



Roots of Empathy

“Roots of Empathy, changing the world child by child”

- Mary Gordon, Founder/President

Roots of Empathy Program

Root of Empathy (ROE) is an evidence-based program that has shown dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression among school children while raising social and emotional competence and increasing empathy. The program reaches elementary children from Kindergarten to Grade 8. The mission of ROE is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

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!

Roots of Empathy in Action

At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom every three weeks over the school year. A trained ROE Instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and to label the baby's feelings. In this experiential learning, the baby is the “Teacher” and a lever, which the instructor uses to help children identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others.

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 cruelties. In the ROE program children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom. The ROE Instructor also visits before and after each family visit to prepare and reinforce teachings.

The support of schools is fundamental to the success of the program. While the Roots of Empathy Instructor is responsible for preparing and delivering the lesson during the ROE visit, the classroom teacher is an active participant in the program. Teachers who see the need for the program, who have worked in consultation with the principal, the instructor and other school staff, and who are proactive, will see the program unfold most effectively.

ROE Instructors uses a specialized curriculum that is comprehensive and attuned to the development and interests of the children. The 639-page curriculum is divided into nine themes, with three classroom visits supporting each theme (a pre-family visit, family visit and post-family visit) for a total of 27 visits. Each of the nine themes is further broken down into four age ranges: Kindergarten, Primary (grades 1-3), Junior (grades 4-6) and Senior (grades 7-8).

The ROE curriculum addresses the affective side of education, but the activities have many links to the classroom curriculum. For example, students use math skills when they calculate and chart the baby's weight and measurement. Literature is used as a way to open the door to





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feelings and perspective taking. The discussion and reflection that follows builds solidarity and empathy. Art plays a large role as children paint their inner feelings which they cannot say with words. Music stirs powerful feelings. It speaks to everyone regardless of language or culture and builds solidarity.

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.





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Does Roots of Empathy work?

Research on the Roots of Empathy program has shown that children who participate in the program know more about emotions and feelings, are kinder to their friends, are less aggressive and bully other children less than those who do not have Roots of Empathy.

Roots of Empathy in Waterloo

A very successful Roots of Empathy pilot program was delivered in six classrooms at Lincoln Avenue Public School in Cambridge. As a result we have been able to secure funding to be able to offer the Roots of Empathy program in 10 new schools in Waterloo Region beginning in October 2008. We are extremely grateful to the Cambridge and North Dumfries Community Foundation, The Gore Mutual Insurance Company Foundation, The Cambridge and North Dumfries United Way, The Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation and The Cowan Foundation whose generous support has allowed us to expand this program. Without their support this would not have been possible and now thanks to their commitment and vision more students will be exposed to the long-lasting benefits of the Roots of Empathy program.

Are you interested in becoming an ROE Instructor or ROE Family?

We are seeking experienced people to undertake an exciting opportunity as a volunteer Roots of Empathy Instructor and/or Roots of Empathy family (parent and infant). If you are interested in either of these volunteer positions, please read on.

Who Can Become a ROE Instructor?

To deliver the Roots of Empathy program in the school system, Instructors from the community are identified, screened and trained. Instructors are certified after meeting the milestones at the end of a successful year of instruction. Becoming an Instructor requires knowledge and expertise in some but not all of the areas indicated below:

- Teaching children in a classroom setting
- Child development and learning from Kindergarten to Grade 8
- Infant development
- Parenting education/support
- Cultural sensitivity
- Community development

In the past, Roots of Empathy has drawn its Instructors mainly from the following areas of expertise: (NB: Teachers may not deliver the ROE program in their own classroom)

School guidance counsellors	Early childhood educators	Principals
Youth and family workers	Social workers	Child Welfare workers
Speech/language specialists	Education assistants	Police & Firefighters
Recently retired teachers	Recreation counsellors	Family support workers
Domestic Violence workers	School & Public Health nurses	School psychologists





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As an ROE Instructor you will be:

- Delivering 27 classroom visits over the course of a school year
- Preparing teaching materials as specified including photocopying, laminating, cutting and pasting

In order to obtain their certification as a ROE Instructor, all Instructors receive four days of intensive training from certified ROE trainers and complete a written test. All Instructors have Mentors who guide and coach them in best practice strategies. Ongoing mentoring provided by ROE ensures Instructors are qualified, confident and supported.

There is no cost to the volunteer instructor for the training, however, the cost of training and support for Roots of Empathy Instructors is a substantial investment; communities expect certified Instructors to commit to a minimum of 3 years of instruction.

Are you a proud parent with a new baby who will be 2-4 month in October? You and your baby could be Roots of Empathy Family!

A Roots of Empathy Family:

- A mother and/or father visit a classroom in a local school with a Roots of Empathy instructor.
- The visits are about 30 minutes long, once a month from October until June.
- The program helps children to learn about a baby's needs and how babies develop and lets children observe the loving relationship between a parent and baby.
- Babies must be 2 to 4 months old in October.

The Roots of Empathy classroom is a participatory democracy where all children are encouraged to contribute and ask questions and we will ask the parent(s) to share with the students how it feels to be a parent and to talk about how your baby is growing and learning. Your baby will be loved by every student and be a star in the school and your family will be helping to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies.

If you are interested in either of these volunteer positions, please contact Kim Decker at 519-650-0800 or by email at k.decker@ywcacambridge.ca or Sharon Burzotta at s.burzotta@ywcacambridge.ca

For more information about Roots of Empathy visit their website at www.rootsofempathy.org
Please look under the heading, Support Roots of Empathy, subheading Becoming a volunteer.

