



Brief Group Module and Icebreaker Collection 1 - Taking the Escalator releases brief icebreakers and group therapy modules about twice per week in the “[Forum](#)” section on the [Taking the Escalator: Group Activities by Topic](#) page of the website. This is a reprint of the brief therapy modules and icebreakers released in that forum for the six-month period from **October 2020 through March 2021**

Icebreaker – “Say Anything”

Directions: This is a way to generate spontaneous group discussion. The rules are as follows:

Someone in the group should volunteer to go first. That person should just say anything by making one statement of any kind* to the rest of the group. **Please no offensive or overtly controversial statements that may upset or hurt others or trigger unnecessary arguing. Rather it is better if it is a thought that can be built upon by others.*

Then the next person in the group should make a follow up statement to the group based on the first statement that was already said. When done, continue this through the group, allowing people to chain together thoughts.

At any point in the chain of statements, the counselor can “veto” a statement that drags down the process as the statements are supposed to build on one another.

At any point in the chain of statements, the counselor can call “Conclusion” – At that point the group should reflect on what was said and draw conclusions and make observations about the process of the discussion

Icebreaker – “Take Your Breath Away”

This is a simple but effective icebreaker question for discussion:

You have quite possibly heard the saying:

"It's not the number of breaths we take, but the number of moments that take our breath away."

Tell the group about an experience in your life that

"took your breath away"



This brief but stimulating ice breaker is doable in person or via telehealth – It's called "**Give it a Name**"

Read the following directions to group and encourage everyone to share:

Think about one of your own particular kinds of mood or feeling states. It could be a “mode” you get into sometimes or a state of mind or attitude that comes over you every now and then. Something that is perhaps unique to you as an individual

- Describe it
- Give it a name

Gimme Five - This is a quick activity to get some discussion going. The process is simple - Start with the counselor/group leader who picks someone in the group and starts a phrase with "Gimme Five..." and then add a request for a list of five things. Some examples below:

- Gimme five foods you would pick if you had to eat the same five meals for the rest of your life...
- Gimme five positive things in your life right now...
- Gimme five reasons why you are going to stay sober...

The person selected should give their five answers then pick a new person and a new "Gimme five" topic

This can be a fun way to get group feeling comfortable. The group leader may need to set some parameters for the group with regard to obscenities of anything of a potentially offensive nature

Say it with a Straight Face is easy - Everyone will need a pen and a scrap of paper if done in person. If this is done via telehealth just use the chat feature on the telehealth platform

The group leader should start by coming up with a silly line or phrase and then give it to one of the group participants. In person this would be done by passing a paper with the phrase written on it or else via telehealth send the phrase via the chat feature. The person receiving the phrase has to say it with a straight face to the rest of the group. Repeat with the person who shared then passing a silly phrase to another group member and continue this process until everyone gets a turn.

The sillier the phrases are, the better and they should be difficult to say with a straight face (but not offensive) - Some examples - 🤪

- "Sometimes I fantasize about what it would be like to have a head the size of a grapefruit"
- "My worst fear is being attacked by an army of elves throwing raw meatballs at me"
- "Last Tuesday I went out in a rainstorm with my socks on and did the Macarena in the moonlight"



This one does not need to be an icebreaker; it can also be a closer or used at any time in a group session - "Broccoli and Brussels Sprouts" is an engaging topic that can generate interesting discussion in just about any group session - Just read and discuss the following:

"Broccoli and Brussels Sprouts"

Most likely you have learned in life that there are many healthy things that may not be enjoyable at first, but you can really learn to develop a "taste" for them if you persist in trying them a few times. What is one healthy thing that you would consider adding to your life by persisting in trying it a few times?

