

# The Bears

## Digital Version



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## Welcome to the Digital Version of **The Bears**



St Luke's Innovative Resources is delighted to bring you the interactive, versatile, digital version of this conversation-building resource, first published as a hard copy card set packaged in a polypropylene box.

*You can:*

- swipe through the digital cards, one at a time
- swipe through a row of thumbnail images at the bottom of the screen
- bookmark/tag images
- write, scribble or draw on the digital cards—you may want to circle a relevant statement or scribble notes as a card is discussed
- add and drag notes anywhere on the images
- highlight, draw and write in multiple colours
- take a screen shot and access the image in your photo gallery
- send the image to the person you are working with so they have a copy
- print the image and mail it to the person so they have a hard copy
- save the image in your files as a record of your conversation.

## **How can I use this digital tool remotely with groups or individuals?**

If you are running groups or meetings using Skype, Zoom or other similar video conferencing tools, you can use our digital cards and tools in a number of different ways.

A good place to start is to give the group or person some time to get to know the cards:

- The facilitator can share their screen, and scroll through the images so everyone can see.
- Point out the different features of the card set including the types of images, the format of the words (if any), the suits (if relevant) and any other unique features.
- Show them some of the features such as the scribble and text tools.

### **Deliberate Selection**

- As you scroll through the cards, invite the person or group to pick cards that jump out at them for any reason. Perhaps it is the image that catches their attention. Perhaps it is a word or a question, or some other quality of the card. It may be a card they are curious about, or would find most helpful to focus on, or think is very important, or it may be a card that matches something they are thinking about or experiencing at the moment, or even a card that expresses something they have never thought about before.
- As the facilitator, you may wish to choose one or two cards to prompt an activity or discussion.

## Random Selection

An alternate way of getting activities started is to select images randomly, for example:

- Ask each person to close their eyes and randomly say, 'Stop!' as the facilitator swipes through the images.
- Or ask each person to choose a number between 1 and X (X being the number of cards in the set). This is the number of their randomly selected card.
- Or use the timer on your phone set to a chosen interval— 5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. Stop on the image that is on screen when the timer dings.

Many videoconferencing tools allow you to put people into groups using 'breakout' rooms. So you may want to invite two or more people to discuss what a particular card means to them, and then come back to the whole group.



## **Some questions for reflection and conversation**

Whether you use a deliberate or random selection method, you can then build the conversation by inviting each person to read or comment on their card, if they wish.

Facilitators can then ask individuals or groups questions like:

- What does this card mean to you?
- Have you thought about the topic on the card before?
- On a scale of 1-10 how important is this to you?
- Can you think of a time when this card was particularly relevant? What happened?
- When this is happening, what is the effect?
- When this is not happening, what is the effect?
- Do you know anyone who is really good at this?
- What do they do?
- What is one simple thing you could do today or tomorrow that would make a difference?
- How will you notice the effects? (Some people ask for feedback, and others prefer to notice carefully how it feels inside themselves and what the effect is on others.)



In the booklet written especially for the card set you have chosen, you will find a lot more information. It includes the purpose of this card set, its origins and practice base, things you should take into consideration before using the cards, and many creative ideas for using the cards. Please adapt the suggestions to the digital environment.

**Don't hesitate to call us for support  
in using this digital resource.**



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## Preface: How Many Puns Can You Bear?

*The Bears* are now over twenty years old!

This sounds very mature and grown-up so one might assume that having lived with *The Bears* since 1995 their propensity to generate playfulness might have worn off. But *The Bears*, like the author, enjoy a little playfulness, including the use of execrable punning.

Adlai Stevenson once said, 'If people never did silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done.' *The Bears* can certainly do silliness as well, and silliness can be an important emotion. But there are many important, indeed vital, emotions—aren't all emotions vital at the right time? And *The Bears* do them all!

For more than twenty years *The Bears* have played a significant role for countless numbers of children and adults and that is, to help them express and describe how they are feeling.

