

# Roots of Empathy

## MENTORING MESSAGES FROM MARY



LETTER 4

Dear Roots of Empathy Instructors,

During this Theme, you will be reaching the mid-way point in the program.

### Questions You Might Ask Your Mentor



One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of being a Roots of Empathy Instructor is playing the conductor role in a symphony of relationships. Working with the orchestra members—the Roots of Empathy Family, the Mentor, the Classroom Teacher, the Principal, and the Local Coordinator (Key Point Person)—requires a lot of coordination and many questions may arise, such as:

- I am worried about how I will fit in all my 27 lessons before the end of the year. What do I do?
- My Roots of Empathy family will be leaving before the program finishes. What do I do?
- My Roots of Empathy Classroom Teacher wants to teach the program herself in her classroom next year. What do I say?

If you don't know the answer to these questions or if you have other questions please contact your Roots of Empathy Mentor for support and guidance.

### From the Green Blanket



#### Remembering Neuroscience

Sensory stimulation such as touch, sight, sound, taste, smell and movement affect the structure and function of the baby's brain during early development. When the children learn about the baby's senses during Family Visits, they can explore the answer to the question "What senses is our Roots of Empathy baby using to learn right now?"

Whenever the Instructor or the parent does exercises with the baby, plays with a toy with the baby, sings to the baby or talks to the baby, you can highlight that these loving interactions are helping the baby's brain to grow. Children are learning that "love grows brains".



Five-year-old children are being coached by the Roots of Empathy Instructor to observe and report on how their baby Kaitlyn is learning about a toy by using various senses.

After singing the *Welcome Song* to the baby, you can illustrate for the children that when the baby hears the song, feels the safety of their parent holding and moving them and sees the faces of the children, the baby is experiencing the multiple firing of neurons from different senses and the moment is being biologically embedded in the baby's brain. This multiple firing and wiring of experience helps create core competencies in the baby so that later on the baby will be able to cope with stress, learn effectively and behave appropriately. "Neurons that fire together wire together" and every Family Visit contributes to the wiring of resilience in the baby.

Apart from helping the students understand how the baby's brain is growing, it is helpful you, as the Instructor, to understand how the Family Visit is helping the students' brains grow. For example, the experience of singing to the baby activates neural structures in the students' brains and builds feelings of connection and belonging. Neuroscientists who are studying the impact of Roots of Empathy on the structure and function of students' brains feel that they are learning to regulate their emotions, which in turn helps them to cope with stress, solve problems and become happy, resilient people.

**Empathy** is the ability to understand how another person feels.

## Empathy Action

### Inclusive Learning Environment

Roots of Empathy Instructors are trained to build community in the classroom by developing relationships with the children based on trust and respect. When we eliminate judgment—both positive (praise) and negative (criticism)—in our responses to the children, we create a trusting and respectful environment that supports each child's ability to develop intrinsic motivation.

When, as Roots of Empathy Instructors, you respond to the children's contributions with acceptance and recognition without judgment, you open the floodgates for authentic dialogue. In every classroom, students are aware that some contribute verbally while others choose not to. A lack of confidence in speaking in class may be because children fear they might be laughed at or told they are wrong. This dynamic changes during Roots of Empathy classes as children become more inclusive of one another



A time when a friend was bullied was when somebody was making fun of my friend's nickname. She felt sad and angry, and was about to cry. I helped them by telling her to stop making fun of her nickname.

Raima has successfully read the cues of sadness and anger in her friend. She has taken it a step further and has stood up for her friend against the hurtfulness of being made fun of. Roots of Empathy creates safe and caring classrooms where every child feels empowered to challenge cruelty and to help a friend in trouble.



Roots of Empathy  
Racines de l'Empathie

and feel comfortable to speak authentically. Children who normally don't contribute become active contributors whose motivations are genuine rather than contrived to impress.

Raima's artwork above is one powerful example of the positive effects Roots of Empathy has had on a classroom. As Raima's teacher reflects,

*Right after the first Roots of Empathy visit this year, I feel we became closer and began to share more. When our Instructor visits our class for the pre- and post-Family Visits, the students open up and freely share their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. She makes the students feel safe in sharing whatever is on their mind. Through hearing each others' stories about different experiences and feelings, they learn that their feelings are real, valid, and not uncommon. This has led to the students being able to identify their feelings, and subsequently using more 'feeling' words in the classroom that they have learned during Roots of Empathy lessons. Because of this, the students seem to be further ahead in being able to solve problems through communicating, compared in other years when I have not had the Roots of Empathy program. It also feels as if we are a more cohesive group, and we often talk about our Instructor, her lessons and our baby. I feel Roots of Empathy has been wonderful for my students, and that they will cherish these memories and lessons for a lifetime.*

*There is an immediate feeling of respect and belonging [during Roots of Empathy Visits] in what is shared by the students, the Roots of Empathy mom, teachers, and Instructors. When the baby is with us, the classroom energy changes. It feels relaxed. We can laugh, empathize, and celebrate as one whole unit.*

In Roots of Empathy classrooms, the baby becomes the lever through which our shared humanity is highlighted, leading to a kinder and more caring classroom environment.

With respect,



Mary Gordon  
Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

