



Roots of Empathy
Racines de l'empathie

ROOTS OF EMPATHY INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS



Our mission is to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

- In the short term, Roots of Empathy focuses on raising levels of empathy in children, resulting in less bullying and aggression and increased levels of caring, sharing, kindness, and inclusion.
- 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.

Roots of Empathy is celebrated as a
Mental Health and Wellbeing program with proven results.

THE ROOTS OF EMPATHY PROGRAM

Founded in 1996 by social entrepreneur Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program proven to significantly reduce aggression and bullying among elementary school children. It fosters empathy and emotional literacy, creating a safe space for children to express themselves, explore their feelings, and develop supportive friendships that reduce stress and anxiety while promoting mental health. In Canada, the program is available in all ten provinces in both English and French, reaching rural, urban, and remote areas, including Indigenous communities. Roots of Empathy is also implemented in many countries and has been translated into seven languages.

Emotional Literacy: Roots of Empathy Baby as the 'Tiny Teacher'

At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom nine times over the school year. Children witness the loving relationship between an infant and their parent(s) and are coached to connect with the baby's vulnerability and humanity by a Roots of Empathy Instructor.

The Instructor guides children to observe and recognize the baby's feelings and then to reflect on when they felt similar emotions, gaining an understanding of their feelings and an ability to talk about them. Through this experiential learning, children develop the ability to read the emotional cues of classmates, which allows them to understand others better and make friends. Outfitted with a special t-shirt, the baby is identified as the 'Tiny Teacher'.



"Roots of Empathy never tells children what to do or what not to do, but rather reaches them through experiential questions. Their growing empathy allows them to understand how other people feel. One beautiful outcome is that in addition to kindness and caring going up and aggression and bullying going down, we see children proactively supporting classmates without the teacher asking them to help."

~ Mary Gordon, Founder, President & CEO,
Roots of Empathy

MODELLING EMPATHIC PARENTING



Through the program, the attachment relationship between the baby and parent is brought into the classroom and onto the Green Blanket. Children witness, over the course of the school year, a model of empathic parenting where the baby's needs and safety are discussed, along with the importance of the loving relationship between the baby and the parent. Students learn neuroscience - "Love Grows Brains"™.

Students see the power of the loving relationship between the parent and baby and witness how babies thrive in this relationship. In this experiential model, students are coached to observe many things: the attachment relationship as the baby and parent interact, the vulnerability of the baby, the range of emotions the baby displays, the developing physical, social, emotional and cognitive milestones, and the baby's innate temperament traits. Children understand that babies cry for emotional, not just physical reasons. "A crying baby is not a bad baby, but a baby with a problem."

Key lessons in infant safety are passed down to students, which will positively influence their future parenting behaviours by teaching children about a baby's needs and developmental milestones.

The program is especially important to boys, countering harmful male role models portrayed in social media.

GOLD STANDARD

Why choose Roots of Empathy as your school's mental health and bullying prevention program? Because it works. Researchers have a gold standard for school-based programs. Roots of Empathy meets these five gold standard qualifications:

- **An accredited curriculum:** The Roots of Empathy curriculum is specialized to four age groups, and complements the formal school curriculum.
- **A training program:** A four day training is the first stage of a certification process for Instructors. There is annual recertification of Instructors, Mentors, and Trainers.
- **A mentoring program:** Roots of Empathy offers a mentoring session where a personal growth plan is developed and coordinated.
- **Ongoing professional development:** Roots of Empathy provides ongoing professional development for Mentors, Trainers, and Instructors through local workshops and the Virtual Training Institute, all connected to their recertification.
- **Evaluation and research:** Roots of Empathy has scientific research and annual evaluations that span over two decades.

SCHOOL PROGRAM ROLES

A successful Roots of Empathy program will involve strong principal support and a supportive classroom teacher who requests the program. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Roots of Empathy Program Manager.

The Roots of Empathy Role:

Roots of Empathy Instructors are trained to deliver our age-specific curriculum through 27 classroom visits over the course of the school year. Instructors receive intensive training and ongoing Mentor support in program delivery.

The Principal's Role:

Principals can support the program by making it a whole-school venture, such as welcoming the Roots of Empathy family to school assemblies or having Roots of Empathy students make a presentation at a school assembly.



The Teacher's Role:

While the Roots of Empathy Instructor is responsible for preparing and delivering each lesson, the classroom teacher plays an active and essential role in the program. To have the most profound results for students, teachers work in consultation with the principal and work proactively with the Roots of Empathy Instructor.

