

BREAKING THE ICE

When meeting somebody for the first time some simple tips will help you reduce the tension in the situation enabling both parties to feel more relaxed and thus communicate more effectively:

1. Use non-threatening and 'safe topics' for initial small talk.

Talk about established shared experiences, the weather, how you travelled to where you are. Avoid talking too much about yourself and avoid asking direct questions about the other person.

2. Listen to what the other person is saying and look for shared experiences or circumstances.

This will give you more to talk about in the initial stages of communication.

3. Try to inject an element of humour.

Laughing together creates harmony, make a joke about yourself or the situation/circumstances you are in but avoid making jokes about other people.

4. Be conscious of your body language and other non-verbal signals you are sending.

Try to maintain eye contact for approximately 60% of the time. Relax and lean slightly towards them to indicate listening, mirror their body-language if appropriate.

5. Show some empathy.

Demonstrate that you can see the other person's point of view. Remember rapport is all about finding similarities and 'being on the same wavelength' as somebody else - so being empathic will help to achieve this.

6. Make sure the other person feels included but not interrogated during initial conversations.

Just as you may feel tense and uneasy meeting and talking to somebody new, so may they.

7. Put the other person at ease.

This will enable you to relax and conversation to take on a natural course.

