



WALK in my SHOES

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...”

- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

Walk in My Shoes is the ideal way to introduce and foster **empathy** with the children in your classroom. The research-based concepts, activities, and ideas within this set have been developed in consultation with early childhood mental-health professionals, child-psychology experts, and research extracted from several esteemed early childhood organizations.

Social and emotional awareness, of self and others, is a crucial component of healthy, successful, and trusting relationships in childhood and throughout life. The ability to relate to one’s own feelings, as well as the feelings of others, will set the stage for growth and fulfillment in both personal and professional endeavors. **Empathy** is the largest and most important component of this awareness.

What is empathy?

Simply put, empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is the social and emotional link between self and others.

We must be careful not to confuse sympathy with empathy. Sympathy is the ability to feel compassion for another; empathy is the ability to “walk in someone’s shoes,” and imagine or relate to what the person may be experiencing and/or feeling.

When can children begin experiencing and acquiring empathy?

As early as 6 months, infants can recognize and respond to facial expressions and language tone. When we smile and use a positive tone, infants may smile back or wiggle in delight.

In the early toddler years, children practice cause and effect with those around them. They may notice a younger sibling crying and realize that giving her a pacifier typically calms her.

Around two years of age, children begin to recognize other’s emotions and feelings. They may see a friend fall down and say “boo-boo” or “uh-oh”.

Between the ages of two and three, children typically begin attempting to soothe another’s pain. They may hug someone who is crying or offer a toy to someone who appears lonely.

Why is the introduction and fostering of empathy important in the early childhood setting?

- Empathy in children is an emotional-intelligence skill that will serve children throughout life.
- Empathy provides the foundation for building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships built on trust and understanding.
- Empathy allows us to respond appropriately to others in a variety of situations. This fosters respectful and positive communication as well as valuable problem-solving skills.
- Empathy allows us to recognize both verbal and nonverbal communication, which leads to deeper social and emotional awareness and connection with others.
- Empathy and understanding of others supports the development of conflict resolution skills both personally and professionally.

After utilizing the Walk in My Shoes activities and materials, children will be able to:

- Understand and define a variety of emotions in themselves and others
- Understand that others may have feelings that are different from theirs
- Imagine how someone may feel in a certain situation
- Determine how it may be helpful to respond to others

Tips on cultivating empathy in your classroom:

- Model empathy in your responses to others.
- Facilitate empathetic awareness in others.
- Practice patience, repetition, and understanding.

The Walk in My Shoes Set includes:

- Walk in My Shoes mat
- Walk in My Shoes shoe pattern for individual representation of self
- Idea cards with extension activities