(Some examples - 12 step meetings, praying, exercise, hobbies, marriage counseling, etc)

Thanos Snap

If you have seen the movie Avengers: Infinity War you know that Thanos, the villain uses the infinity gauntlet which gives him the power to snap his fingers and make anything happen. Evil Thanos decides to eradicate half of the universe with his finger "snap"

You don't need to see the movie to use this icebreaker, that is just a little background - The "Thanos Snap" activity works like this -

Read - *If you could just snap your fingers and make any one thing happen in the entire universe one time, what would you make happen?*

> Optional - You can let people give two answers if they want too - One funny answer first, then one serious answer - (Everyone in the group should be encouraged to give at least the one serious answer)

Examples -

Funny - *"With my Thanos snap I would make it make it so all dogs in the universe could talk like humans and then work as teachers in public schools"*

Serious- *"With my snap I would cure world hunger and make sure that everyone in the world has plenty of food growing nearby and clean water to drink"*

Your Life as a Movie - Icebreaker

READ - A talented director and producer wants to make a movie about your life, or at least a significant part of your life with you as the main consultant. Answer the following questions

- What genre of movie would you choose? (For example, Action, Drama, Romance, etc...)
- What part of your life would be the primary focus/the main story?
- What actor would you like to play you?



OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP - Real Life Story

Ask the group if anyone would like to share their real-life story, either in the group today or plan it for a future group

Taking the Escalator has a Life Story Outline for use in structuring a life story - Link in comments section below to [Life Story Outline](#) (Or it can be found on Group Activities By Topic page under heading Life Story)

Perfectly Peculiar... My Sweet Idiosyncrasy

Background - Read definition: **Idiosyncrasy** - *a characteristic, habit, mannerism, or the like, that is peculiar to an individual.*

Some examples to get everyone thinking - Can you think of an unusual way that you...Talk, eat, drive, count, dress, sleep, order food, cook, laugh, sneeze, run, stand, walk, smile, - ANYTHING THAT YOU DO UNUSUALLY SPECIAL TO BEING YOU

**Tell the group about one of your idiosyncrasies...
and... If you are up to the challenge: "Work your quirk" - If possible (and appropriate), show or demonstrate your uniquely peculiar way of doing something**

This is a two-part set of questions that can open up some good discussion in groups. The first part is specific to the COVID-19 pandemic and the second part is more open ended and imaginative and can be used anytime

"The Vaccine"

Part 1 - Read and Discuss: - We are all hoping that the Coronavirus vaccine will one day open up the world to some return to normalcy in our foreseeable future - Answer the following question - "If the vaccine helps the world return to some semblance of normalcy and increased social freedom, what is one thing you look forward to being able to do again in your life?"

Part 2 - Read and Discuss - On the topic of vaccines, suppose you could design a vaccine that would make people immune to anything that you choose - *ANYTHING at ALL*. This is more of a fantasy-based question so you can share any answer based on whatever your values are.

Examples -

"I would like to make a mandatory "rudeness vaccine" that would make it so people could no longer behave in a rude, obnoxious or arrogant manner"

"I would like to take a "road rage vaccine" so I could drive on the highway without getting stressed out any more by other people's bad driving"

Again, there are no wrong answers here, just creative self-expression



2020 vs 2021

This is a fun way to engage group in a discussion now that 2020 is almost over. As counselor/group leader you would just need a way for everyone in the group to be able to see pictures on the internet. On telehealth this can be done using the "screen share" function or in person you may need a device with a large enough screen for everyone to see. Group members would need internet access and a way to surf the net to participate

Directions: Give everyone in the group 5-10 minutes to surf the net and find two pictures, GIF's or very short videos. One picture would be their choice to represent the challenging year we have had in 2020 and the second picture would be something hopeful for 2021

Share and discuss everyone's 2020 vs 2021 pictures and allow group members to explain their choices.

This is a great segway into a group focused on goals for 2021. Taking the Escalator has a Goal Setting worksheet listed under "Goal Setting" on the Group Activities by Topic Page"- (Direct Link to Goal Setting worksheet in comments below)

My Own Personal Mt. Rushmore

The real Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, US, consists of sculptures of four US Presidents: Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt and Lincoln. These men were probably chosen because of their influence on US history

If you were to be able to select four people for your own personal Mount Rushmore, who would you choose?

2 Versions

Version 1 – Deep and Serious – Choose four real people who have had the most positive influence in your life. Could be family members, teachers, close friend, sponsor, etc – Anyone who is part of your story of progress and success

Version 2 – Fun and Light – Choose four people from life areas you really like and admire – Could be sports stars, musicians, entertainers, fictional characters, etc....anything goes

Long Weekends: Primed to Persevere

This is a list of group discussion questions for surviving and thriving over the two consecutive long holiday weekends coming up in the next two weeks. (Counselor's choice which works best for your group)

→ What are three tools you are ready and willing to use to effectively manage your sobriety and mental health over the next several days?