On the one hand we talk about our feelings all the time; 'How are you?', 'I feel fine'. But much of our description of our feelings is socially-prescribed and -constrained. We say we are fine because it is the conventional thing to say, because we don't want to cause offence or because we are reluctant to reveal the reality of the pain, the hurt, the anxiety, the confusion, or the joy and anticipation we may be sitting with.

At times, we readily put up shells around us to hide our true feelings. At other times we struggle to find the words

to honestly express our feelings. Even if we want to describe our feelings in an honest way sometimes it is our lack of words or the inadequacy of words to describe what is happening for us that get in the way.

As adults we know how difficult it is to find the right words to express our feelings. At times we fall back on clichés. At times our voice is silenced. At times we act out our feelings and, for better or worse, our behaviour reveals the emotions that are sitting inside us.

For children the task of finding the right words to describe feelings is even more challenging as vocabularies are still being built. As adults we can make huge assumptions that children understand the language we use to express our feelings and that children have the same capacity for expression. Clearly, being able to honestly, accurately and fully describe our feelings is a hugely sophisticated and complex task.

At times this struggle to find the right words to describe our emotions means that our feelings can be bottled up until they emerge inappropriately. We can lose the ability to discern the appropriate time or place to express ourselves verbally or behaviourally. Or some emotions are seen as negative and to be avoided or suppressed rather than all emotions being recognised as positive, useful and important to express at the appropriate time.

We live our whole lives in the company of our feelings. We have a complex and constantly changing relationship with our feelings. They cast their spell over us almost constantly. They are our ever-present companions and influence almost

every decision we make. They walk with us from the moment we wake until we drift into sleep ... and beyond. Our feelings can be very powerful. They are part of our essence, our core, our very aliveness.

Because capturing our emotions in language is sometimes difficult, many of us could use some help. Theodore Dreiser once said, 'Words are but the vague shadows of the volumes we mean. Little audible links they are, chaining together great inaudible feelings and purposes.'

This is where *The Bears* come in.

The 48 *Bear* cards can represent a universe of different feelings—without using words at all. But their power and usefulness is in their interpretability; what they suggest through their facial expressions and body language. *The Bears* can say a lot about feelings without using words but they also create ways to add words and build languages to allow for clearer and more honest articulation of our feelings.

Without words, *The Bears* speak a universal language which means they can be found in Lapland within the Arctic Circle, in the Nuba Mountains in Somalia, in Western cosmopolitan cities, in Bangladesh, in the Himalayas in Nepal, in Aboriginal communities in remote Australian regions and even in bases on Antarctica.

Across the world they are used in school classrooms, with refugees, with women trafficked into sex slavery, by sporting teams, in counselling and family therapy, in corporate organisations, in programs assisting with recovery from natural disasters like bushfires, with victims and

perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse, and in countless other situations where expression of feelings is crucial.

And that's just about anywhere and everywhere!

Since their inception *The Bears* have appeared as cards and stickers but since January 2015 whole new populations have been meeting these characters with the release of *The Bears App* for mobile devices. Using the *The Bears App* you can swipe through the 48 cards, tap on a *Bear* to match your mood, add a message and share it via email, Twitter or Facebook. Or you can click on the dice icon to get your random *Bear* for the Day.

So, welcome to *The Bears* booklet! Whether you are a regular user of *The Bears* or have only just bumped into them, I hope you find some suggestions in this booklet to spark your curiosity, your imagination and your creativity. And I hope you can manage to find the puns at least bearable!

Russell Deal OAM

*Founder and former Creative Director  
St Luke's Innovative Resources*



## Bearly Alive

*The Bears* started their life as *The Bear Family* in 1995. The original idea was for a card set that could be used by counsellors and therapists to invite their clients to construct a ‘sculpture’ of their family using animal images on cards to talk about their relationships within their family.

Family sculpting was a well-known technique within therapy circles to add richness and depth to traditional genograms or family trees. Sometimes the actual family members were used to build a living human sculpture and sometimes pictures of people or other images or figurines were used.

Our hope was that we could popularise family sculpting in a way that would make the idea accessible and easy to use by a broad range of family workers and other human services practitioners. The animal we chose was a bear. We naively thought that cartoon bears could capture both human facial expressions and body language. We thought that bears would appeal to people across all ages. And we thought bears would be pretty easy to draw.

