Roots of Empathy

Our Program

Established in 1996, Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy.

Working in partnerships, the Roots of Empathy Program teaches elementary children from Kindergarten to Grade 8. In Canada, the program is delivered in all 10 provinces, in English and French and reaches rural, urban and remote communities including Aboriginal communities. Roots of Empathy is also delivered internationally in New Zealand, the United States, the Isle of Man, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Wales and England. Research results from national evaluations of Roots of Empathy indicate significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behaviour.

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.
Roots of Empathy Baby as “Teacher”/Emotional Literacy

At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom nine times in the school year. A trained Roots of Empathy Instructor coaches the 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 that the Instructor uses to help children to 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 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.

Roots of Empathy Goals

- 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