→ Tell the group how you are going to feel when you come back next week having successfully survived the challenges of the long weekend – How can this motivate you to stay on the right course over the next several days?

→ List 4 reasons why it is worth it for you to stay sober and stable over the next several days – Think MOTIVATION!

→ Specifically, what do you plan to do if you come across any haters, shamers, Karen's, or other negative or ignorant people who purposely (or perhaps unknowingly) try to stumble your progress or stir your emotions in a bad direction over the next several days?

→ If you find yourself alone with negative thoughts, one way to refocus is to imagine your brain like a television and then pick up the remote and "change the channel" from negative thoughts to the "Gratitude Channel" (Thoughts about what you are grateful for right now in your life) – What good things in your life can you focus on when you switch your brain to the "Gratitude Channel"?

My Phrase for the Next 360 Days - This is a simple but valuable discussion point for group therapy - The directions are simple: After checking in or checking out or at another relevant point in the group session - **Ask everyone to make up a short motivational/inspirational phrase for 2021.**

It's great if people can make up their own phrase but if anyone feels like they are struggling with being creative it is okay to instead use a song lyric, a line from a movie, or an existing phrase you already know. What is important that it is something that you feel applies to you personally and that can inspire you all year round

OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY - As an expressive art activity, everyone in the group should write their phrase down on paper and decorate it to make a nice inspirational poster with their phrase on it

What's Required for My Recovery

This is a brief recovery module that can be used at any point in a therapy group. These questions apply to substance use, mental health and co-occurring recovery issues.

Directions - Review and discuss the following:

- **Required - adjective - "Necessary for a particular purpose"**

As a group discuss the following questions about what you believe is required for your recovery:

- **What is required for you to feel self-confident?**
- **What is required for you to stay motivated?**
- **What is required for you to stay on a positive path to progress? (relapse prevention)**
- **What is required for you to succeed for today? (short term)**
- **What is required for you to succeed with your long-term goals?**



How are You Managing?

Intro - To "manage" by definition means: to bring about or succeed in accomplishing, sometimes despite difficulty or hardship - to take charge or care of

Group questions: *How are you managing?*

... Your substance use recovery?

... Your emotional and mental health?

... Your overall life goals, progress and purpose?

Are You an Anchor or an Oar?

This is a brief group module that can open up discussion of behaviors and attitudes that hurt and that help the group process as a whole.

Read and discuss the following as a group:

Consider this group to be a large boat that everyone is traveling on together. In this illustration each person on the boat can choose to be one of two things: **An Anchor or an Oar** -

An Anchor slows the group down and can even stop it from moving forward in a positive direction. As a group: Discuss what behaviors and attitudes would fit into this "Anchor" category

Some examples -

- o Coming to group high or intoxicated*
- o Lying about how you are really doing (wasting group time with untrue stories)*
- o Disrupting group with side talk (in person) or on telehealth disconnecting, not paying attention or doing things in the background that distract the flow of the discussion*

An Oar helps "row" the group forward by cooperating with the group process and goals in order to help things keep moving forward in a positive direction. Discuss what types of behaviors and attitudes would make someone an Oar -

Some examples -

- o Sharing openly and honestly while listening to and supporting others who share*
- o Participating a good amount but also making sure not to take over the group by not letting others share*
- o Getting real about what is going on in your life by being honest and also sharing your true thoughts and feelings and taking risks to open up*

Closing question - What specifically can I work on to make sure to be an Oar and not an Anchor in this group?



The Little Things Can Mean So Much

As an icebreaker share something about your life that is going on right now that you wouldn't necessarily share with the general public or post on social media, but it was still a relevant part of your life this past week. (Something that may not seem like a big deal to people who don't know your situation, but it was meaningful to you, even if just a little)

Some examples:

- Last week I finally went to the dentist to take care of the dental work I was neglecting when I was using
- My kid got sick in school and I had to go pick him up, but it was nice to be there for him when he needed me
- I applied for some jobs online and it feels satisfying to know that I am going to pass the drug test if there is one as part of the interview process

Follow up question - How does it feel to be making these small but meaningful steps forward in your life and your recovery?

Monday Monday!