Almost as soon as *The Bear Family* appeared, the original family sculpting idea drifted into the background. It’s not that it wasn’t a useful idea—many practitioners still use them successfully in this way—it was just that an array of creative possibilities seemed to explode overnight.

Little did we know that we were creating a monster!

Well, not a monster that was ugly, ferocious and devouring but a monster in terms of the extent of its popularity and usefulness. *The Bears* became a ‘monster of goodness’, not

just because they have contributed significantly to our sustainability at Innovative Resources, but also a ‘monster of goodness’ to the countless people who have discovered the simple magic of *The Bears* — their ability to help people talk about feelings.

In our naivety we had chosen the one animal that is possibly the most loved across most cultures. Cats might have been another contender but they have some negative baggage in some cultures! Many children, of course, grow up with teddy bear stuffed toys. Many more are exposed to the ‘humanoid’ bears of writers and illustrators from Paddington to Pooh and from Yogi to Fozzie. All bears from the family Ursidae can look cute, especially as cubs, and distant relatives like pandas and koalas can be pretty charming.

Our second useful decision (made before everything had to be ‘evidence-based!’) was to be simple and minimalist. That is, we didn’t add words or background images, we used different colours on the cards to add some interest and we happily settled on 48 cards rather than trying to reproduce every possible feeling. This meant that the bears we did illustrate could be, and had to be, interpreted in different ways.

*The Bears* were up and running (even if the originals came with homemade plastic stands, a less than useful innovation, fortunately long since discarded).

Since then *The Bears* have become a key resource in the toolkits of countless practitioners in diverse human services roles in many countries. *The Bears* speak many languages and integrate into a wide variety of theoretical and practice frameworks although for Innovative Resources they will always be closely aligned to our ‘strengths approach’.

In their long history we have yet to meet anyone claiming that our cards have caused them to become a Bear with a Sore Head! Although one practitioner came close when she began to stick a *Bear Family* card on her office door to alert her colleagues of the bear they might encounter if she was interrupted! We called this the ‘Tsunami Warning Effect’ or ‘Going Bear-zerk’!



# *Ursidae Emotioicanus: Bears With Feelings*

Here is the full array of cards.





## Being Pre-Beared

Even though they may look cute, bears are wild, undomesticated animals. Our *Bears* are no exception. They need to be handled with some care. It's not that they will ever turn on the user and tear them to shreds (we trust) but some surprises are always a distinct possibility when *The Bears* are brought out.

At Innovative Resources' we have learned over many years that the most innocuous and gently humorous materials can take conversations into unexpected places.

As with all Innovative Resources conversation-building tools, you will not find an accompanying instruction manual or a prescribed training course in how to use the cards. We try assiduously to publish materials that anyone can pick up and use and in ways that are pleasurable and meaningful. We make every effort to avoid publishing anything that might inadvertently cause offence. At the same time, however, we cannot determine how our cards are going to be introduced by any facilitator or how they are going to be interpreted or experienced by anyone who uses them.

Facilitators need to be mindful that there is no way of predicting how the cards are going to be received or how the conversation will evolve. When it comes to feelings, one doesn't have to scratch very hard to uncover feelings from just below the surface to much deeper places in our consciousness.

If *The Bears* generate a strong negative reaction perhaps the best thing to do is to simply put them away and try a different card set or activity.

We are aware that in some cultures asking adults (particularly males) to play with cartoon-style images can be experienced as demeaning. A different approach that is comfortable for all may be called for. However, perhaps the lack of acceptance of the metaphor is due to the context and how the cards are presented rather than to an impenetrable cultural blockage.

Just because there is a ‘negative’ reaction or strong emotions bubble over doesn’t mean that harm has been done.

Sometimes important learning can be painful. Sometimes a whole range of bottled-up emotions might spill out — much to everyone’s surprise, embarrassment or sometimes even relief.

So how might someone best pre-bear—oops, sorry, prepare—to use *The Bears* (or any other conversation-building tool from Innovative Resources) with individuals or groups?

