

Roots of Empathy

A Parenting Program For Our Grade 4 Students

Empathy is the ability to identify with another person's feelings. The ability to see and feel things as others see and feel them is central to competent parenting and successful social relationships in all stages of life. When children are able to understand another person's point of view and respect their feelings, aggressive behaviour is less likely to occur.

Roots of Empathy is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to building caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children. Working in partnership with communities, Roots of Empathy delivers an innovative classroom-based parenting program that aims to reduce aggression through the fostering of empathy and emotional literacy. The program reaches children aged 3 to 14.

The heart of the program is a neighborhood infant and parent, who visit the classroom once a month for the full school year. With a certified Roots of Empathy instructor, students are coached to observe the baby's development, celebrate milestones, interact with the baby and learn about an infant's needs. The Roots of Empathy Instructor also visits before and after each family visit to prepare and reinforce teachings, using a specialized curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for each of four age ranges.

The emotional literacy taught in the program builds more caring classrooms. When children understand how others feel, they are less likely to victimize each other through bullying. As empathy rises, aggression falls. A national evaluation of Roots of Empathy is underway with early research results indicating a significant reduction of aggression and an increase in empathy and pro-social behaviour. Empathy is a key ingredient to caring parenting. Information on infant safety and development helps children to be more aware of issues of infant vulnerability, such as SIDS and Shaken Baby Syndrome. Observations of a loving parent-child relationship give children a model of competent parenting.

The children of today are the parents of tomorrow.

Culture of Caring

The classroom is a window on the future. Children learn to care for one another, their world, and their future. Building good citizens in the classroom today will lead to a civil society tomorrow.

Respect

In Roots of Empathy classrooms abstractions meet reality. Diversity is celebrated as

local parents demonstrate that a loving parent-infant relationship transcends language and cultural barriers.

Literacy of Feelings

Through infant observation and discussion, students learn to identify and label their own feelings. This serves as a bridge to understanding others' feelings. Levels of emotional literacy rise as students become comfortable discussing

their feelings.

Perspective Taking

The ability to understand another person's perspective is the key to the development of empathy and is an asset to conflict resolution. Through the use of literature and group discussion, children learn to respect and understand the

opinions of others.

Neuroscience

Students learn the importance of nurturance and stimulation in the development of the brain and formation of secure attachments. The role of parenting in the early years is celebrated.

Teen Pregnancy

While senior students are taught the milestones of infant development and observe the joys of parenthood, the messages are tempered with insights into the heavy time commitment and serious responsibilities that come with

parenthood.

Attachment /Temperament

Over the school year, students observe how their baby forms an attachment to his or her mother. They learn to recognize their baby's cues and unique temperament.

Curriculum Connection

The Roots of Empathy curriculum complements the classroom curriculum particularly in the areas of math, science, music, drama and art. For example, babies are measured and weighed at three points during the year.

Fathering

Roots of Empathy fathers provide a role model of gentle responsive parenting. When the fathers discuss their feelings, the students are especially attentive.

Inclusion

The principles of democracy thrive in the Roots of Empathy classroom. Messages of social inclusion and valuing of diversity are featured. Children learn to replace bullying and other forms of cruelty with kindness and compassion.

Problem Solving

Children solve real problems as they measure, graph, and record their size relative to the baby. Collaboration and team building are program values.

Program Components

Nine themes with 3 classroom visits by a Roots of Empathy Instructor per theme (27 Visits).

For each theme, a Family Visit (parent and infant) is made with the Roots of Empathy Instructor, for a total of nine Family Visits.

Ongoing communication between the Roots of Empathy Instructor and the participating family (may include home visits).

Each Roots of Empathy classroom uses grade appropriate books and infant toys for the family visit.

Toll-free warm-line and e-mail support from Roots of Empathy in Toronto for the Instructors.

Infant Development

This baby is delighting the students with his interest in the book they made him. The gift book was made in response to learning baby's visual preferences and visual abilities.

Infant Safety

As students observe the milestones of their baby's development, they also learn about the safety issues related to each of their baby's new accomplishments. The vulnerability of the baby in the first year and the Shaken Baby Syndrome are emphasized.

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