The classroom teacher is an active participant during the Roots of Empathy visits, assisting with note-taking, picture-taking, art activities, drama or writing. Roots of Empathy prefers to postpone the Roots of Empathy class if there is a substitute teacher because of the importance of continuity with the classroom teacher. While the Roots of Empathy Instructor is delivering the program, the classroom teacher benefits from the unique opportunity of observing the students from another vantage point. The power of Roots of Empathy lies in the classroom teacher's ability to integrate the learnings from the Roots of Empathy classes into the regular classroom work. Teacher extensions are as unique as the teachers themselves.

The responsibilities of the classroom teacher are to:

- Welcome and support the Roots of Empathy Instructor and family
- Maintain regular communication with the Roots of Empathy Instructor (e.g., setting times for visits, notifying the Roots of Empathy Instructor as soon as possible of any changes in lesson times)
- Be present and involved in the Roots of Empathy classes in the following ways:
 - Taking important notes during class discussion
 - Taking photos during Family Visits
 - Helping the Roots of Empathy Instructor with classroom management
 - Allowing time for completion of Roots of Empathy art/writing
 - Providing space for and helping to maintain a bulletin board
 - Completing a Roots of Empathy Feedback Form at the end of the year
 - Collecting student permission forms

OVERVIEW OF CLASSROOM VISITS (27 TOTAL)

The Pre Family Visit



- 9 visits total
- Roots of Empathy Instructor without family
- Each is 30 to 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 30 to 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 30 to 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

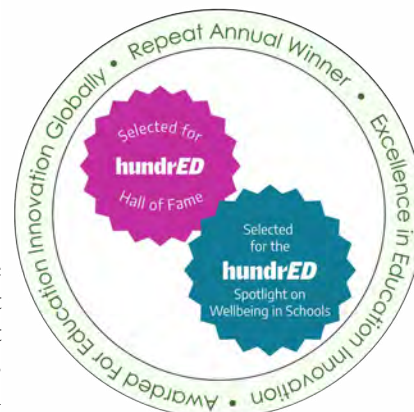
RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Since 2000, the Roots of Empathy program has been evaluated in both comparative and randomized controlled studies designed to measure changes in the behaviour of participating students. Independent research has been conducted on three continents.

Key research findings show:

- An increase in prosocial behaviours (E.g., sharing, helping, and including)
- An increase in empathy
- A decrease in aggressive behaviours, including bullying
- An increase in knowledge of infant development and safety
- Lasting impact

Awarded annually for excellence in education innovation by HundrED since 2018, Roots of Empathy has also been selected for its evidence-based impact to improving student wellbeing in HundrED's 2025 Spotlight on Student Wellbeing in Schools. HundrED is a Finland-based NGO renowned for its rigorous annual assessments of inspiring K-12 education innovations from around the world.



Every year, Roots of Empathy conducts program evaluations completed by Instructors, volunteer families, host classroom teachers and students who have participated in Roots of Empathy. These evaluations consistently show that Roots of Empathy achieves its core goals: fostering the development of emotional literacy and empathy, promoting children's prosocial behaviours, reducing levels of bullying and aggression, preparing students for responsive parenting and responsible citizenship, and advancing students' mental health, wellbeing, and resilience.

ROOTS OF EMPATHY FOUNDER/PRESIDENT & CEO MARY GORDON

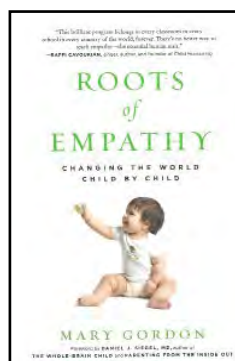


Internationally recognized social entrepreneur, educator, best-selling author and child advocate Mary Gordon has created innovative programs informed by the power of empathy. In 1981, she initiated Canada's first school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, which today serve as a best-practice model, and are public policy in Ontario. She founded Roots of Empathy in 1996, and the program has expanded to many countries. 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, The Judicial Council of California and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. She is featured in several TedEx Talks. Gordon was elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2002 and an Ashoka Globalizer in 2011. She is a member of the Order of Canada (2006), the Order of Newfoundland & Labrador (2012), and the Order of Ontario (2020). In 2018, Gordon was honoured with the Governor General's Innovation Award for 'trailblazers and creators' who contribute to Canada's success.

"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



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 caring children who will pass on their legacy of empathy to their own children.

Purchase your copy at [indigo.ca](https://www.indigo.ca) or [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [.ca](https://www.rootsfempathy.org)



www.rootsofempathy.org | mail@rootsofempathy.org | tel: 416-944-3001

Roots of Empathy Canada Charitable No. 89643 4818 RR0001

Roots of Empathy USA is registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization EIN# 981017743

Roots of Empathy is a registered trademark. Copyright © 2025 Roots of Empathy