We suggest:

- 1 Get to know all the cards until you are confident about their content.
- 2 Be convinced that you are comfortable with the cards and enjoy working with them.
- 3 Be clear about your purpose in using the cards.
- 4 Decide whether you need to use all the cards or can make a selection.

- 5 Know a little about the culture and circumstances of the people who will be using the cards and be prepared to take a risk with the cards you think will be most readily understood and accepted.
- 6 Give careful consideration to the words you will use to introduce the cards.
- 7 Ensure you have allowed sufficient time for stories to be told and respectfully heard.
- 8 Introduce the cards at a time and place that participants experience as safe.
- 9 Have a 'Plan B' if you find *The Bears* aren't useful at that time for any reason.
- 10 Consider how you will ensure people can elect not to comment or share about their feelings if they wish to 'pass'.
- 11 Also consider how you will ensure there is enough time for all participants in the group to have their turn.
- 12 Have a backup strategy if strong emotions are released.
- 13 Have a plan for how you will end the activity and how you will give and seek feedback about how the cards were experienced.
- 14 Consider how significant learning might be reinforced through the use of stickers, letter writing or follow-up.

## Bearers of Good News: Getting Started

The good news embedded in *The Bears* is their ability to be used within very different cultures and with participants who have no English and even no literacy. Over many years they have proven to be versatile and engaging across all age groups from 3 to 103.

Like all other conversation-building materials published by Innovative Resources there are no prescribed rules about how *The Bears* might be used. In fact their strength is just the opposite. They have been welcomed with open arms by countless practitioners in hugely diverse roles because they are so adaptable and malleable to different needs and situations. They invite practitioners in domains as different as therapy, community building and strategic planning to meld the use of the cards according to their own creativity. The simplicity of *The Bears* helps ensure that they don't get in the way of any practitioner's creativity but, rather, they invite creativity to flourish.

There is an explicit, gentle humour in the cards that has given them wide appeal and, for many people, conveys a sense of safety in using them. However, what is implicit and not quite so immediately recognisable is the emotional content of the illustrations themselves. *The Bears* can pack an emotional 'punch' because of the connection to this animal many of us have had since childhood. This suggests that, unlike words that we have to put through various cognitive filters to understand, images (particularly those with emotional content) take different neurological pathways and can have a more direct impact on emotion-processing centres in the brain such as midbrain regions.

In essence, this theory of different neurological processing suggests *The Bears* have an emotional impact that is significantly different from verbal or written communication. Anecdotally, our experience over twenty years bears (sorry!) this out.

*The Bears*, like other conversation-building card sets from Innovative Resources, can be very easy to use in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable. Firstly, you don't need to use the whole set. A small number of cards may be enough to represent what are sometimes called the primary emotions: anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, love, surprise, disgust and shame. Especially for children, working with just a few cards may be sufficient to cover key learnings about emotions.

Secondly, a single *Bear* can say a lot. (Later in this booklet you will find many suggestions for using one or more cards with children or adults.)

Thirdly, whether you use the whole or a partial set there are really only two ways of getting the cards out:

- 'Spread, Scan and Select' simply means the cards are spread on a table or on the floor, scanned or studied enough to become sufficiently familiar with them, and then sorted or selected according to useful questions.
- 'The Fourth S' stands for Serendipity. Introducing a random choice or blind-selection activity can be both fun and informative. We call this 'Playing with Serendipity' or 'Letting the Universe Choose'. Sometimes responding to a card chosen this way leads to different and novel insights.

Choose any card at random.

- What words come to mind when you look at this *Bear*?
- What feelings do you think the *Bear* has inside?
- Does this *Bear* remind you of people you know?
- Can you tell a story about a time that this *Bear* reminds you of?
- What would you imagine you would be doing if you had the feelings of this *Bear*?



## Grin and Bear It: Ways of Using the Cards

The versatility of *The Bears* means that there are endless ways of using them to build conversations. Here are just some of the possible applications:

### Family Sculpting

As mentioned earlier, *The Bears* were originally designed as a family sculpting tool and are often still used in this way. Perhaps the simplest version is to invite a person to choose a card to represent each person in their family. The same activity can be applied to friendship groups or teams of any sort. Children especially can enjoy picking the *Bear* that matches the personality of the family or group member. A popular classroom activity for students beginning school is to create a poster about their family using *The Bears* stickers to represent family members.

