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Depression and Suicide Risk Can Intensify in the Spring and Summer *May Is Mental Health Awareness Month*

PRINCETON/WEST WINDSOR, NEW JERSEY (May 6, 2024) – While intense symptoms for individuals with depression are commonly associated with the winter and holiday season, depression and suicidal thoughts are actually more common in the spring and summer. For example, pressure to socialize when warmer weather makes it more possible may be particularly stressful for individuals with depression, as well as those with anxiety. Physical elements in the environment in the warmer seasons are also possible triggers of mental health struggles.

“Depression and anxiety need to be addressed early and consistently. Otherwise, they can become severe and lead to suicidal thoughts and behavior,” stressed Tricia Baker, Co-founder of Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®), a Princeton-based nonprofit that provides mental health and suicide prevention education along with the emotional support of certified therapy dogs.

Facts and Theories about Mental Health Challenges in the Warm Weather

“The pain of social disconnection precisely when those connections are increasingly possible” could trigger suicidal thoughts in individuals with depression, according to [The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds](#).

[Johns Hopkins Medicine](#) reported that “those who may have spent the winter depressed find themselves, in the spring, still depressed, but with the energy and motivation to take their own life.” In addition, individuals with depression may experience intensified symptoms as they observe others embracing and celebrating spring.

Similarly, [UT Health East Texas](#) shared that “seeing others’ vacations on social media could also have a negative impact on mood, as people make upward comparisons to others’ seemingly ‘perfect’ lives.” Taking vacations and participating in holiday-related events – actually any “change in structured activity” – could also be factors of depression.

Physical environmental factors associated with depression include pollen and other allergens; the sun’s disruption of the circadian rhythm; and increased anxiety and agitation in response to extreme heat, as explained on [Healthline](#).

Fortunately, for many people, being with others and outside reinforces good mental health. To capitalize on these opportunities now that the weather is getting nicer and combine them with mental health education, AIR will host an outdoor event on May 18, 2024. Families, including their dogs, are encouraged to participate.

OPEN AIR Event Builds Awareness of Mental Health and Dogs' Positive Impact

This event will be held on May 18, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at West Windsor Community Park. To celebrate and reinforce the positive mental health impact dogs have on health, the event will feature a 5K walk for people and their dogs.

The event will also feature a blessing of the animals, butterfly release to honor loved ones lost too soon, live musical performances, refreshments and exhibitors from organizations that support AIR's mission. Please click [here](#) for details and to register to attend. The event is sponsored by Szaferman Lakind Attorneys at Law, Princeton Brain & Spine and PerformCare NJ.

"We look forward to seeing many children, adults and dogs at this family fun day. We are tremendously grateful for support from our volunteers and other event participants for our mission to save our youth from suicide, which is the second leading cause of death among 10- to 24-year-olds and has been increasing in even younger populations," Baker said.

To date, AIR has educated more than 200,000 students from elementary school through college age, and has certified therapy dogs at every presentation, as well as other events, to provide additional mental health support. Research conducted by The College of New Jersey's TAPLab (Testing and Assessment in Psychology) has demonstrated the effectiveness of these presentations. For example, up to 50% of middle school students who attend them open up about their own mental health struggles and concern for friends. This feedback is given confidentially to school counselors, enabling them to connect with those students and provide them with immediate support and, if needed, connections to providers of ongoing mental health care.

"We hope to reach every student to give them the tools to live a long and happy life. Good mental health is the cornerstone of overall health and we appreciate support for making this a public policy priority. Together, we can save more young lives," Baker stated.