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Virtual Icebreakers, Check-Outs, and Engagement Strategies

Icebreakers and Check-Ins

Emoji check-in: Use [EmojiPedia](#) to select an emoji that describes how you're doing today (or could describe how one feels after a specific activity or discussion, etc).

Puzzle Pieces: Using [I'm a Puzzle](#) have the team work together to put together a puzzle. Can upload your own image so that it has a specific theme. This requires the team to identify one person to move pieces and other members to communicate where to move the puzzle pieces.

What GIFs? Use [Giphy](#) to find gifs to share in response to questions. Examples of questions might include how is your week going; how are you feeling about the upcoming weekend; what comes to mind when you think of your community; what comes to mind when you think about health; etc.

Scattergories: The host comes up with a short list of questions such as 1. Name a type of food. 2. Name a place to travel to. 3. Name an activity to do at the park. 4. Name an emotion. Then the host gives one letter from the alphabet to the group. Each person must come up with one response for each question that starts with that letter. The goal is to not replicate any responses, but people don't know what responses others are coming up with. One point is awarded for each unique response. The person with the most points wins. Responses can be entered into an online chat box.

Sketching/Drawing: Each person uses a piece of paper and writing utensil to individually draw a response to a question, and then shares out with the group by showing their drawing via webcam. Some prompt ideas to draw could include: create your own emoji; what would you choose as a superpower; what is your favorite health and wellness activity; what comes to mind when you think of your community; what does the view look like from a window in your home/office/work space, etc.

Where in the World? Display a world map using [Padlet](#) or another app and have each person drop a pin or place an icon where they would want to be in the world at that moment, and then describe aloud or in the chat box to the group why they chose that location.

10 Things in Common: The group must talk together to come up with 10 things the entire group has in common. Depending on the size of the group, may need to break out into smaller groups. Examples of things in common could be: everyone has a brother, likes to watch baseball, enjoys swimming, etc.

Passion Presentation: Give each person a short 1-3 minutes to share about something they are passionate about. This activity may work best after the group knows each other a bit more.

Favorite Things: Name or show your favorite thing from where you are sitting - this might be a pet, your coffee mug, your water bottle, the color of a wall, etc.

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The Cutest Baby Animal: Ask each person to find a picture of the cutest baby animal. After everyone has shared their photo of a baby animal, ask the group to vote which they think is the cutest. This activity might be a good way to get youth talking when a new group has formed.

Scavenger Hunt: Share a list of items and ask participants to search for each item in their space. An alternative way to facilitate this is to name a color or characteristic of an item and ask participants to grab/touch an example and see who gets one first (e.g., “touch something blue” or “find something made of metal”). You can have the person who gets the item first then choose the characteristic/color for the next round’s item.

This or That: Display text or images of two related items on the screen. Using the annotation feature on Zoom, chat box, speaking aloud, or other interactive tool, ask each person to pick either “this” or “that.” For example, a holiday-themed “This or That” might include: apple cider or hot cocoa, holiday movies or holiday songs, hosting or visiting, adventure or relax, etc.

Would You Rather: Display two scenarios or situations on the screen. Using the annotation feature on Zoom, chat box, speaking aloud, or other interactive tool, ask each person to pick which scenario or situation they would rather experience. Some “Would You Rather” examples might include: read books or write stories, be an actor or be a comedian, be a wizard or be a ninja, live where it is always sunny or live where it is always rainy, be able to fly or be able to turn invisible, etc.

Learning About Each Other: Ask creative questions of each team member to learn more about each other. Examples include:

- High, Low, Ha: What’s a high point from the previous week, what’s a low point, and what’s something that made you laugh?
- Rose, Bud, Thorn: Rose – share a success or something positive that happened; Bud – share something you’re looking forward to; Thorn – share a challenge or something difficult you are working through
- What is your favorite type of music?
- What is your favorite movie/TV series?
- What is your favorite animal/food/etc and why?

Gratitude Garden: Ask each youth to anonymously write a compliment about a peer. Share out the compliments at the end of the session. Youth, just like plants in our garden, need care to grow and thrive. As humans we care for each other in order to thrive. One way we can fill our emotional watering cans is by sharing compliments and affirmations or showing gratitude for others. [Padlet](#) or [Mentimeter](#) can also be used for this activity.

Superpowers: Ask youth, what is your superpower and how can you use it to help others today?

Getting Back on the Bike: Ask youth a series of questions and engage in dialogue using the metaphor of “getting back on the bike.” This icebreaker question can be a segue to reflecting on what challenges a class or project has faced and how we can overcome those challenges or fix our mistakes.



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- Ask youth: What mistakes have you learned from? What lesson did you learn? Have you ever fallen off a bike, skateboard, or rollerblades? Did you stay on the ground or get back up and keep trying?