There may be times when Family Sculpting can include family members who are no longer alive.

Useful questions might include:

What is it about this particular *Bear* that resembles  
 this person?

Is 'person X' always like this *Bear* or sometimes are they  
 like a different *Bear*?

Do they perhaps have 'Good Bear Days' and 'Bad  
 Bear Days'?

- Which *Bear* is most like you — on a Good Day or a Not-So-Good Day?
- Who are you closest to in your family?
- Can you move your cards around so that those who get on the best are placed close to each other?

When working in a session with a family group each person might be asked to sculpt their family at the same time or one after another. Alternatively, the family might be invited to work together to construct a *Bear* sculpture to see how much consensus exists. Finished sculptures can be photographed to provide a record of the activity or else *The Bears* stickers can be used as a visual record.

## Scaling

There are many different scaling techniques that work as powerful ways of representing change. Scaling can be used to describe someone's current feelings, to evaluate activities, to portray someone's relationship with their problem or to develop pictures of the future. A whole range of human experience can be scaled from one's coping ability to one's energy level to ... any emotion that can be named.

Again *The Bears* can provide visual representation for different points along any scale. For example:

- If you thought about happiness as a 10-point scale what *Bear* would you choose to represent a 10 — the most happy *Bear* ever?
- Which *Bear* would you choose for a 1 — the most unhappy *Bear* ever?

- Which *Bear* is the happiest *Bear* you have ever been?
- Which is the unhappiest you have ever been?
- On your 10-point scale which *Bear* represents how happy you are right now?
- What things are you doing to stop yourself falling down your happiness scale?
- What might you do to go one point up your scale?

### **The (Teddy) Bears Picnic: Creating an Audience**

A classic strengths-based saying is: ‘Change only happens when it is noticed.’ The obvious meaning of this aphorism is that each of us needs to be attuned to looking for changes in and around us. If we don’t notice the change we can simply continue as if nothing has happened.

But sometimes it is even more important that others notice our changes.

One powerful strengths-based idea is to work with a client to build a potential audience of others who can notice and hopefully reinforce the change. An audience can be built starting with questions like:

- Who are the people whose opinions you most respect? What would they say were your greatest strengths?
- Who are the special people in your life you would want to notice your change?
- When the problem that has had you in its grip has loosened its hold, who will you want to tell?

🐾 When things are different for you and you have realised your best hopes, who will notice?

🐾 Who will you want to celebrate your success with?

Imagining an audience of valued persons who will recognise and support your change helps build the anticipation of success.

Ben Furman, in his ground-breaking book called *Kids' Skills*, incorporates imagining and planning an audience as part of the step he calls 'going public' when a child learns an important new skill. The Kids' Skills model is a powerful antidote to the prevalence of deficit-based labelling that can descend into fatalism. *Kids' Skills* is a great example of reframing the label 'this child has a problem' to the optimistic, future-oriented and collaborative 'this child has a skill yet to be learned'. Imagining a receptive audience can play a significant role in strengths-based reframing, for adults as well as children.

*The Bears* can help a client visualise the audience they want to notice the change:

🐾 Which *Bears* represent the people who will notice the change in you?

🐾 Who are these key people and which *Bears* demonstrate how they will be feeling when things are different for you?

🐾 What do you imagine they will be saying to each other and to you?

🐾 Which *Bear* will you choose for yourself when things are different?

- Can you put your *Bear* in the centre and the *Bears* that are the others around your *Bear*?
- How are the others going to realise change has happened? Will you tell them? What will each of them see in you that's different? Will they see different things?
- Could you imagine having a party (a Teddy Bears Picnic!) to celebrate?

## **Bear Hugs**

*The Bears* can provide simple messages of encouragement, hope and affirmation. They can offer warm, positive feedback for anyone—especially children who might be feeling a little low or disheartened:

A card placed on a table setting for a family meal or on a pillow might just remind a child that their parents are thinking of them.

