

What is a Roots of Empathy programme?



Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom programme that has been shown to reduce levels of aggression among school children, while also improving social and emotional competence and increasing empathy. Significantly, it provides an effective approach to reducing the risk factors that cause violence.

Roots of Empathy launched programmes in Northern Ireland in 2010-2011, as a result of an invitation from the Public Health Agency to Roots of Empathy Founder/President, Mary Gordon, to deliver a keynote address.

Actions

At the heart of the programme are a baby and parent from the local community, who visit the classroom on a monthly basis throughout the year. A trained instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and label the baby's feelings. This 'emotional literacy' lays the foundations for more safe and caring classrooms.

Children become more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying.

Outcomes

A number of randomised controlled trials have found that children already identified as having bullying and aggressive behaviours, and who participated in Roots of Empathy, had a reduction in these behaviours of 88% compared to those identified

children who did not receive the programme. The latter group had an increase in aggression and bullying behaviour of 50%. The observed reduction in aggression among the former group continues for at least three years after completion of the programme.

Find out more about the programme at [**Northern Ireland - Roots of Empathy**](#)

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