

# The Bears

Of all the conversation-building tools published by Innovative Resources, *The Bears* have proved to be one of the most enduring and versatile. They cross language, literacy, cultural, age and racial boundaries. They are engaging—even enticing—and positively beg to be used creatively!

The simplicity of *The Bears* invites every user to apply their own unique brand of creativity to find the conversational pathways that work for them. Is there a risk? Yes, always. *The Bears* may look innocuous but they do have the power to move people in surprising ways, at unexpected times.

The ideas below represent a tiny handful of possible uses for the cards. Don't forget to check *The Bears*' page on our website for dozens of other suggestions and stories!

## Bear Family Sculpting

In human service work, family trees are drawn as 'genograms' using symbols to represent family members and their relationships. *The Bears* can add rich dimensions to these ways of representing family members by opening up conversations about the various personalities within the family, and their differing feelings, attitudes and perceptions.

- Which bear comes closest to representing each person in your family?
- Is one bear sufficient or do you need to use several different bears to create a picture of each family member?
- Which bears represent each person on a good day and a bad day?
- Who is closest to whom in your family? Can you move your bear to demonstrate this closeness?
- Who are the people in your family who are most similar/different? How might this be important?

## Bearing up: Transitions

Transitions are those times in our lives when we are going through significant changes—times when we really come face to face with the veritable smorgasboard of emotions that life can throw at us. Used with care, *The Bears* offer ways to reflect on and describe the multiplicity of emotions that accompany transitions.

- Is there an important transition in your life that you are willing and comfortable to talk about? Can you pick out bears from the set that remind you of the different emotions you experienced during this time?
- Who were the people around you at this time of transition? Can you find any bears that describe how they were feeling and what was happening emotionally for them?
- Can you compare this transition with one or more other transitions you have experienced? Would different transitions reveal different sets of bears?



## Bears for Evaluation

Over the years, countless educators, managers and group facilitators have shared stories about ways that *The Bears* have 'value-added' to their more formal evaluations. Depending on the age and experience of the group you are working with, we suggest using a limited number of bears, and you may wish to use *the Bears* stickers rather than the cards. You can be creative in framing the evaluation questions, but generally the pattern goes something like:

- Which bears represent the way you feel about...?
- Which bear sums up your feeling about the thing/s that worked best? What were these things?
- Can you place a bear sticker beside each of the activities on this list to show how you felt about them?
- Which bear represents how you feel about the things that could have been improved? What were these things?
- In a month's time when you look back on this event, which bear do you think will sum up your feelings?

## Inner and Outer Bears

Some people 'wear their emotions on their sleeve', making clear what they are feeling. Others are very adept at disguising their feelings for a multitude of reasons. Differentiating the visible or outer signs from what a person is feeling on the inside is quite a sophisticated skill—a skills that *The Bears* can be used to develop.

- Can you think of a time when your own feelings were misinterpreted by others? Which bear shows how you were seen and which bear comes close to how you were actually feeling?
- Have you ever misinterpreted someone's feelings through misreading their 'outer' emotions? Which bear shows both?
- Using a picture book, story or audiovisuals, can you match a bear with how each character is behaving?
- Can you find the bear that you think represents how the character is feeling on the inside? Are they the same or different bears?

### THE BEARS

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