A happy *Bear* card lent to a struggling child by a teacher might just provide a touch of encouragement.

As stickers *The Bears* can be readily given away. Individual stickers can be gifted on their own, or placed on a greeting card with an affirming message. In this way we can create a simple artifact that may have a very different impact from words alone.

A sticker or a card placed in a child's lunch box when they are facing a tough day might just make all the difference.

A gift of a sticker on a student's assignment might say more than an elephant stamp!

## Getting Your Bearings: Best Hopes

Solution-focused brief therapy practitioners emphasise the power and possibilities inherent in imagining 'pictures of the future'. Imagining a picture of the future that is different from the current situation is itself a great catalyst for change. Building a picture of the future around 'best hopes' creates anticipation and keeps optimism alive.

Inviting people to describe their best hopes can be less daunting than talking about plans or goals. Best hopes can be malleable and evolutionary. They are anticipatory and aspirational but without the shadow of possible failure that sometimes sits just under the surface of plans (or New Year's resolutions!).

Best hopes can be explored through the iconic 'Miracle Question' that goes something like: 'If tonight after you go to bed a miracle occurs overnight so that when you wake up in the morning your problem is no longer there, what would be different?' Or one can simply ask; 'What are your best hopes?'

*The Bears* provide a way of bringing best hopes alive through creative visualisation:

- 🐾 Which *Bear* do you hope to be when the problem has evaporated?
- 🐾 When your best hopes are realised which *Bear* corresponds with how you will be feeling?
- 🐾 Which *Bear* will others see when your best hopes come to fruition?

The Miracle Question and best hopes questions can lead into the exploration of exceptions—that is, those times when the problem has been absent or less dominant.

Again *The Bears* can play a role:

- Can you tell me about the better times in your life when you weren't pushed around by the problem at all (or, as much)?
- Which of these times provides an indication of how it will be if your best hopes are realised or the miracle occurs?
- Which *Bears* remind you of how you were during these times of exceptions to the problem? How were you feeling? What were you doing that was so successful? What skills or strengths do these *Bears* suggest that you employed?

## **Finding Your Inner Bear**

We constantly try to read the feelings of others through their facial expressions, hand gestures and other aspects of body language. Sometimes these interpretations are accurate and sometimes they can be wide of the mark. *The Bears* are particularly good at helping us make these interpretations and put words to the feelings that we perceive in others through their outer or public *Bears*.

Some people, however, find this task inordinately difficult. Both children and adults who are recognised as sitting on the autism spectrum can struggle to identify and name the feelings represented by *The Bears*—whether they are their own feelings or those expressed by others.

However, we are aware of numerous examples of people who have been helped by *The Bears* with the task of identifying feelings—a task that many folk may simply take for granted. Certainly, most people can be helped to build emotional vocabularies by using *The Bears* and, with practice and patience, many of those struggling with autism and other learning disabilities can also be greatly assisted.

Interpreting inner feelings is a sophisticated skill as sometimes the emotions we are experiencing on the inside may be quite different from how we are perceived.

The ‘Inner and Outer Bear Game’ simply invites players to randomly choose two different cards.

- Do you think it is possible for anyone to feel like one of these *Bears* on the inside but to look like the other *Bear* on the outside?
- Can you think of a time when you have had an inner and outer *Bear* like this?
- What if you reversed the two *Bears* so that the inner bear was now on the outside and vice versa?
- What do you see as the similarities and differences between these two feelings?
- Do you think it is possible for a person to be like these two *Bears*?



## A Smorgasbord of Bears

Feelings can be complicated. But at times we simplify things by imagining or assuming that we experience a single emotion at any one time.

But on reflection, most of the time we contain several emotions simultaneously. It may in fact be rare, or even impossible, to ‘sit with’ a single emotion—at least for any period of time. At particular times in our lives, like transitions when big changes might come in tsunami-like waves, it is possible to identify that a number of quite different feelings might descend upon us at once. In workshops with practitioners we often use *The Bears* to share stories about what it was like on the very first day of each person’s latest job.

