

Instructor Media Guidelines

There may be times when you, as an Instructor, are approached by media. Or, you may have a media contact who is interested in covering the program. The Roots of Empathy program, and particularly the Family Visit, are very appealing to print and broadcast media. You can play a role in promoting Roots of Empathy in your community by hosting a media or VIP visit in your classroom.

Roots of Empathy has media guidelines in place for Mentors, KPPS, and staff.

If you are contacted by the media, either directly or through the school where you teach the Roots of Empathy curriculum, contact your Mentor as quickly as possible – preferably within 24 hours.

The Mentor will walk you through a checklist to make sure you are prepared and supported in dealing with the media. The Mentor will also provide you with an information sheet to give to the media containing key facts about Roots of Empathy.

After the media has visited, please send your Mentor and Roots of Empathy International Office (mail@rootsofempathy.org) a copy of the print article or information on the date/time of the radio or TV coverage, plus station/program.

Mentor/Instructor Media/VIP Visit Checklist

Instructor Coaching

Mentors: Use this part of the checklist to coach Instructors prior to a media/VIP visit.

Instructor Tasks Before the Visit

- Confirm that all photo release forms are signed (for students and parent of Roots of Empathy baby).
- Ensure you have a Roots of Empathy baby “Teacher” t-shirt for baby for the Family Visit
- Ensure the Roots of Empathy bulletin board is up-to-date (i.e., Roots of Empathy sign is posted, as well as a picture of baby with name, height and weight chart).
- Review **Family Visits Updates/Reminders**.
- Review **Roots of Empathy Key Information**; ensure Instructor has a copy for reporter.
- Go over key information about the program with the Roots of Empathy parent, classroom teacher, and the principal, if they wish (refer to **Roots of Empathy Key Information**).
- Ask the classroom teacher to let students know a reporter or guest will be visiting.
- Review the theme being covered during the Family Visit.
- Talk to the reporter/VIP about the structure of the Family Visit, the theme being covered, and how it fits with the other themes.
- Call the parent of the Roots of Empathy baby the day before to confirm the date and time of the visit.

Tasks During and After the Visit

Note: These tasks will be performed by the Instructor if no other Roots of Empathy representative is attending. Otherwise, they should be shared by the KPP/Mentor and any Roots of Empathy staff present. Negotiate beforehand who will do what.

- Remind the teacher that any student for whom we do not have a photo release will be asked to sit at one end of the Green Blanket, outside of camera range.
- Meet the reporter/VIPs and make introductions to the parent and baby, classroom teacher, and principal.
- Give the reporter a copy of **Roots of Empathy Key Information**.
- Advise the reporter/VIP which children may not be photographed.
- Make sure your Roots of Empathy baby is wearing their ‘school uniform’ – Roots of Empathy baby “Teacher” t-shirt – before the Family Visit starts
 - Thank participants – teacher, principal, parent, reporter – in person or by phone/email.
 - Please forward a copy of the resulting media coverage to your Mentor and Roots of Empathy International Office at mail@rootsofempathy.org

Roots of Empathy Key Information

What is Roots of Empathy?

Roots of Empathy is an award-winning charitable organization that offers empathy-based programming for children. Our vision is to change the world – child by child.

Roots of Empathy is considered a model of social innovation and has two programs: a flagship program of the same name for children in elementary school (Roots of Empathy) and Seeds of Empathy, its "younger sibling" – a program for children ages three to five in childcare settings. Both programs have shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among children while raising their social and emotional competence and increasing empathy.

Mission

Roots of Empathy's mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

History and Reach

In 1996, Mary Gordon created the Roots of Empathy program in Toronto, Canada. Roots of Empathy became a charitable not-for-profit organization in 2000. To date, Roots of Empathy programs have reached an astounding 600,000 children worldwide.

The Roots of Empathy program is delivered to schoolchildren from Kindergarten to Grade 8 across Canada, in English and French, and in rural, urban, and remote communities. It also reaches children in the United States, New Zealand, the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, Germany and Switzerland. A number of other countries are working to launch it in subsequent years. The program has been called "Canada's olive branch to the world."

In 2008, the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution to endorse Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy, calling both programs "compatible with traditional First Nations teachings and worldviews." Both programs are offered in a growing number of First Nations communities and to urban and rural Aboriginal children across Canada, and the organization works in partnership with Indigenous people globally.

Roots of Empathy was one of three winners of an international Changemakers award from the Ashoka organization.

