



Roots of 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.

What is Roots of Empathy?

Roots of Empathy is a classroom parenting program which teaches infant development, emotional literacy, inclusion, and fosters the development of empathy (the ability to understand how other people feel).

WHY DO WE NEED ROOTS OF EMPATHY?

Today's kids 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 teaching respect and caring. The result is a generation who may excel in academic literacy, but operate without a literacy of feelings.

There is an inverse relationship between empathy and aggression. As levels of empathy rise, violence and aggression decrease. When children are able to understand another's point of view and respect their feelings, aggressive behaviour is less likely to occur. This has a direct impact on bullying and future levels of family and societal violence.

Knowledge of infant development and safety issues (Shaken Baby Syndrome, SIDS) prevents 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 civic society.

How Roots of Empathy makes a difference:

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 a parent.

Classrooms, Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8, adopt a neighborhood parent and infant for the school year. The Roots of Empathy Instructor visits the classroom 26 times during the school year. One third of these visits include parent and infant, whose development is chronicled from the earliest months to 12 months of age. Through watching, listening and asking questions, children 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 four levels of Roots of Empathy curriculum complement and support the school curriculum.

The Roots of Empathy effect:

Roots of Empathy was piloted in Toronto schools in 1996. Today, Roots of Empathy programs are in many sites in Ontario, as well as British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. The program is currently reaching 10,000 children, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8, across Canada.

Like all abilities, empathy skills are strengthened through practice. Roots of Empathy provides a vital foundation in emotional literacy that program participants will use now and in the future, to build relationships with their peers and their own children.

A national evaluation is underway with early research results indicating significant reduction of aggression and an increase in empathy and pro-social behaviour.

Give children Roots of Empathy today, and tomorrow they'll grow us a more caring and peaceful society.

For more information please contact:

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