At such times it is not unusual to feel exhilarated and anxious, excited and apprehensive, happy and disappointed or... Transitions shine a light on the multiple emotions that we experience simultaneously, even feelings that appear to be contradictory.

- Think about a time in your life when you were part of a big change. Can you recall the different feelings you experienced at the time? Which *Bears* represent these different feelings?

Another way of thinking about there being a smorgasbord of different emotional states within each of us is to imagine we are made up of a number of different bears, each with their own personalities, moods and idiosyncrasies. How we respond in any particular situation might depend on which *Bear* is in control or ascendancy. The same event might lead

to quite different responses depending on which *Bear* we choose to lead our thinking and behaviour.

William Glasser's models of Reality Therapy and Choice Theory emphasise the choices we are constantly making in our day-to-day lives.

- Do we choose to be different *Bears* from time to time?
- If so, what do you think determines the different choices we make?
- If you randomly chose, say, 6 different cards and imagined that each *Bear* could be you at different times, what would cause one of the *Bears* to become dominant at that time?

Sometimes the metaphor of a car can be very useful.

- If you think of yourself as a car, and the *Bears* as representing your feelings, which *Bear* is in the driver's seat in particular situations?
- Is there another *Bear* that sometimes/often comes along for the ride as a passenger?
- Is there another *Bear* giving directions from the back seat?
- If you'd prefer another *Bear* to be in the driver's seat, how could you change drivers?
- Is there another *Bear* you would prefer to have as a passenger? If so, how could you drop off one passenger and pick up another?

## Feedback Using Cards or Stickers

Over the years *The Bears* have proven to be an invaluable means of quickly giving feedback in a wide variety of situations. A card can simply be chosen and held up to convey a person's feelings about ... well, just about anything!

Early on in *The Bears'* journey a St Luke's worker, Dave, was asked to run a client-directed evaluation of a disability service. Some of these clients had quite severe cerebral palsy making communication difficult—so difficult, in fact, that they had never before been asked their opinions of the services they were being provided with. Dave's solution was to use *The Bears* in a way that enabled each client to at least point to the *Bear* that provided their response to the evaluation questions he asked. Because it was the first serious and respectful attempt to elicit honest feedback in a way that could be readily understood, the activity was profoundly moving for everyone concerned.

As stickers *The Bears* have multiple uses and have been added to students' projects and school reports as a way of congratulating a student and acknowledging their work. Stickers are also wonderful for placing on school lunch boxes, mirrors, notes cards and journals. Strengths-based practitioners who use letter writing as a feature of their communication with clients will often add a sticker to reinforce a compliment for something well done.

However, perhaps one of the most telling uses of *The Bears* stickers was created by the St Luke's family work team who provide out-of-home-care services. The team acknowledged a big gap in their ability to get feedback from the children with whom they worked.

The solution was to devise a simple paperwork spreadsheet that asked these children a number of questions about their experience of St Luke's family services.

- What happened that was good?
- What happened that was not so good?
- How helpful was your worker?
- How helpful were your carers?

Each question could be answered in words with the worker scribing as required but there was also a space next to each question on the spreadsheet that could have a *Bear* sticker attached that was the child's choice to summarise their answer.

In essence *The Bears* as stickers can be used to give feedback in a broad range of scaling and other evaluation tools. With the arrival of *The Bears App* this ability is now hugely enhanced.



## Bearing Up: *The Bears App*

In January 2015, coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of *The Bears* cards, these intrepid adventurers entered the digital age with the release of *The Bears App*.

Now all 48 *Bears* can be downloaded onto your mobile device and you can use them in your digital communications. Simply swipe through the array of *Bears*, tap on a bear to select it, add a message and share it via email, Twitter or Facebook. Or you can click on the dice icon to get your random Bear for the Day.

On the release of *The Bears App* practitioners immediately began inventing creative ways to use the digital bears with clients—giving immediate feedback, encouragement, reminders, and simply connecting through a mutually-loved metaphor.

If you are a practitioner who enjoys using *The Bears* cards in your work, you may find that your clients and colleagues will also respond to *Bears* being included in your emails, texts, letters, documents, reports, Facebook posts and tweets.