Roots of Empathy in Action

In the Roots of Empathy program, a parent and baby (who is two to four months old at the start of the program) from the community visit a classroom nine times over the course of a school year. A trained Roots of Empathy instructor visits with the family to guide children as they observe the relationship between the baby and its parent. The instructor also visits before and after each family visit to reinforce teachings. There are 27 classroom visits in total in a Roots of Empathy program.

Roots of Empathy Key Information

In the program, the baby is the “Teacher.” With each family visit, the instructor leads the children in noticing how the baby is growing and changing over the course of his or her first year of life. The children also watch the loving relationship between the parent and baby and see how the parent responds to the baby’s emotions and meets the baby’s needs. The attachment relationship between a baby and a parent is an ideal model of empathy.

Children learn to understand the perspective of the baby and label the baby’s feelings, and then are guided in extending this learning outwards so they have a better understanding of their own feelings and the feelings of others. This emotional literacy lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms, where children are “Changers.” They are more socially and emotionally competent and much more likely to challenge cruelty and injustice.

Research on Roots of Empathy

A decade of independent academic research across several countries has consistently shown that the program dramatically reduces aggression and increases social and emotional understanding among children who receive it. Children who have participated in Roots of Empathy programs are kinder, more cooperative, and more inclusive of others, and are less aggressive and less likely to bully others compared to children who do not participate in the program. These positive effects have been shown to last years.

About Mary Gordon

Internationally recognized social entrepreneur, educator, author and child advocate Mary Gordon has created innovative programs informed by the power of empathy: she founded Roots of Empathy in 1996, created Seeds of Empathy in 2005, and 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.

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, the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador, and was a recipient of both the Queen’s Silver and Diamond Jubilee Awards. 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.

For more information, visit www.rootsofempathy.org

Roots of Empathy

Family Visit Updates and Reminders

When delivering a family visit please remember to keep these key points in mind:

- **Singing The Roots of Empathy Welcome/Goodbye Songs (Our International Anthem)** – The importance of beginning and ending each visit with the familiar routine of singing sets the stage for the students, baby and the Roots of Empathy program, and encourages the children’s participation and connection to the baby. Singing the Roots of Empathy Welcome and Goodbye songs is also recommended when delivering the pre & post visits in the kindergarten and primary grades to begin and end the sessions. It is important to let students know that when they sing to the baby, neurons are firing and wiring, and repetition strengthens these connections. This experience of singing activates neural structures in the children’s brains and builds feelings of connection and belonging. In addition to the Welcome and Goodbye songs, please sing 3 songs of your choice during each family visit. This will support the engagement and focused attention (an executive functioning skill) of the children, build solidarity and for children who have difficulties down regulating their emotions, it is a natural calming strategy for them and the baby.
- **Students Stand Up** - Have students stand when singing the Roots of Empathy Welcome and Goodbye songs as the parent and baby (wearing the Roots of Empathy “Teacher” t-shirt) walk around the blanket to greet/say goodbye to each child. We have come to the conclusion that babies need at least 3 seconds to focus on each child in front of them. Having an opportunity to make eye contact and touch the baby has an impact on both the baby and the children, and therefore, it is important that children have the opportunity to look directly at the baby, engage in eye-to-eye contact and some form of touch. Having the opportunity to make eye contact with, and physically touch the baby engages the students’ emotions and deepens their learning and memory. Even those children who may be reluctant at the beginning of the program look forward to the one-on-one connection with the baby. This is just as strong a connection for the baby, and instructors will find that as the baby becomes comfortable with the routine, they also make sure to look at every single child as they move around the blanket. We know that the children cherish this intimacy and remember it for a long time. The baby looking at them makes them feel special.
- **Always Ask Roots of Empathy Baby** - Before holding, exercising, or playing with the baby ask, "Can I hold, exercise or play with you?" This sends the message to children that they have rights and their bodies are their own. It is a clear message of respect for the baby and in turn themselves.
- **Using Roots of Empathy Infant Toys** – You have the option to use any of the Roots of Empathy infant toys at each family visit to help demonstrate infant development, temperament, neuroscience and attachment. The toys are a way for children to observe the baby’s growing competence. Instructors are asked to try out certain toys before the baby is able to respond to them. For example, in the first family visit, when putting on the wrist rattle and foot finder, the baby registers no awareness. Whereas, at subsequent family visits, the baby may actively work at removing the wrist rattle but not be able to coordinate taking off the foot finder. The toys provide a vehicle for infant observation skills. When introducing a toy, ask the students, “What is the baby’s reaction?” or “How does the baby feel?” or “What do you notice?”, or “Remember when the baby was not yet able to grab the clutch cube and now the baby can shake it?”
- **One Roots of Empathy Infant Toy At A Time** - Once again, you have the option to use any of the Roots of Empathy infant toys at each family visit but be sure to use only one at a time. Students themselves are drawn to the colourful toys and frequently reach for them and are distracted by them. Also, the baby will be distracted and may become over stimulated if there are many toys on the blanket. Your aim is to engage the baby with one toy. Roots of Empathy has chosen these toys because they are safe, easy to clean, developmentally appropriate for younger and older babies, open-ended in use and help to highlight a baby’s problem-solving abilities. By using the same Roots of Empathy toys throughout the program, the students will have the opportunity to notice changes in the baby’s development and skill level as the toys are explored during each family visit. For this reason, no other toys are to be introduced or substituted and Roots of Empathy parent(s) are asked not to bring toys from home.

