Roots of Empathy
Racines de l'empathie

ROOTS OF EMPATHY INFORMATION *FOR SCHOOLS*

Our mission is to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

- The focus of Roots of Empathy in the long term is to build the capacity of the next generation for responsible citizenship and responsive parenting.
- In the short term, Roots of Empathy focuses on raising levels of empathy, resulting in more respectful and caring relationships and reduced levels of bullying and aggression.

THE ROOTS OF EMPATHY PROGRAM

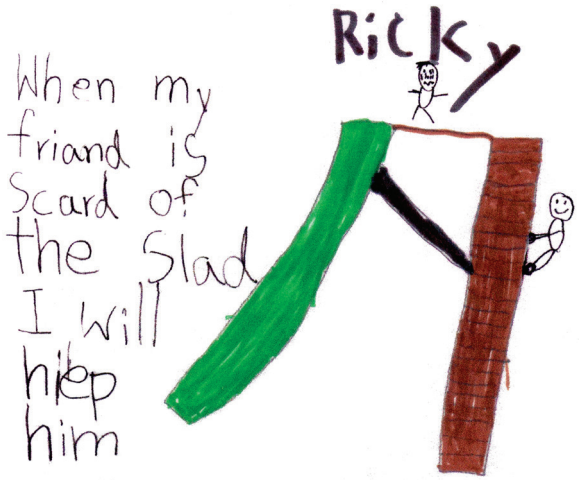
Created in 1996 by social entrepreneur Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression—including bullying—among primary and elementary school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. In Canada, the program is delivered in all ten provinces, in English and French and reaches rural, urban and remote communities including Aboriginal communities. Roots of Empathy is also delivered on three continents, and in multiple languages.

Roots of Empathy Baby as "Teacher"

At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom nine times over the school year. A trained Roots of Empathy Instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and to label the baby's feelings and intentions. In this experiential learning, the baby is the "Teacher" and a lever that the Instructor uses to help children to identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others.

Emotional Literacy/Perspective-Taking

This "Emotional Literacy" taught in the program lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms, where children are the "Changers." They are more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy), and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other emotional cruelties. The cognitive aspect of empathy is *perspective-taking* and the affective aspect is *emotion*. Roots of Empathy educates both the mind and the heart.



"Children in Roots of Empathy are encouraged to see themselves as *Changers* – people that have the ability to challenge what is not fair and to help those with problems. Every classroom, playground, community, boardroom and war room needs a Ricky."

~ Mary Gordon, Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

"Roots of Empathy is a simple, brilliant and powerful example of how developing children's empathy can be a priority, and can be accomplished with amazing results. The heart is the way to the mind, but they have to be explicitly linked. Roots of Empathy is a model of social and academic inclusion."

~ Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto

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GOLD STANDARD

Why choose Roots of Empathy as your school's social and emotional learning or bullying prevention program? Because it works. Researchers have a gold standard for school-based programs. Roots of Empathy meets these five gold standard qualifications:

- **An accredited curriculum**: The Roots of Empathy curriculum is specialized to four age groups, and complements the formal school curriculum.
- **A training program**: An intensive training is the first stage of a certification process for Instructors. There is annual recertification of Instructors, Mentors and Trainers.
- **A mentoring program**: Roots of Empathy offers ongoing mentoring support as long as the Instructor delivers the program.
- **Ongoing professional development**: Roots of Empathy provides ongoing professional development through local workshops and the Virtual Training Institute.
- **Evaluation and research**: Roots of Empathy has over a dozen years of scientific research and annual evaluations from stakeholders.

SCHOOL PROGRAM COMMITMENT

Research has indicated that the Roots of Empathy program is most successful when all required elements are in place. To maintain program integrity, we ask you to follow these guidelines when hosting the program in your school. If for any reason you experience difficulty with these terms, please contact the Roots of Empathy Program Manager.

A successful Roots of Empathy program will involve:

- Strong principal support
- A supportive classroom teacher who requests the Roots of Empathy program
- Occasional use of the school photocopier and the school's digital camera (once every three weeks)
- Willingness to participate in and return program evaluations (Roots of Empathy End of Year Feedback Forms)

The Roots of Empathy Commitment

All Roots of Empathy Instructors are trained to implement our structured curriculum which is specialized for different age levels. Instructors receive intensive training and ongoing mentor support in program delivery.

The responsibilities of the Roots of Empathy Instructor are to:

- Deliver 27 classroom visits over the course of a school year
- Use the Roots of Empathy curriculum as specified and prepare all teaching materials required
- Schedule an information meeting with the principal and teacher at the start of the program to review philosophical underpinnings, and roles of all people involved
- Communicate with the classroom teacher regarding the teacher's role and responsibilities for each lesson
- Schedule classroom visits with the Roots of Empathy family and classroom teacher and ensure that any changes to the schedule are communicated to all parties involved
- Maintain ongoing communication with the Roots of Empathy family, deliver the initial home visit and prepare the parent(s) for their visits over the school year

The Principal's Commitment

Principals can support the program by making it a whole-school venture. Some ways of doing this include:

- Attending an introductory Roots of Empathy principal/teacher presentation
- Sharing information on Roots of Empathy with the school staff and school community, and/or host a presentation
- Sharing information about Roots of Empathy with other schools and education authorities
- Inviting the Roots of Empathy family to school assemblies or having Roots of Empathy students make a presentation at a school assembly
- Providing space for the Roots of Empathy bulletin board

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The Teacher's Commitment

Research shows that the Roots of Empathy program is successful when the classroom teacher is supportive of and enthusiastic about the program. When teachers support the program, work in consultation with the principal, and work proactively with the Roots of Empathy Instructor, students have the most profound results. The classroom teacher is an active participant during the Roots of Empathy visits, assisting with note-taking, picture-taking, art activities, drama or writing. Roots of Empathy prefers to postpone the Roots of Empathy class if there is a substitute teacher because of the importance of continuity with the classroom teacher. While the Roots of Empathy Instructor is delivering the program, the classroom teacher benefits from the unique opportunity of observing the students from another vantage point. The power of Roots of Empathy lies in the classroom teacher's ability to integrate the learnings from the Roots of Empathy classes into the regular classroom work. Teacher extensions are as unique as the teachers themselves.

