

# PTA Meeting Icebreakers

By Heather Starks, MN PTA President

Icebreakers are a crucial part of an organization's success and should be present in every PTA meeting – whether big or small. **They play a critical part in membership retention, volunteer recruitment and leadership development.**

Think about why YOU are part of your PTA? What brought you to your first meeting? Did a friend invite you? Did you see a flyer or announcement and curiosity led you there? Did you have an issue at school you wanted resolved? We all have different reasons we attend our first meeting. But then...

Why did you STAY? Why did you keep coming back? If the meetings were boring, people were not friendly, and the content was junk, you may never have returned. However, chances are SOMETHING caught you and kept you coming.

For many people, it's the connections with others that keep them coming back. Icebreakers give attendees old and new a chance to connect and – even more critical – a reason to come back! They are also not scary (ice breakers NEVER ask deep questions), encourage small talk, and allow introverts a chance to break out of their comfort zone, when they may not have normally done so. (That was me)

Membership Retention: Ice breakers are something you put time in to at the beginning, but many not see the rewards until months later. Chances are, your September meeting is full. It's the beginning of the year, people are excited, and you can harness that energy. But what about February when it is cold, dreary, dark and possibly snowy and icy? What will keep people coming to THAT meeting?

Consistent effective meeting practices (another blog post) are important to that, and ice breakers can be one practice you can employ. They are fun, often take very little prep, and only take 10 minutes or less of a meeting time. From them friendships can form, working relationships appear, and people get comfortable with each other. Bonus: At your February meeting, a new member from the fall may find a person to sit next to that they recognize from a previous ice breaker. They feel comfortable approaching them because the ice has been broken! See how that works?

Volunteer Recruitment: You need a new chair for the school dance. Who do you ask? A stranger, or a member that has been coming to a few meetings that you've gotten to know through ice breakers? If you hadn't done icebreakers, they could STILL be a stranger in February. And you still don't have a chair for the dance.

Leadership Development: The president of the PTA does not need to be the person that runs the ice breakers. Any member can be responsible – it is an easy task to ask a fellow member to

do, and can be a great way to ease someone into a leadership role with a small activity at every meeting.

I've listed below four of my favorite PTA meeting ice breakers (Common Corners, Would You Rather?, M&M's/Skittles' Game, and Who Am I?) plus an explanation of Enhanced Introductions at the end. Feel free to change anything you'd like – they are just ideas to get your creative juices flowing.

I typically did Common Corners at the Sept and Oct meetings, Would You Rather in November, Enhanced Introductions in January, M&M's/Skittles in February, Who Am I in March and then by April we celebrated Volunteer Appreciation Month with a meal vs. an icebreaker since ideally we'd know each other quite well by then.

Good luck! I hope you find using ice breakers in your meetings to be effective, fun, and engaging this year and that you see the benefits throughout your term. Feel free to contact me with any questions!

# Common Corners Icebreaker

**DESCRIPTION:** Common Corners is an icebreaker where people get to know each other based on items they have in common. It takes a bit of prep, but is a great way for members to get to know each other, and is easy to do multiple meetings in a row. Allow for 10 minutes minimum to get through 2-3 rounds of questions. People tend to enjoy this one, so plan longer time than you think it will take.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

- 1) A room with four “corners” – you can make up corners if needed.
- 2) Signs in each corner representing choices. I’ve typically done it this way:
  - a. Red construction paper in each corner has answers for Common Corner question 1, Orange construction paper has answers for question 2, Yellow for question 3, etc.
  - b. Example: one red sheet would have 55425, another 55420, another 55431 and last 55437/55438 (zip codes in Bloomington). Each red sheet would go in a separate corner. Below the red sheets would be orange: under the red sheet with 55425 would be an orange sheet with 1 child. Below that would be a yellow sheet with K-1<sup>st</sup> grade, and so on.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Before the meeting, place the answers for each question in the various corners of the room. During your meeting, allow for a minimum of 10 minutes to get through 2-3 rounds of questions. You can always repeat the icebreaker at future meetings with new questions and answers.

You tell attendees they will be getting up, moving around, and introducing themselves to other people they have something in common with. Announce your first option and have people go to the corner with the answer that fits them. Then, tell them to introduce themselves to one other person in the same corner. (As the facilitator, you choose whether you go to a corner or not – I typically went to the one with the smallest group, not necessarily the one that fit my answer)

Repeat until you run out of time.

## **Common Corner Options:**

- Neighborhood (zip code, near landmark, etc)
- Number of Children (1, 2, 3, 4+)
- Ages/Grades of Children (ex. K-1<sup>st</sup>/ 2<sup>nd</sup>- 3<sup>rd</sup>/ 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>) – you don’t always need to have four choices

\*First three choices are best for groups just getting to know each other. PTA’s in small communities, or those together a long time may not need these options\*

- Hobbies (reading, cooking, exercising, crafting)
- Place to travel on vacation with kids (amusement park, snow skiing, ocean, camping)
- Where I Grew up (Twin Cities, Greater Minnesota, United States, International)

# Would You Rather? - Icebreaker

**DESCRIPTION:** Would You Rather? is a game available in many different forms. This version requires attendees to get up and move and to answer the questions based on where they go in the room, vs. verbally. You then take about 1 minute for people to introduce themselves to one other person that answered the same.

