



Roots of Empathy

Family Visit Updates and Reminders

When delivering a Family Visit please remember to keep these key points in mind:

- **Starting with 3 Deep Breaths-** We always start each visit (Pre Family, Family, and Post Family) by inviting the students to take three deep breaths together. When children synchronize their breathing, the group experiences a positive connection. This practice also brings the children a sense of calm before the lesson begins so that they may feel open to participate and supports the development of self-regulation.
- **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 and to one another. It is important to let students know that when they sing to the Baby, their neurons are firing and wiring, and repetition strengthens these connections. 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. 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. One of the ways we can demonstrate that we are following the Baby’s lead is by choosing a song that matches the Baby’s state. For example, if the Baby is bouncing energetically in the mother’s arms, you could suggest singing a bouncing song to the children or similarly a sleepy Baby might enjoy a lullaby. This will also support the engagement, focused attention (executive functioning skill), and support the children’s capacity to attune to the Baby. For children who have difficulties down regulating their emotions, singing is a natural calming strategy for them and the Baby.
- **Students Stand Up** - Invite students to stand when singing the Roots of Empathy Welcome and Goodbye songs as the parent and Baby (wearing the Roots of Empathy “Tiny Teacher” t-shirt) walk around the Green Blanket to greet/say goodbye to each child. Babies need at least 3 seconds to focus on each child in front of them and having an opportunity to make eye contact and touch or gently hold the Baby’s feet has an impact on both the Baby and the children. The routine 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 the Baby becomes accustomed with the routine and with each successive visit, the Baby is more able to focus on the individual children. 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. Guide the children in reading the Baby’s cues by asking, “Is the Baby ok with what I am doing? Why do you think that?”
- **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 (social, emotional, cognitive-neuroscience, physical speech/language), temperament, attachment and attunement. 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 developmentally able to engage. For example, in the first Family Visit, when putting on the wrist rattle, the Baby will likely register no awareness. Whereas, at subsequent Family Visits, the Baby may be aware of the wrist rattle and actively work at removing it. The toys provide a vehicle for observing infant development and uniqueness of each Baby. When introducing a toy, ask the students, “What is the Baby’s reaction?” or “What do you notice?”, or “Remember when the Baby was not yet able to grasp the ball and now the Baby can shake it?” and “How do you think that makes the Baby feel?”
- **One 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



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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 and help to highlight the 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.

- **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 of the Baby to their parent and to take advantage of opportunities presented by the very wise 'Tiny Teacher' on the Green Blanket. The instructor can point out many of the curriculum connections of temperament, neuroscience, attachment and attunement when sitting beside the parent and Baby, and take advantage of the Baby's cues and subtle forms of communication through facial expressions, vocalizations and body language. When on the blanket, instructors also have a direct view of all the students, notice any children who are distracted and can encourage participation by asking experiential questions and drawing out less engaged students.
- **Keep The Family Visit Kit 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 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) Around The Green Blanket With The Baby** – The parent(s) as well as the Baby should be sitting with the children around the Green Blanket at eye level and not on a chair during the visit. It is easier to highlight the attachment of the Baby to their parent and the parent's attunement to their 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.
- **Teacher Involvement** – Invite the teacher to sit around the Green Blanket with the students or close by, whichever feels most comfortable for them. There is an opportunity for the classroom teacher to contribute to a discussion, if they are comfortable. Remember to please ask the classroom teacher ahead of time if they are comfortable sharing their experiences. For example in the primary curriculum, the teacher is invited to share a time that they felt proud. The purpose of inviting the classroom teacher to contribute to a feeling question is to let children know that we are all human and regardless of our age or role, we share the same range of feelings.
- **Debrief With Roots of Empathy Parent(s)** – In order to understand how the parent is feeling about volunteering it is important to debrief immediately following every Family Visit. You might start by asking the parent if they have any questions about the visit and to ask them for feedback on the visit. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to comment on if everything is new, so you might help by asking, "How does it feel to see the children being so interested in their Baby?" You might want to reinforce that we use a parent and Baby as the best model of empathy in the world and the children are learning about their own emotions by understanding the Baby's emotions – emotional literacy.