



## Picture Book Uses Dogs to Reverse the Attitudes of Children

*Tricia Baker of AIR wants kids to keep their eyes, ears and hearts open*

*By Arnav Janeesh | Photos supplied by Tricia Baker*

“Whatever you decide to be, be happy.”



Amidst the rumble of lawn mowers and barks of her dogs, Tricia Baker uttered these words, a testament to her unyielding determination to address mental health in the youth population.

Baker founded AIR (Attitudes in Reverse), an organization that travels to schools and other youth organizations to educate them about the importance of managing their anxiety

and processing their emotions. She addresses this pressing social issue uniquely through man’s best friend: dogs.

Baker published “Miki & Friends Go to School: Exploring Emotions through the Eyes of Dogs,” a picture book featuring her five dogs as they went through a multitude of scenarios, forcing them to address their anxiety, sometimes not always through the best means.

“I based it on my Pomeranian Goober,” she stated, emphasizing his goofy name. “When I used to take him to dog school, the larger dogs would often playfully pounce upon him, but this caused him to develop an anxiety around other dogs.”

“Ninety to 95 percent of aggression is fear-based,” she continued. After this repeated behavior, Goober started to become defensive against other dogs in order to deal with his anxiety. He growled and barked, like how human beings would pretend to be tough in fearful scenarios.

All this would be illustrated in her book, which she would bring from classroom to classroom, addressing an important scenario for many of these children.

What she would see would sometimes shock her.

“I would ask the kids if Goober should fight or walk away in specific panels.” Her voice concernedly lowered. “Too many kids put their thumbs up for fighting!”

This gives Baker an opportunity to discuss making better choices. She believed that parallelisms could be drawn between the behaviors of dogs and humans. What the kids would see as a read-aloud would actually be teaching them a valuable lesson.

“I always tell young people to keep their eyes open, ears open, and hearts open.” Her serious tone transitioned into a sweet smile. To Baker, she saw all 250,000-plus kids she talked to as her own, and wanted the best for them as they grew into adults.

In fact, Baker knew the importance of mental health during adolescence in shaping the outlook of life. “Goober was also in his adolescent years

when he developed his defensive behavior. Because of that, I can’t take him around other dogs now because he gets too nervous.”

But why dogs? Sure, they were cute, but were they the best examples? Well, Baker was no scientist, but she had her facts down.

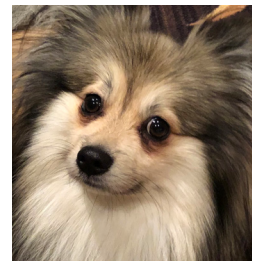
“When we look at dogs, our brain releases oxytocin. It’s a relationship hormone.” She laughed, deservedly addressing her dogs who were protecting her from the “evil” lawn man. “Touching a dog releases serotonin and dopamine, which can lower blood pressure and stress levels.”

That’s why Baker always brought in her therapy dogs. “The joy on the kids’ faces, if only you could see it.” Baker always wanted to end her sessions on a positive note, especially when the conversations were deep, so she ensured all kids were mandatorily left with a snuggle from Miki or a pawshake from Goober.

As Baker continues, she hopes her book can rise to the same level as her pups. “Miki was awarded the Canine Excellence in Therapy honor from the American Kennel Club in 2011. He is one of our best!”

Through her work, Baker reminds us that recovery can come from the gentlest teachers - the four-pawed ones, of course.

You can purchase her book at <https://a.co/d/1qpZPxx>



### Dogs, Kids & the Power of Kindness

*Local author Tricia Baker shares her 5 dogs to help kids explore emotions through her picture book*

***Miki & Friends Go to School***



For ages  
5-10

**TO ORDER**



*“My students were talking about how dogs have emotions like they experience. We had a great discussion about feelings after reading the book.” – NJ Elementary School Teacher*

**For more information please contact: [Info@AIR.ngo](mailto:Info@AIR.ngo)**