

Walk in Their Space Boots – Levels A & B

PLAY

To support early empathy by helping students notice others and experience simple caring responses. Through pretend play with “space boots,” students explore the idea that other people have feelings too. Linked to the Neptune theme from The Playful Astronauts, this activity reinforces that feelings can be big and that gentle attention and kindness help people feel safe and supported.



Learning Intentions

Students aim to notice another person during shared play.



Students aim to experience simple caring actions toward others.

Students aim to take part in a calm, shared routine with peers and adults.



Success Criteria

I can take part by watching, touching, choosing, or listening.

I can notice another person with adult support.

I can respond to another person using actions, gestures, visuals, or AAC.

I can stay with the activity for part or all of the time.



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Duration: 8 - 12 minutes

Objective

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Players

Pairs, small groups, or adult–student play
Suitable for 2 - 16 students

What You Need

- A small selection of shoes or boots (one pair per group)
Alternative option: a single shared pair of “space boots” or a picture of boots
Clear, calm floor space or seated area
AAC devices, switches, or communication boards as required

Setup

Arrange students in pairs, small groups, or seated with an adult.

Place the shoes in the centre where students can see or touch them.

Introduce the activity using simple, concrete language:

“These are space boots.”

“They belong to someone else.”

Link gently to the Neptune theme:

“Neptune reminds us that feelings can be big.”

“We can be kind to each other.”

Reassure students:

“You can watch or join in.”

Confirm AAC devices are switched on and open to simple words such as feel, sad, happy, help, kind.



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Gameplay

Step 1: Adult Models Empathy

The teacher models first.

Hold or wear the boots and say in simple language:
"These boots feel sad."

or

"The person who wears these boots feels worried."

Use facial expression or gestures to show the feelings.

Activate AAC or point to a feeling symbol while modelling.

Step 2: Student Interaction

Invite one student to hold or look at the boots.

The student may:

- Touch the boots or attempt to put them on
- Look at the teacher and try to mimic their actions/gestures
- Activate AAC
- Watch quietly

The adult narrates:

"You are noticing what i'm doing" or "You are wearing the boots."

Prompt a caring response with support:

"What can we do to help the person?"

Students may respond by:

- Giving the boots back
- Offering a gentle gesture (thumbs up, hand on heart, hug)
- Activating AAC (help, kind)
- Sitting nearby calmly or vocalising a response

There is no expectation to name feelings or speak.



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Step 3: Repeat with Support

Repeat the routine with another student. This student may want the boots to feel angry, frustrated or nervous or even happy. Try to discuss this with the class and see if the student/s can use sounds and gestures to display the feeling being shown by the boots. Remember, we are trying to teach the students about empathy and understanding how others may feel and how we can help them when certain emotions/feelings arise. Use the same simple pattern each time to build predictability:

Feel → Pause → Kind response.

Debrief / Reflection

Keep reflection brief and concrete.

Ask one simple prompt with wait time:

“Have you ever felt those emotions before?”

“How did someone help you to feel better?”

Accept responses through gestures, AAC, eye gaze, vocalisation or movement.

Reinforce:

“Being kind helps others to feel better.”

Winning the Game

There are no winners or losers.

Success is shown through participation, noticing others, and shared calm.

Sensory-Specific Learner Variation

Purpose: To support emotional safety and regulation.

Adjustments may include:

Using pictures of shoes instead of real items.

Reducing group size to one-on-one with an adult.

Using the same feeling each time (e.g. sad only).

Allowing observation-only participation.

Keeping voices quiet and movements slow.

AAC-Specific Supports

Prepare AAC in Advance

Ensure access to symbols such as: feel, sad, happy, help, kind, me.

Single-message switches (help, kind) are appropriate.

Model AAC Consistently

Adults activate AAC while modelling empathy:

“Feel sad.” → “Help.”



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Accessibility and Inclusion Notes

Physical walking is optional.
Students may remain seated throughout.
Ensure clear space for mobility aids.
Accept gestures, AAC, or stillness as valid responses.
Never require eye contact or verbal responses.

Teacher Notes

“Walk in Their Space Boots – Levels A & B” introduces empathy as a shared experience, not a concept to explain. The predictable routine of noticing and responding gently helps students associate others’ feelings with care and safety. Linked to the Neptune theme, the activity reinforces that when feelings feel big or deep, calm attention and kindness help us connect.