Roots of Empathy

Family Visit Updates and Reminders

- **Talking Temperament** – Temperament is the way we react to people and situations. There are nine traits. During each family visit, look for opportunities to highlight at least 3 temperament traits in the baby. This presents an opening to ask the children about their own experience of these temperament traits. This experiential questioning bridging from the baby to the students' temperament traits supports the development of empathy as the children hear and understand how their classmates experience the world.
- **Instructor On The Green Blanket** – There are many reasons why the Roots of Empathy instructor should be on the blanket with the parents and baby during the family visit. Being close to the baby and parent allows the instructor to demonstrate the attachment relationship and to take advantage of opportunities presented by the very wise 'teacher' on the green blanket. The instructor can point out many of the curriculum connections of temperament, neuroscience and attachment/attunement when sitting beside the parent and baby, and take advantage of the baby's cues and subtle forms of communication through facial expressions and body language. When on the blanket, instructors also have a direct view of all the students, notice any children not focused or inattentive and can encourage participation by asking direct questions and drawing out the quieter, less engaged students. This strategy is also useful in supporting those students who are more distractible and challenging during a family visit. Having them sit beside the instructor gives us the opportunity to keep an eye on them and ensure they are actively engaged throughout the class.
- **Keep The Family Visit Bag Beside Or Behind Instructor** – Having the family visit kit on the floor beside or behind the instructor keeps the visit moving along and allows all learning materials including toys to be accessible and within easy reach of the instructor. Having to get up to access the toys interrupts the flow of the visit and we 'lose the moment' to follow up with the baby's cues.
- **Parent(s) On The Green Blanket With The Baby** – The parent(s) as well as the baby should be on the blanket during the visit. It is easier to highlight attachment and attunement of the parent and baby when they are in close proximity to each other. The baby will often look at the parent, lean back on mom's leg, touch dad's body for security or bury his or her face into the parent's lap. This physical contact shows the need for the baby to feel secure before being able to engage with the toys or students during the visit. These subtle moments of interaction between the parent and baby, like the number of times the baby will make eye-contact with the parent, are lost with too much distance between them, and the importance and impact that this relationship has on the developing brain are part of the neuroscience lessons within the curriculum.
- **Children Sit Around the Green Blanket In A U-shape** – Having the baby and parent at one end of the blanket allows all children a direct view and encourages active participation during the visit. Younger children, with shorter attention spans can become distracted during a family visit, and classroom management is easier when all students are engaged. Children's perspectives and observations of the baby's growth and development are more specific and detailed when they are close and have an unobstructed view.
- **Teacher Close-By** - Have the teacher sit in the U shape around the blanket with the students. When they are not taking photos, have them sit either around the blanket with the children or directly behind them.
- **Teacher Involvement** - Invite the teacher to join the conversation but only if (s)he feels comfortable sharing. For example, in theme 3, family visit, if the classroom teacher is a parent (s)he can share how (s)he felt as a parent when his/her children lost their teeth, what (s)he put in the diaper bag to take care of them or what type of diaper(s) (s)he used. If the teacher is not a parent (s)he could reflect back to a time when (s)he lost his/her first tooth and share how (s)he felt. Remember to please ask the classroom teacher ahead of time if (s)he is comfortable sharing his/her experiences.
- **Debrief With Roots of Empathy Parent(s)** – It is important to debrief with the Roots of Empathy parent(s) immediately following every family visit by simply asking them how they felt the family visit went.