompt twice. Repetition can be good (if you put the same words on two panels – simply let players know that they need to build upon a previous answer).
 - "Pass to the right" – player passes the ball to the person directly to the right.
 - "Stump the Leader" – player chooses which panel the facilitator must answer.
 - "Toss Again" – player tosses ball up and re-catches it.
 - "Share 5" or "Group Share" – player gets topic from facilitator and 5 or more players must all offer answers.

- *Energy Break*

1. **Energize the group after lunch** -- Toss the ball to a recipient and have them read the prompt and demonstrate the movement to the whole group. Encourage all who can to join in for 1 to 3 minutes.
2. **Learning review** – Pick a movement and relate it to something the group has just learned. Alternatively, toss the ball and have the recipient perform the movement while they think up their answer to a review question.
3. **Break the ice** – Have the ball recipient do the movement described the panel, then have others in the group share a moment that the movement reminds them of.

- *Toolbox Talks (safety)*

- **Be prepared:** Toolbox Talks are likely to raise questions about proper safety checklists or "correct" techniques for first aid, fire prevention, CPR, etc. Several websites provide such information sheets with ready answers pertaining to a variety of work situations: cpwr.com * safetytoolboxtopics.com * ehs.harvard.edu
- **Take notes for follow-up:** While this is a discussion-starter tool, it may surface organizational issues or uncover gaps in knowledge about recommended safety protocols. Keep a list of follow-up actions that are identified during discussions.

- *Workplace Ethics*

Your goal is to make conversations about ethics interesting and productive, without judgement or finger pointing. To explore these touchy questions most effectively, remind your group that there are no right answers. Be transparent about these goals and explain your interest in opening discussion and having rich conversations -- about morals, handling sticky situations, evaluating fairness, and exploring the organizational practices that enable or inhibit ethical behavior.