



# ROOTS OF EMPATHY INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



**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.

**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.*

## 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

## Does it 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.

## What a Roots of Empathy Family Does

The heart of Roots of Empathy is the neighbourhood parent and baby who join the Instructor in the classroom for nine Family Visits, each about 40 minutes long. Our program celebrates the power of the family in the development of the baby as a person. We will ask you to share with the students how it feels to be a parent. Students will have lots of questions about your baby and about what it takes to be a parent. Since we focus on the parent-infant bond, fathers and/or mothers are equally welcome to participate. The Roots of Empathy Instructor also visits a week before and a week after each Family Visit. This is to prepare and reinforce teachings using a specialized lesson plan for each visit.

## Our Commitment to You

At the start of the year, the Instructor will come to your home to talk about how the program will run and answer any questions you may have. The Instructor will call before each of the nine Family Visits to talk about the theme for the visit and tell you about questions the students have asked since the last Family Visit. Instructors are supported throughout the year by certified Roots of Empathy Mentors to ensure the best experience possible for your family.

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. On the last Family Visit you will be given a photo album as a memento of your baby's first year as a Roots of Empathy teacher and a Wishing Tree filled with children's heartfelt wishes for "their baby." At the end of the year, Roots of Empathy invites you to fill out a feedback form on your experience with the program.

The Roots of Empathy curriculum has received highest honours and is specialized for different age levels. There is a lesson plan for every visit; in total there are 27 Roots of Empathy visits during the school year. Nine themes are covered and each theme is addressed over three visits (Pre Family Visit, Family Visit, and Post Family Visit).



## OVERVIEW OF CLASSROOM VISITS



### 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

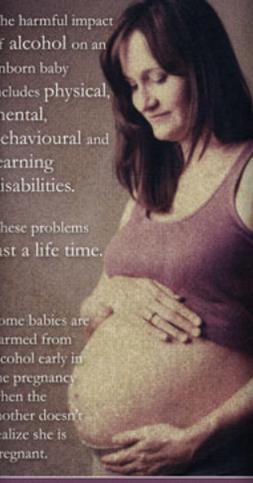
- 9 visits total
- Roots of Empathy Instructor, parent(s), and baby
- Approximately 40 minutes in length
- Roots of Empathy Instructor guides students' observations of the baby's feelings, intentions, and the attachment relationship
- Roots of Empathy Instructor demonstrates the baby's physical and emotional 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

## SAFETY MESSAGES

These simple leaflets are shared in classrooms with children 9 years of age and up, to help them learn how to protect babies from harm. Children have been powerful in spreading the news about these dangers.

