



Attitudes in Reverse®
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Attitudes In Reverse® Reinforces its Mission to Address Increasing Mental Health Challenges among Youth

May Is Mental Health Awareness Month; May 7th Is National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY (May 1, 2026) – While May holds a special meaning for individuals in the mental healthcare field, it is particularly poignant for Tricia and Kurt Baker, who founded Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) almost immediately after their son Kenny lost hope of recovering from severe depression and anxiety and took his life on May 19, 2009. In response to not only this tragic loss, but also the stigma and judgment they faced in the wake of Kenny's death, the Bakers channeled their grief into a mission that has proven to save many lives: Educating individuals from kindergarten through college age about mental health and, for the older students, also related disorders and suicide prevention. All of the programs have AIR-certified therapy dogs, who have proven to be effective partners in creating comfort with the topic and opening up about mental health challenges.

As a Certified Professional Dog Trainer-Knowledge Assessed, as well as a dog parent for many years, Tricia knows firsthand about the mental health benefits that dogs offer. Throughout Kenny's illness and the family's grieving, Tricia had her therapy dog Miki as an extra source of support in the family. It is so fitting that Miki was born in May, not only for the comfort he provided for Tricia, but also for the hope and joy he shared with thousands of people as the "spokesdog" for AIR. After 15 years of serving in this role, which earned him the American Kennel Club Award for Canine Excellence in 2011, Miki recently joined Kenny, continuing to provide love and encouragement in a spiritual way.

"I'll never forget all the ways Miki has given me strength since he was a puppy and until his recent passing at almost 18 years of age. After Kenny died, Miki licked my eyelids, gently guiding me to wake up and face each day," Tricia shared. "Both Kenny and Miki are the driving forces behind our mission to ensure everyone understands mental health; recognizes and accepts individuals who are struggling; and is comfortable speaking up and seeking help when needed."

In addition to being the face and "voice" of AIR, Miki is a main character, along with other therapy dogs in the Baker family, in *Miki & Friends Go to School: Exploring Emotions through the Eyes of Dogs*. Tricia created this book as an educational tool and uses it with students in kindergarten through fourth grade. This program is one of several that she developed, each tailored for a different age group.

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“The nation has seen tragic trends that underscore the critical importance of educating children beginning at a young age. They reinforce our determination to give our youth the knowledge and skills they need to cope with mental and emotional difficulties and thrive throughout their lives,” Tricia said.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the rates of depression, anxiety and suicidality among youth nationwide have consistently and significantly increased from 2009 to 2025. For example, by 2023, nearly 40% of high school students reported persistent sadness or hopelessness, 18% had experienced major depression, and 10% had attempted suicide. More specifically, the prevalence of major depressive disorder among teenagers (15 to 17 years old) doubled from 2019 to 2022, most notably during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic. Also since 2009, nearly one-third of teenagers had anxiety disorders and suicide rates among 10– to 19-year-olds increased by 85.3% between 2007 and 2017, the AAP reported.

Part of AIR’s efforts to build awareness of mental health and the organization has been an annual *Miki & Friends Walk for Hope*, which will be held on May 16, 2026 from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. at West Windsor Community Park. The event will feature a butterfly release commemorating loved ones lost too soon (not necessarily to suicide); inspiring music and other presentations; and exhibitors from various organizations both directly within and indirectly related to the mental healthcare field.

“This will be our last walk event. We had to make this difficult decision in light of our limited resources and the growing need for the educational presentations and our other initiatives,” Tricia said. “We are so appreciative of all our supporters and we look forward to working with everyone to expand our mission and our message of hope and healing.”

Please visit <https://air.ngo> to learn more about AIR, register to attend or volunteer at the May 16th event, and to get involved to support AIR’s ongoing mission to save lives.

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Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) was established by Tricia, Kurt and Katelyn Baker of Plainsboro, NJ, in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny died by suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety. Their mission is to save lives by educating students about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention. Since January 2011, they have presented to more than 250,000 students in elementary, middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Missouri, Texas and Arizona. AIR also offers the AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds® program, bringing dogs into schools to help students de-stress and engage in the conversation about mental health. In addition, AIR trains and certifies Emotional Support Animals and offers a lunch-and-learn program for businesses. For more information about AIR, please visit www.air.ngo or call 609-945-3200.

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