“Turning points” activity
an activity for building real relationships in small groups

Form small groups
Form small groups of three (or at most four) people. As far as possible, work with people you don’t know rather than with people you do. Aim for groups that are as diverse as you can make them. Exchange people between small groups to improve the diversity of each small group.

Individual work
Think back over your life so far. Begin with your first memories and work towards the present. As you do so, identify “turning points” — events, or people, or both together, who made a real difference. As you identify a turning point, note it down. When you have six or more turning points, choose three that you are willing to talk about in your small group. For each of these three turning points, prepare brief answers to these three questions:

- what is the story of the turning point — where was it and who was there. And especially, what happened?
- in one brief sentence, why was it a turning point for you? What was its effect?
- in one brief sentence, what are the long term outcomes? — what does it say about you, now. How are you different now as a result of that turning point?

It’s best not to write detailed scripts that you have to read. Use keyword notes.

Exchange information in small groups
Meet in your small groups. In turn, each tell the story of one of your turning points. When each person has told one turning point, go around the group for the second turning point. Repeat for the third turning point.

(In other words don’t relate all three turning points at once. Go around the small group three times. This increases the effectiveness of the process.)

As you relate a turning point, look at the other people in your small group. Engage with them. When someone else is telling you of their turning point, be curious about what they are saying. Give them 100 per cent of your attention.

Debrief in small groups
If you have time … At first individually, and then in discussion, answer these three questions:

- Did the exercise make a difference to your feelings and thoughts about your group colleagues and your attitudes towards them?
- If so, how would you describe the difference?
- If so, what was it about the exercise that led to that difference?