



Roots of Empathy  
Racines de l'empathie

## Roots of Empathy: Freeing up Children to Learn

**The Instructor models Roots of Empathy program values and creates an optimal learning environment in the classroom through:**

- Practicing authentic communication - asking questions that lead to exploration with the child rather than questions the adult knows the answer to or that prompts a yes/no answer.
- Promoting a climate of respect - showing children that their thoughts, feelings and opinions will be listened to and have equal weighting with the thoughts, feelings and opinions of any adult. All speakers in the Roots of Empathy classroom are honored as equal contributors and there is no single “right” answer. Roots of Empathy can be considered a participatory democracy.
- Valuing discussion where adults share their honest feelings with children thereby creating a safety net of trust in the classroom and fostering meaningful communication.
- Acknowledging and validating a child’s questions and answers with thanks rather than praise - a child learns to respect and trust his own intuitive feeling when an adult does not rate its value through praise.
- Creating an agreement that no one’s opinions or contributions will be laughed at - exploring the perspective of hurt experienced by a child who is disrespected in this way.
- Preparing children to honor the Roots of Empathy baby and parent and be respectful of activities such as breastfeeding, which may cause shyness or embarrassment.
- Intrinsic motivation is fostered in the Roots of Empathy classroom. We acknowledge children’s contributions through their questions, comments, writings, and art without judgment. Praise is positive judgment. Criticism is negative judgment. In a group setting, insecure children may be demotivated or fearful to speak up in the group if other children have been praised as they may worry they will not be praised. A “thank you” or acknowledgement is sufficient and praise is often manipulative.

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- Teaching children to recognize unfairness and to find ways to be a changer.
- Presenting the classroom as a community, the concept of being part of something bigger than oneself.
- Building a climate of civility and creating situations where friendships are nurtured.
- Children feel empowered when they realize that things they thought were unfair are not their responsibility but they can help to make them fair, be a changer.
- In the Roots of Empathy program, celebration of our differences and recognition of the commonalities that bind us together as human beings are used to teach the value of social inclusion. “Setting a place at the table for everybody, whether in a wheelchair, a rocking chair or a high chair.” ~ Mary Gordon
- All children need to feel a sense of belonging in their classroom. In Roots of Empathy, children are sensitized to other children’s feelings and they are encouraged to be inclusive of others and not hurtful.
- Establishing the validity of all voices and focusing on consensus-building.
- Removing barriers and divisions that are used to separate people by age, role, fluency, ability, temperament, allowing the principle of equity to shine through.
- Raising levels of awareness of those who may be feeling left out.

Appendix D: Getting Ready

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