Just as the title says, these simple but introspective questions are designed to prepare and empower group members for the week ahead in a positive manner, especially with regard to goals:

- **What are two or three things that you can start to do today to get this week moving forward on the right note?**
 - **What is one thing that you can commit to this week that is above and beyond what you usually do, so that you can make this an extra successful week of progress and growth?**
 - **What could be a phrase or saying that you could remember and repeat to stay motivated and inspired all week long in order to do what's right and stay on a positive course all week long?**
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Listen and Learn

What is one thing that you wish you had listened to...

...as a young child?

...as a teen/young adult?

...in the past few months?

What is needed for a person to have the right attitude to be able to consistently listen and learn from good advice?

The Free Pass - A mysterious person hands you a ticket and says "You can cash this ticket in anywhere in the world for to either get out of one situation for good with no questions asked (like a court date or a bad relationship) or instead you can use the ticket to get into one place for free, no questions asked for one day every year (like a concert, a movie set, an exclusive hotel or a sporting event)

Discuss - What do you do with your ticket?

Coping Skills Video shares some easy-to-use mental health coping skills that are great for anyone who needs to increase insight and motivation and make progress toward goals. Great for group therapy discussion, featuring entrepreneur/motivational speaker Henry Eisenstein and Therapist Ken Pecoraro LCSW, LCADC - Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az1i95DRom0&feature=youtu.be>

Skills Reviewed - With Group Discussion Questions

> ***"Be a True Friend to Your Future Self"*** -

How can you apply this idea of treating your future self like a friend, in your own life?

What can you start doing today that will benefit your future self- (Short term in the next few weeks or months...Long term over the course of the next year or longer?)

> ***Applying Some "Extra Time"***

What is one or two life areas where you can unselfishly apply a little extra time and focus each day to help make improvements in?

>***Using Introspection, Self-Awareness and Self Analysis***

What is at least one or two areas of personal growth that you need to stay aware of so you can measure your progress daily?

Deep thinking - What areas do you need to make sure to be honest with yourself about?

What do you need in life to be where you want to be and how do you plan to attain what you need?



Unpopular Opinion

This can be an icebreaker or for closing out group, or useful for at any time in group to encourage some interesting discussion and exchange of thoughts. **The only rule is to avoid potentially controversial topics or views that may offend or insult others.** Otherwise, the process is simple: Everyone in group is encouraged to **take turns sharing an unpopular opinion with the group.** Perhaps it may be something you like or dislike or something you've done or never done, that goes against popular or mainstream trends

Some examples:

"I actually think Nutella is way overrated"

"I have never watched a single episode of (popular show) and I have no interest in ever trying"

"I honestly think that mayonnaise is better on French Fries than ketchup"

"I secretly think (unattractive celebrity) is actually kind of hot"

"I think that (unpopular song or singer) is actually pretty good"

Hopefully, everyone gets the gist. Take turns sharing some of your unpopular opinions as a group and discuss them respectfully (no arguing or insulting please) Have fun with it!

The Speech

The Speech - (Read) - You have the world's attention for 5 minutes – Your 5-minute speech is going to be played on every television station, every radio station and on all internet live feeds and posted on all forms of social media. The president, congress and the leaders of almost every country will hear it and it will be played at the United Nations as well. You have the world's collective ear for 5 minutes to say whatever you want

What do you choose to talk about?

(After everyone shares in the group to the first question above, discuss these follow up questions)

What does your choice for the speech say about what is important to you (Your values)?

How do your values impact you today and your progress toward your treatment goals (substance use, mental health recovery, etc.)?



Shut Up

Saying “**shut up**” is considered to be rude in the public domain which makes sense, because it is not nice thing to say. No one likes to be told to shut up. However, when it comes to ourselves, often the consequences of *not shutting up* in certain situations can be devastating. Think about the last time that you wished that you had just shut up and not spoke your mind (only to regret it later) - It may not have been too long ago, right?

Ask yourself the following questions for introspection and increased self-awareness:

When are some situations in my life when I should just shut up?

How can I better understand ahead of time, when it is time to shut up (before it's too late)?

What can I say to myself, in my own head, to get myself to shut up, when I need to shut up?

What kinds of emotions, increase the likelihood of me talking when I really should just shut up?

In conclusion, what is my plan going forward, to get myself to shut up, when I need to shut up?