The responsibilities of the classroom teacher are to:

- Attend an introductory Roots of Empathy principal/teacher presentation
- Welcome and support the Roots of Empathy Instructor and family
- Maintain regular communication with the Roots of Empathy Instructor (e.g., setting times for visits, notifying the Roots of Empathy Instructor as soon as possible of any changes in lesson times)
- Be present and involved in the Roots of Empathy classes in the following ways:
  - Recording information on flip chart during class discussion
  - Taking photos during Family Visits
  - Helping the Roots of Empathy Instructor with classroom management
  - Allowing time for completion of Roots of Empathy art/writing
  - Providing space for and helping to maintain a bulletin board
  - Completing a Roots of Empathy Feedback Form at the end of the year
  - Collecting student permission forms

OVERVIEW OF CLASSROOM VISITS (27 TOTAL)

The Pre Family Visit

- 9 visits total
- Roots of Empathy Instructor without family
- Each is 40 minutes in length
- Focus on infant development and preparation for Family Visit
- Students predict what changes they may see in the baby's development at the Family Visit

The Family Visit

- 9 visits total
- Roots of Empathy Instructor, parent(s), and baby
- Approximately 40 minutes in length
- Roots of Empathy Instructor guides students' observations of the baby's feelings, intentions, and the attachment relationship
- Roots of Empathy Instructor demonstrates the baby's physical and emotional development and temperament, and interacts with the baby through music (i.e., singing songs) and early learning games (e.g., peek-a-boo).
- Students ask parent(s) questions about the baby

The Post Family Visit

- 9 visits total
- Roots of Empathy Instructor without family
- Each is 40 minutes in length
- Students reflect on their own feelings and focus on understanding the feelings of others (empathy)
- Children's literature and art/writing are used to foster perspective-taking, the cognitive aspect of empathy

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RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Since 2000, the Roots of Empathy program has been evaluated in both comparative and randomized controlled studies designed to measure changes in the behaviour of participating students. Independent research has been conducted on three continents.

Key research findings show that Roots of Empathy children perceive a more positive classroom environment by the end of the program (e.g., increased sense of classroom belonging and peer acceptance). Roots of Empathy children also exhibit:

- An increase in prosocial behaviour (e.g., sharing, helping and including)
- A decrease in aggression—particularly significant given that children in the comparison classrooms show increases in aggression across the school year
- An increase in social and emotional understanding
- An increase in knowledge of parenting
- An increase in cognitive and emotional empathy

Studies conducted by researchers at the University of British Columbia looked at specific types of aggression—proactive (bullying), physical, relational and reactive. All of these studies showed a significant decrease in bullying/aggression in the Roots of Empathy program groups.

An accelerated longitudinal study showed that the beneficial effects of the program were mostly maintained or continued to improve throughout the follow-up years (physical aggression decreased, indirect aggression decreased, and prosocial behaviours increased). It is worth noting that this study has been extended to include a long-term follow-up evaluation of the children and youth, who participated in the original evaluation. Health related behaviours and outcomes in the teenage years such as involvement with criminal justice system, age of first pregnancy and mental health outcomes are the variables of focus.

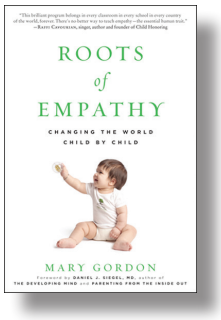
ROOTS OF EMPATHY FOUNDER/PRESIDENT MARY GORDON

Internationally recognized social entrepreneur, educator, author and child advocate Mary Gordon has created innovative programs informed by the power of empathy. In 1981 she initiated Canada's first school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, which today serve as a best-practice model, and are public policy in Ontario. She founded Roots of Empathy in 1996, and the program has since grown on three continents, and in 2005 she created Seeds of Empathy for early childhood settings.

Gordon speaks internationally and consults to organizations such as The World Health Organization, the United Nations and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. She has had several dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She is a member of the Order of Canada, and was a recipient of both the Queen's Silver and Diamond Jubilee Medals. Gordon was elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2002 and an Ashoka Globalizer in 2011, the same year she was named Canada's Top Social Innovator, honoured with the national Manning Innovation Award's David E. Mitchell Award of Distinction.

"Mary Gordon has created a brilliant strategy for teaching young children the essential skills to see the mind within each person... Empathy in all its forms is encouraged and cultivated in this science-based, emotion-inspiring, life-changing immersion in the inner world of human development."

~ Daniel J. Siegel, MD



In *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*, Mary Gordon chronicles the creation of her groundbreaking classroom program and shares her vision of a society of compassionate and caring children who will pass on their legacy of empathy to their own children.

Purchase your copy at **www.indigo.ca** or **www.amazon.com**

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