<h3>Never Shake a Baby</h3> <p>Shaking a baby can damage the baby's brain, resulting in blindness, deafness, permanent disabilities and even death.</p> <p>Babies die each year because the people who are taking care of them shake them.</p> <p><b>Why do people shake a baby?</b> Usually because the baby is crying... A LOT, and they don't know it is harmful.</p>  <p>When a baby cries constantly, you feel...</p> <p>frustrated worried sad annoyed stressed out helpless angry like a "bad" person like crying</p> <p>Roots of Empathy Racines de l'Empathie</p>	<h3>Second Hand Smoke</h3>  <p>If a pregnant woman smokes cigarettes, it is harmful for the baby.</p> <p>Roots of Empathy Racines de l'Empathie</p>	<h3>Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)</h3> <p>There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink when you are pregnant.</p> <p>There is no known safe time to drink alcohol when you are pregnant.</p>  <p>All kinds of alcohol are unsafe to drink when you are pregnant.</p> <p>Roots of Empathy Racines de l'Empathie</p>	<h3>Postpartum Depression</h3> <p>Every year, thousands of mothers participate in Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy programs with their infants.</p> <p><b>Nearly 1 in 7 women who give birth are affected by postpartum depression.</b></p>  <p>Roots of Empathy Racines de l'Empathie</p>	<h3>Back to Sleep</h3>  <p>Please put me to sleep on my back.</p> <p>Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is reduced by 50% when babies are put to sleep on their backs.</p> <p>Roots of Empathy Racines de l'Empathie</p>
<h3>Never Shake a Baby</h3> <p>What should you do when a baby cries? Remember, a crying baby is not a bad baby, but a baby with a problem.</p> <p><b>The baby may be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Hungry</b> – try feeding her!</li> <li><b>Wet</b> – try changing her diaper!</li> <li><b>Too Cold/Hot</b> – try changing her clothes!</li> <li><b>Lonely/Sad</b> – try picking her up and cuddling, rocking or taking her out for a walk!</li> <li><b>Tired</b> – try putting her to sleep!</li> <li><b>Bored</b> – try playing peek-a-boo, singing a song or looking at a book with her!</li> <li><b>Sick</b> – seek medical advice!</li> </ul> <p><b>NEVER SHAKE A BABY!</b></p> <p>Since 1996, children in Roots of Empathy classes have been learning how to protect babies from harm. They become child advocates bringing these public health/safety messages to their friends and families. These messages stay with them for life.</p> <p>www.rootsofempathy.org © 2009 Roots of Empathy</p>	<h3>Second Hand Smoke</h3> <p>The baby is crying because she doesn't like the smell of smoke.</p>  <p>Before and after birth, it is harmful for a baby to be breathing in cigarette smoke.</p> <p>Since 1996, children in Roots of Empathy classes have been learning how to protect babies from harm. They become child advocates bringing these public health/safety messages to their friends and families. These messages stay with them for life.</p> <p>www.rootsofempathy.org © 2009 Roots of Empathy</p>	<h3>Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)</h3> <p>The harmful impact of alcohol on an unborn baby includes physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities.</p> <p>These problems last a life time.</p> <p>Some babies are harmed from alcohol early in the pregnancy when the mother doesn't realize she is pregnant.</p>  <p>Since 1996, children in Roots of Empathy classes have been learning how to protect babies from harm. They become child advocates bringing these public health/safety messages to their friends and families. These messages stay with them for life.</p> <p>www.rootsofempathy.org © 2009 Roots of Empathy</p>	<h3>Postpartum Depression</h3> <p>Postpartum depression is a major public health problem and affects 10-15% of women after childbirth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Postpartum depression is different from Baby Blues.</li> <li>&gt; Baby Blues affects 50-85% of mothers and includes symptoms such as tearfulness, lack of confidence and a feeling of being overwhelmed.</li> <li>&gt; Baby Blues disappears a few weeks after birth. If symptoms continue beyond this time, the mother may be experiencing postpartum depression.</li> </ul> <p>Postpartum depression symptoms include: crying spells, overwhelming sadness, irritability, anxiety and, most upsetting of all, a feeling of detachment from one's baby.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Unfortunately many mothers suffer silently with postpartum depression because it is not well understood and often bears a stigma.</li> <li>&gt; We now know that the attachment relationship between babies and their mothers is the main vehicle for healthy growth and development.</li> </ul> <p>It is important for mothers with postpartum depression to get help from their health care practitioner(s) so that they and their babies can thrive.</p> <p>This brochure is an effort to help people understand the symptoms and prevalence of postpartum depression in order to reduce the stigma and encourage mothers to seek help from their health care practitioner(s).</p> <p>www.rootsofempathy.org © 2011 Roots of Empathy</p>	<h3>Back to Sleep</h3>  <p>Please put me to sleep on my back.</p> <p>Since 1996, children in Roots of Empathy classes have been learning how to protect babies from harm. They become child advocates bringing these public health/safety messages to their friends and families. These messages stay with them for life.</p> <p>www.rootsofempathy.org © 2009 Roots of Empathy</p>

The postpartum depression brochure has not been written for a student audience and will not be distributed in Roots of Empathy classrooms. However, the Roots of Empathy organization shares it with social service agencies in an effort to help people understand the symptoms and prevalence of postpartum depression in order to reduce the stigma and encourage mothers to seek help from their health care practitioner(s).

## Wishes for the Roots of Empathy Baby from the Wishing Tree

“Courtney, here’s my wish for you: Forgive your own mistakes.” ~ *Nine-year-old student*

“I wish that Jade will be loved and stay safe.”

~ *Eight-year-old student*

“I wish that Madelyn would smile forever and never stop smiling. Her smile would cheer up the world.”

~ *Eleven-year-old student*

“My wish for Jordan is that he can be nice to people and help them. I wish that he can help people when they are sick to get better.”

~ *Five-year-old student*

“I wish for Sashca to never give up on anything.”

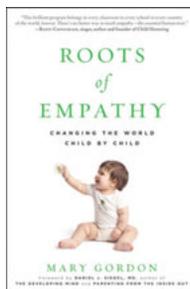
~ *Twelve-year-old student*

## 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.



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](http://www.indigo.ca) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

“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*

“Mary Gordon’s *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*

## INFORMATION FORM FOR BABY’S PARENTS

If you or your baby get sick or are otherwise unable to attend your Family Visit, please call your Roots of Empathy Instructor. If you cannot reach the Instructor, please call the school.

Instructor’s Name:

Instructor’s Phone Number(s):

Instructor’s E-mail:

School Name:

School Address:

School Phone Number:

Teacher’s Name:

Age of Students:

Room #:

Principal’s Name:

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