

# Coat of Arms

The best activity I've ever done to genuinely get to know other people. This is not a boring icebreaker. You'll get to know a small group of people, and I think it's likely that you leave the activity feeling warm and fuzzy and with a ridiculous grin on your face.

Harry Taussig

## Purpose / Outcomes

- Build or strengthen genuinely meaningful connections between people of any level of familiarity with each other
  - I've run this with kids, adults, strangers, and best friends and it has never failed to create the deep and vulnerable conversations that allow people to connect, while still allowing them to feel comfortable and naturally build up to that level of depth throughout the conversation.
- Facilitate the foundation of new friendships
- Get people comfortable being vulnerable and honest with each other
- Build mutual respect and understanding
- Feel warm and fuzzy and have a ridiculous grin on your face for the next hour

## Materials

- Paper and pen for everyone
- 4 small stickers or sticky notes per person (you need room for 1 word on each slip/sticker)
- Surfaces to write on for everyone



# Instructions

## 1 - Creating the Coat of Arms

- Pass out paper and pen to everyone (not the stickers yet!)
- Ask everyone draw the outlined shape of their coat of arms (can be any shape) (1 minute)
- Ask them to split it into 6 sections however they want
- Loop through each question (6 of them normally)
  - Ask the question to everyone
  - Tell them to draw a little symbol or picture that represents their answer in one section of their coat of arms
    - Give them 60 seconds for thinking of each answer and drawing it

## 2 - The Questions - Choose your own!

1. What's the most unique or strangest thing you enjoy doing as a hobby or in your free time?
2. Who's one of the most important people in your life?
3. What's something you're worried about for your future?
4. What's something that you think is a large part of your identity?
5. What's something you're proud of that you've done?
6. What's something you're not proud of that you've done?
7. What's something that you've been working on improving about yourself, or something you want to work on?

## 2 - Revealing your Coat of Arms

- Put everyone into groups of 4 (one or two groups of 3 is fine), sitting in a closed of circle
  - Spread groups out as much as you reasonably can
- Have everyone be sitting on the same level (if one person is on the floor everyone's on the floor)
  - Having everyone sit on the floor can be nice for this
- Have each group choose who will go first
- Have the first person choose one thing on their coat of arms to talk to everyone else in the group about for 1 full minute (set a timer, this feels longer than you'd think — do 1.5 or 2 minutes with EAs)
  - No one else in the group is allowed to say anything, they just listen. If the speaker runs out of things to say, people are allowed to ask a follow-up question
  - Repeat this for each member of the group
  - **Repeat this for each member of the group 3 times total** (each person talks to the group about a different thing on their coat of arms for one full minute, three separate times).
    - I usually up the time to 1.5 or 2 minutes for the last rotation

### 3 - Appreciating and Acknowledging Each Other's Openness and Honesty

At this point, many group conversations will have gotten vulnerable, deep, emotional, and/or meaningful. People will already have this warm glow of feeling connected with others so fast, which creates this wonderful opportunity to acknowledge and share that feeling in a caring way with each other.

- Ask one person from each group to come up and get 4 stickers for each person in their group (4 groups of 4 stickers/slips of paper)
- Ask everyone to think about what the other people in their group talked about and revealed, and have them write a one-word compliment on one of the stickers for each other member in their group
  - (using 3 of the 4 stickers so far)
- Starting with whoever shared first, have everyone else in the group give that person their one-word compliment and sticker, and (if they want to) say a little about why they chose that compliment
  - Do this for each other member in the group
  - Have people put the compliments (stickers) they received on the back of their own nametag/folder/phone (if they want to)
- Now everyone feels warm and happy and cared for :)
- Tell everyone that if they want to, they can write a compliment on that last remaining sticker to someone else outside of their group that they want to give it to, and to give it to them now or later today
- Give your personal closing spiel emphasizing the reasons you wanted people to connect in this way, and what you hope they bring from that into the rest of whatever they'll be working on together!
  - My spiel (do not read this word for word): "If you feel like I've felt after participating in this activity, which it seems like a lot of you do, I think it's worth considering how you might want to bring this into your life. The group of people — basically strangers — you just talked with is not a particularly special group, and this kind of interaction is possible with almost anyone. We tend to interact in ways where we don't have these kinds of meaningful interactions. Where we don't truly listen to each other. When was the last time you listened to someone as closely as you did right now? When was the last time you had someone listen to you this closely? How did that feel? When was the last time you selflessly gave someone a genuine compliment about their personality? These kinds of interactions don't happen by accident, and they don't happen randomly — you can create the conditions in your relationships to connect with people on this level, but it does take extra work and discomfort to break through our regular patterns of interaction".