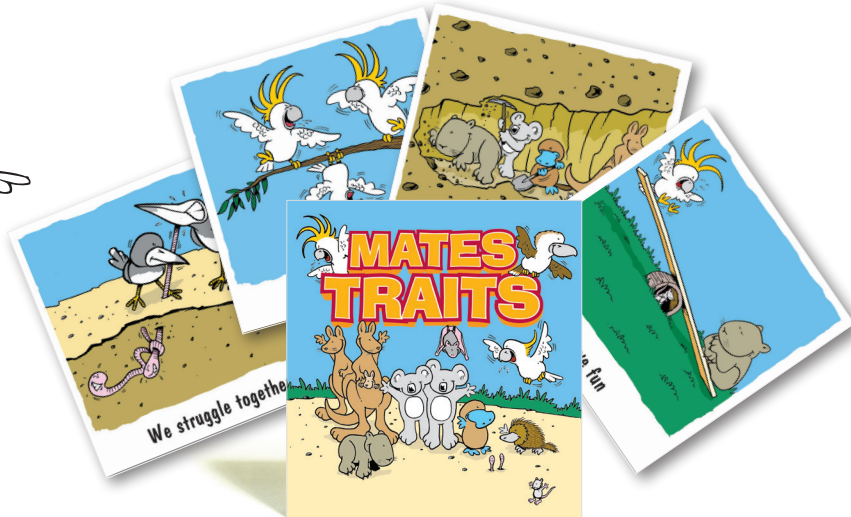




# Mates Traits



Most of us depend on our friends for lots of things—happiness is just one thing that goes hand-in-hand with friendships. But while friendships are a very important part of the lives of most of us, it is easy to take them for granted. Have you ever stopped to think about how friendships are made? How we choose who we will be friends with? What makes a friendship resilient to cope with the ups and downs?

*Mates Traits* is designed to help children (of all ages!) to reflect on and talk about relationships. It can be used to talk about social skills, communication, personalities and interests, and provides a unique way of working towards the prevention of bullying.

## Building new relationships

Sometimes knowing how to become friends with someone new can be very difficult. It might be a new person who joins a class or sports team. Or it could even be that cousins you don't know well are coming to stay or that Mum and Dad are foster parents and will sometimes care for children who are complete strangers in your home.

Rather than merely accepting that such 'imposed' friendships will somehow work out, *Mates Traits* provides a way of taking preemptive action. Introducing the cards into a classroom or family conversation before the new arrival appears can help children identify positive ways of being together, while encouraging respect for differences too.

- How do you think you could start a friendship with the newcomer?
- How might the newcomer be feeling when you meet the first time?
- Which cards or 'traits' might you choose to demonstrate when the newcomer arrives? Which traits might come later?
- Have you ever become friends with someone you didn't like? How did you do this?

## The 'find-your-partner' game

Two sets of *Mates Traits* are needed. Divide the group into two with the same number of participants in each group. Each group receives and distributes a matching set of cards, with each participant receiving one card.

The first challenge is for the partners to find each other. This can be done by requiring each person to act out what is on the card as the players mingle. The only question permitted is, 'Does your card say ...?' when someone thinks they have found their partner.

The second challenge is then for each pair to act out their *Mates Traits* cards in front of the whole group, followed by stories and discussion about why this can be an important characteristic of a friendship.

A range of further activities can then be built around the matching pair. Perhaps participants might identify a person who embodies that trait for them or write a short story or create a collage around one of the friendship themes.

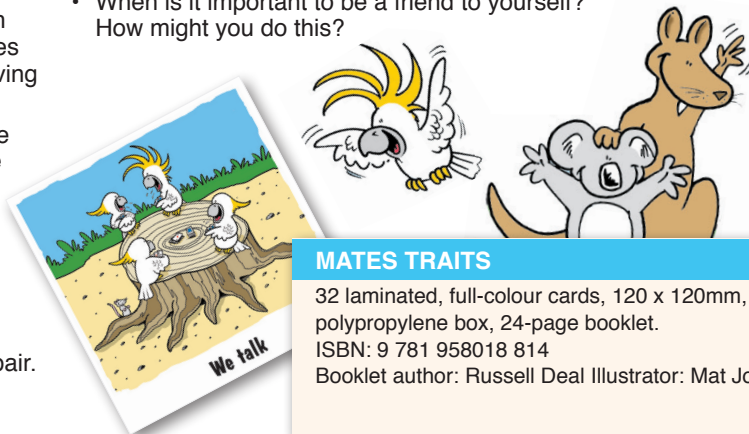
## Conversations about friendship

Many children struggle with the complexities of friendship building. Some cards may be worth introducing to a new group to establish some ground rules and expectations. Some questions may help repair fragile or tested relationships.

- What are the most important things you think friends should do together?
- Do you do different things with different friends? Does this ever create a problem?
- Do you think you can have friends who are very different from you?
- Do you think that boys build friendships in different ways than girls?
- Do you think it is important to have lots of friends? Is it okay to have just a couple of friends? Which do you prefer? Why?
- If there were 'friendship awards' to be given for each of the *Mates Traits* cards, which ones would you most like to win? As a friend, which of the cards says what you do well?

Sometimes children who are targets of bullying are confused about friendships. They may feel that they have done something to cause the bullying or they may think that bullying behaviour is something that friends do. Some questions that might help a child in this situation are:

- Why do you think this person picked on you? Did they misunderstand something you did in wanting to be their friend?
- All friends have up and down times and all friends can hurt us at times but is the behaviour of this other person something that real friends do? Would a real friend later regret their behaviour?
- Can a friendship be one-sided or allow one person to dominate another? What do fairness and equality mean in friendship?
- When should friends say they are sorry and when should we forgive our friends for their mistakes?
- Do you think there are times when we just can't be friends with someone? What is the best way to do this?
- When is it important to be a friend to yourself? How might you do this?



## MATES TRAITS

32 laminated, full-colour cards, 120 x 120mm, polypropylene box, 24-page booklet.  
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