



Roots of Empathy
Racines de l'empathie



Roots of Empathy is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to building caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

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Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program which has shown dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression and violence among schoolchildren while raising social emotional competence and increasing empathy.

How do you grow a more caring society?

You create better citizens, citizens who recognize that the needs of others are equal to their own. It's simple really. Simple enough for the youngest children to learn. Basic enough for a baby to teach. That's Roots of Empathy.

Why do we need Roots of Empathy?

Today's children receive a daily exposure to violence and aggression in the news, on T.V., and video games. Society's harsh tone needs to be actively countered in the classroom. The current focus on scholastic basics leaves little opportunity or method for fostering social and emotional learning. The result is a generation who may excel in academic literacy, but operate without a literacy of feelings. Promoting students' social and emotional skills, as Roots of Empathy is proven to do, plays a critical role in improving their academic performance.

Like all abilities, empathy is strengthened through practice. When children are able to understand another's point of view and respect their feelings, aggressive behaviour is less likely to occur; there is a positive effect on the tone of the classroom, creating a climate of social inclusion and contributing to safe and caring schools. Roots of Empathy provides a vital foundation in emotional literacy that students will use now and in the future, to build relationships with their peers and their own children. This can have a direct impact on bullying and future levels of family and societal violence.

How does Roots of Empathy make a difference?

Roots of Empathy strives to break the intergenerational cycle of poor parenting and violence. The focus of Roots of Empathy in the long term is to build the capacity of the next generation for caring and compassionate citizenship and parenting. In the short term, the program focuses on raising levels of empathy, resulting in more respectful and caring relationships and reduced levels of bullying and aggression.

The goals of the program are:

- To foster the development of empathy
- To develop emotional literacy
- To reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence, and promote children's pro-social behaviours
- To increase knowledge of human development, learning, and infant safety
- To prepare students for responsible citizenship and responsive parenting

Part of our success is due to the universal nature of the program; all students are positively engaged and with empathy in their lives find themselves able to see beyond differences and find the humanity in their classmates. Knowledge of infant development and safety issues (Shaken Baby Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, second-hand smoke) can prevent future child abuse and builds parenting capacity for the next generation.

Messages of inclusion, respect and good citizenship are core values in Roots of Empathy instruction and should be core values in a civil society.





“Roots of Empathy is about changing the world,
classroom by classroom.”

Mary Gordon - Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

The Roots of Empathy Story

Roots of Empathy is a:

- Anti-bullying program
- Character building program
- Preventative intervention program
- Human development program
- Social/emotional competency program
- Crime prevention program
- Emotional literacy program
- Substance-abuse prevention program
- Parenting program
- Teen pregnancy prevention program
- Peace program
- Infant injury prevention program
- Child abuse prevention program
- Domestic violence prevention program
- Anti-racism education program

Roots of Empathy was created by Founder/President Mary Gordon in 1996 and became a registered charity in October of 2000 with a mandate to expand across Canada and internationally. The program reaches elementary school children from Kindergarten to Grade 8 in English and French in rural, urban, and suburban communities and in Aboriginal communities both on and off-reserve. The program operates in communities across Canada and has been piloted internationally.

The principle of Roots of Empathy is that to build a civil society, we need to be able to understand and respond to the needs of others, as well as articulate our own. At the heart of the Roots of Empathy curriculum is an infant whose success is entirely dependent on his or her ability to express his or her needs to the parent. Elementary classrooms, Kindergarten to Grade 8, adopt a neighbourhood parent and infant for the school year.

A certified Instructor visits the classroom once a week working with a specialized curriculum to coach students in observing baby's development, celebrating milestones, interacting with baby and learning about infant needs and temperament. Every three weeks, the Instructor is joined by the parent and infant. Through watching, listening, and asking questions, students witness the growing of a bond between parent and infant, and the evolution of the child's ability to communicate.

With age-appropriate instruction in neuroscience and by learning to compare their own feelings and temperament with those of a baby, children learn lessons that they can apply to relationships in the classroom and throughout their lives.

The Effectiveness of Roots of Empathy

Research indicates that 50% of academic success is based on traditional intelligence, the rest relies on social and emotional literacy (Liff, 2003)

The University of British Columbia (UBC) has taken a lead role in conducting research evaluation of the Roots of Empathy program since the program's inception in 2000. Findings from this evaluation yielded empirical support for the efficacy of the Roots of Empathy curriculum, specifically for its contribution to the pro-social behaviour and emotional health of children and the impact it has on reducing aggression, particularly the type of aggression related to bullying.

Roots of Empathy students, relative to comparison students, demonstrated significant improvements from pre-test to post-test in the following areas:

- Increased emotion knowledge
- Increased social understanding
- Increased pro-social behaviours with peers
- Decreased aggression with peers
- Decreased proactive aggression (bullying)

For more information contact: research@rootsofempathy.org