Mad Libs: Engage youth in a game of [Mad Libs](#), but with a CalFresh Healthy Living, UC twist. Create a “story” leave “blanks” for youth to select, nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc at applicable places. Consider creating a short story that relates to the project or activity the youth are currently working on, or to prepare them for that day’s activity.

My First Single or Album: Use a shared [Jamboard](#) or other online whiteboard tool to answer the following question: “What is the first music single / album you ever bought?” For each response, have people do an image search to find a picture of the single / album cover and add it to the Jamboard/whiteboard. Next to their album image, ask people to create a post or text box to share where they bought it, why they liked it at the time, and what format they bought it in (e.g. vinyl, 8-track, cassette, CD, mp3, etc). Then ask people to do a virtual gallery walk to look at everyone’s responses and/or have each person share their post.

I Like My Neighbor: When doing this activity virtually, start with all cameras off. The “It” person then asks a yes or no question and youth who agree yes to the question turn their cameras on. For example, “Turn on your camera if you like pineapple on your pizza.” Alternate the “It” person until everyone has a turn to ask a question. When doing this activity in-person, you can ask the youth to be seated and stand up if they agree “yes” to the question, or do a certain physical activity movement if they agree “yes” to the question.

On a Scale of Dog: Create a collage of images (dogs, cats, variety of animals, etc) and ask youth to use the annotation feature in Zoom, or another tool based on the virtual platform, to select the image that reflects their current mood. For an example see [Scale of Dog](#).

Show and Share: Let youth present one things that makes them feel good/excited/happy and have them share why they chose that item. This activity helps the group get to know each other and gets everyone talking and sharing.

Guess the Number: Select one volunteer who will try to guess a number between 1 and 100 (or a different scale if you prefer). Everyone else will be shown the number except for this person (so have them look away for a moment when you show it on your camera or in person to everyone). Ask the “it” volunteer to make a guess and then everyone else will let them know if the actual number is higher or lower by doing the same physical movement together. If the number is higher, everyone else will jump up and down or raise up on their tip toes. If the number is lower, everyone else will do squats. Do this each time the “it” person makes a guess until they get to the correct number. You can continue with additional rounds with different “it” volunteers.

Background/Filter: If using the Zoom platform, ask the youth to explore the virtual background and filters on Zoom. Start with cameras deactivated, then turn cameras on to reveal background/filter selections. This could follow a certain prompt such as “select a background of where you wish you



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could be right now” or “select a silly filter.” Note: Additional backgrounds can be shared in a document or email so the youth have other options to select from.

Rock, Paper, Scissors (or other) Mini Tournament: Use [Bracket Maker Headquarters](#) to create a bracket for a mini tournament of rock, paper, scissors or other simple game that can be played virtually.

Check-Outs

1. **Head, Heart, Feet:** This activity can be done at the end of an individual session or at the end of an entire project as part of a wrap-up and celebration. Ask everyone to share about one or more of the following areas. Head: What is one thing you learned from this session/project? Heart: What is one way this session/project made you feel? Feet: What is one thing you will do moving forward as a result of this session/project?
2. **One Word:** Ask each youth to pick a word at the end of the session to answer a question. Example questions might include: How are you feeling after this session? How do you feel moving forward after this session?
3. Invite youth to share a funny, short, appropriate video (TikTok or other platform) with UCCE educator in advance to be shared with the whole group at the end of the session.
4. Create your own [Wheel of Names](#) to spin and ask each youth a question or facilitate a closing activity.
5. Consider adapting any of the icebreakers or check-ins for use as a check-out.

Engagement Strategies

Other items to consider when conducting virtual ice breakers, check outs, and team building activities:

1. Encourage youth to lead these activities or to brainstorm additional activities.
2. Consider having a poll on the screen as youth are joining the session. Poll questions could be themed to the season, current events, or nutrition and physical activity. Example questions include:
 - Have you eaten vegetables every day this week?
 - Have you been physically active for at least 60 minutes every day this week?
 - Have you slept for at least 8-10 hours each night this week?
3. Explore different platforms and tools to use when facilitating ice breakers and team building activities virtually. Some examples may include:
 - Zoom
 - i. Chat box
 - ii. Breakout rooms
 - iii. Annotation
 - iv. Reactions
 - v. Polls and Advanced Polls



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- vi. Virtual backgrounds and filters: consider this strategy to encourage youth to turn on their cameras
 - Google
 - i. Slides
 - ii. Jamboard
 - iii. Hangouts Meets
 - Microsoft 365
 - i. Microsoft Teams
 - ii. Microsoft Whiteboard
 - Sli.do
 - Padlet
 - Flipgrid
 - Quizizz
 - Kahoot
 - Nearpod
 - Canvas
 - Bitmoji Classroom
 - Mentimeter (word clouds)

Thank you to the CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Youth Engagement Workgroup for contributing to the updated development of this resource.

For questions, please contact CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California at uccalfresh_support@ucdavis.edu.