This is a really easy icebreaker as it doesn't take much prep or material and can be done for as long or short as you have time available. It also can be repeated at a future meeting without repeating topics.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

- 1) A list of "Would You Rather" options (list below)
- 2) Enough space for people to gather in two different spaces of the room

## **Would You Rather Options:**

- Live near the ocean or in the mountains?
- Eat steak or sushi?
- Watch a football game or baseball game?
- Fly to a vacation, or go on a road trip?
- Watch a thriller or a comedy?
- Give up sweet food or salty food?
- Forever never have to do laundry or dishes again?
- Meet Bon Jovi or Cher?
- Watch a sunrise or a sunset?
- Sky dive or scuba dive?

# M&M and Skittles Icebreaker

**DESCRIPTION:** This icebreaker uses candy to bring people together! Participants pick different colored candy (M&M's or Skittles) and based on the color, answer a question about themselves to share with the group.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED:

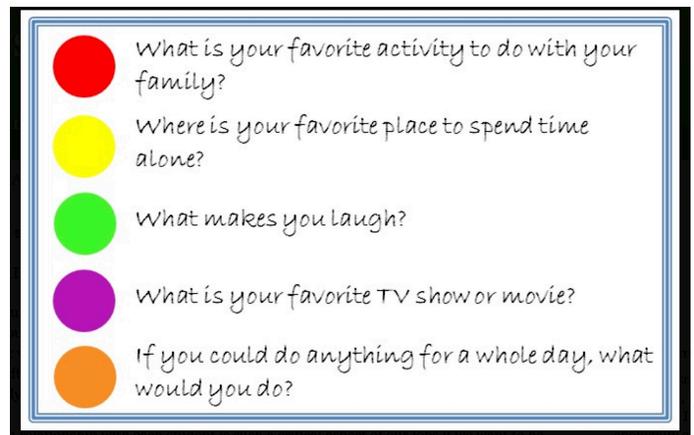
- 1) Halloween/Single size bags of M&M's or Skittles
- 2) Printouts with directions for each color candy
  - <http://creativeeverafter.blogspot.ie> (M&Ms printout)
  - <http://smithinfifth.blogspot.com> (Skittles printout)
  - Or create your own using these suggestions:
    - A favorite food or restaurant
    - A favorite book, movie or TV show
    - A favorite summer activity/A favorite summer activity
    - Something you couldn't live without
    - Something you do well/Something you want to improve on
    - Something that makes you happy/sad/angry/thankful
- 3) Space to break out in to groups of 3-5 people (with tables is preferred).

## HOW IT WORKS:

- 1) HIDE the printouts until step #5. Do not let participants see the instructions before they pick candy colors.
- 2) Break participants into small groups of 3-5 people.
- 3) Have each participant take a small bag of M&M's or Skittles (or pour 20-30 small candy pieces on to the table) - instruct them to not eat them!
- 4) Ask each participant to pick 2 – 4 different pieces of candy – each a different color (the number you choose is based on the time you have for the activity) and set pieces in front of them.
- 5) Pass out direction sheets for the candy you chose (shown below, or make your own).
- 6) Have participants take turns sharing info based on color candy in front of them.
- 7) EAT THE CANDY!

**marvelous me**

Tell the table about yourself based on which color m&m you pull out of your bag



# Who Am I? - Icebreaker

**DESCRIPTION:** Who Am I? is a guessing game where players don't know which person/character they have been assigned and have to ask yes/no questions to determine who they are. Best used for groups where people are relatively comfortable with each other – typically used in later part of PTA school year.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

- 1) Notecards w/one name per card
- 2) Tape or safety pins (to attach cards to backs of shirts) – can alternately place on forehead with “Headbanz” pieces or just holding up with fingers.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Each person is given a card with a well-known person/character on it (see list below). Person CAN NOT see the name before it is either placed on their back or they hold it up to their forehead. Secrecy is key.

Have attendees circle the room asking other people yes or no questions to determine their person/character. You can require only one question per person if you feel people won't circle the room well otherwise. Sample questions include (MUST only have YES or NO answer):

Am I real/fictional? Am I dead/alive? Am I an athlete/artist/writer? Am I a female/male?

Who Am I options: (one resource <https://www.playmeo.com/celebrity-heads-names-list/>)

- Kermit the Frog
- George Washington
- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Elvis Presley
- Brett Farve
- William Shakespeare
- Neil Armstrong
- Dr. Suess
- Albert Einstein
- Mother Teresa
- Harry Potter
- Buzz Lightyear
- Marge Simpson
- Mary Poppins
- Morgan Freeman
- Princess Leia
- Cinderella
- Oscar the Grouch
- Michelle Obama
- JK Rowling
- Wonder Woman
- Venus Williams
- Princess Diana
- Amelia Earhart
- Mickey Mouse
- Queen Elizabeth II
- Miss Piggy
- Abraham Lincoln

# Enhanced Introductions

Sometimes, you just don't have the time to do an icebreaker at every meeting. While most PTA's can fit an icebreaker in to virtually every meeting, we do acknowledge that it is not always practical. As an alternative, you can do "enhanced introductions" – introductions with a little extra "something" that gives people a chance to connect beyond their name.

## **Some ideas for enhanced introductions include:**

September: favorite activity or memory from the summer

October: favorite fall activity or favorite Halloween costume growing up

November: favorite elementary school teacher and why

December: favorite holiday tradition

January: favorite activity or memory from winter break

February: favorite winter activity

March: favorite free time hobby

April: favorite spring activity

May: activity most looking forward to this summer