- 🐾 Use them to give a snapshot to others about how you are feeling at the moment.
- 🐾 Add a *Bear* to the feedback and evaluation you give about ... well, almost anything!
- 🐾 Send out a meeting request with a friendly *Bear* attached.

- 🐾 After meeting with a client, email them the *Bear(s)* they picked during their conversation with you as a reminder of the conversation, or as a reminder of their goals, plans or next steps.
- 🐾 Acknowledge a client's efforts by sending a congratulatory *Bear* and a message.
- 🐾 Send a client or anyone messages about what you see as their strengths by sending them *Bears* you have named after their qualities. For example, *Bears* you label as Determined, Caring, Happy, Resilient, etc.
- 🐾 Use a *Bear* to send a message of thanks to someone.
- 🐾 Use a *Bear* and a message to remind a client of an upcoming appointment.
- 🐾 Place *Bears* electronically in emails, documents, letters and reports.
- 🐾 Add a *Bear* to a Facebook comment, or tweet a message using a *Bear* image.

Because *The Bears App* is inexpensive, some practitioners buy it for their clients so that *Bears* can be readily 'swapped' both ways.

- 🐾 Ask your client to use *The Bears App* to send you a message about how they are travelling each day or regularly over a period of time.
- 🐾 Invite a client to use *The Bears App* to track their own self-evaluation for a period of time.
- 🐾 Use *The Bears App* to track how clients (or you) are travelling in terms specific things such as diet, organisation, wellbeing, energy levels, mood etc.

Children love using *The Bears App*; it's so simple, colourful and fun!

- 🐾 Invite children to pick a *Bear* from the App each morning to say how they are feeling.
- 🐾 Teachers: Build vocabularies about emotions and feelings in the classroom using *The Bears App*.
- 🐾 Invite children to use these characters as an adjunct to story writing.
- 🐾 Invite children to use the *The Bears App* to let you know how they are going with projects, sports events, feelings or situations at school or ... anything.
- 🐾 Counsellors: invite children to use *The Bears App* to communicate with you about how they are feeling ... or how they are doing in regard to a goal or plan you set in place with them.

Most of the activities suggested earlier in this booklet for the cards can be adapted for use with *The Bears App*. We have no doubt that people will experiment and discover many creative possibilities of their own for using and sharing these delightfully expressive characters—and please let us know some of the ideas you come up with!

Get *The Bears App* from our website:

**[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)**

Watch out for the *The Bears* cube and

*The Bears* stress relievers!



## **About Innovative Resources**

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, one of Australia's leading community service organisations. Anglicare Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of child, youth, family and community services throughout Victoria and New South Wales.

### **Our publishing**

Innovative Resources publishes card sets, stickers, books, picture books, digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, stories and goals. Our resources bring colour and creativity to therapeutic and educational settings all over the world. They are used by counsellors, teachers, trainers, social workers, managers, mentors, parents, teams, supervisors ... and anyone who works with people to create positive change.

### **Our training**

Innovative Resources also offers highly-engaging training in 'strengths-based' approaches to working with people where change arises out of a focus on strengths, respect and hopeful possibilities. We also offer 'tools' workshops on ways of using our resources to invigorate human service work. Our workshops honour different learning styles and the power of visual images to open up storytelling and other ways to truly connect with children and adults alike.

**[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)**

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# The Bears

*The Bears*: more than twenty years of building emotional intelligence and feelings vocabularies!

*The Bears* have a world-wide reputation for their ability to invite people from all cultures to identify, talk about and constructively harness their feelings. Even though feelings enter our conversations all the time, we know that it can be hard to honestly say how we are feeling, or to find the right words to describe our emotional state.

Our feelings are constantly changing. Sometimes they push us around. Sometimes they take us to wonderful places or to places we don't want to be. But they never stay constant for long. And rarely do we ever sit exclusively with one single emotion; we often juggle a number of feelings simultaneously – even feelings that seem contradictory.

If you find yourself stuck for words open a pack of *The Bears* and let them do the talking!



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