

Community of Kindness



HOW YOU
CAN HELP
CREATE A



1. AIR Awareness T-shirt Contest – The t-shirt contest gives teachers the opportunity to talk about mental health stigma. The purpose of the t-shirt is to start one-on-one conversations about good mental health and reduce stigma, so no one is ever embarrassed or afraid to seek treatment for a biological brain illness. The contest can be incorporated into an art class curriculum. The first place winner receives an ipad and their winning design on the front of hundreds of t-shirts.

2. In Their Shoes™ (ITS) Traveling Exhibit – This exhibit of shoes represents youth who lost hope and ended their lives by suicide.

- The ITS can be displayed throughout the main hallway of the school. Walking past the shoes, students can immerse themselves in the thoughts and struggles of others.
- The exhibit can be used in many ways during a school day, to increase compassion and kindness within the school community. The shoes can be included in curriculums for the day. Art classes can draw the shoes. English classes can pick a pair of shoes and write a short story or poem about the person who wore the shoes. Psychology teachers can use the shoes to share about different mental health disorders and to explain that they are physical brain illnesses.
- Mental health clubs have provided their own shoes and thoughts to become a permanent part of the display. AIR provides tagging materials and instructions.
- The ITS display can be used during any parent presentation to increase parents realization of what their children may be struggling with in silence.



3. Coming Up for AIR™ Program – This 60-90 minute interactive presentation is geared towards 6th through 12th graders. A college level program is also available. AIR Heroes discuss mental health disorders, statistics, stigma and signs of suicide and share their personal experiences. All students receive a silicone wristband and informational print materials.

4. Packing a Good Mental Health Toolkit for Youth™ – This 45-60 minute presentation is geared for 7th graders and younger students. Interactive program that discusses stress and coping mechanisms for stress. All students will receive their very own toolkit.



5. AIR Dog Tug Toys – AIR sells hand-made dog tug toys to raise donations. These tug toys are made by local students to be sold to raise money for programming. AIR will supply the fleece and the instructions. When students participate, they can be instructed that the toys are being made to help fund mental health educational programs.

6. AIR Dogs: Paws for Minds™ – The simple actions of looking at and petting a dog helps decrease stress, by lowering cortisol levels and increasing other good de-stressing brain chemicals. By having dogs present in the schools, it allows us to address mental health and coping mechanisms. AIR Dog handlers must complete Youth Mental Health First Aid training.

AIR Dogs are used in many different ways:

- AIR Therapy Dogs attend programs, so that students can pet them afterwards. Many schools report back that the retention of the program seems to be greater with the addition of the dogs.
- AIR Dogs can visit during high stress times, during AP week, midterms and finals. De-stressing the students will allow them to perform better on their tests.
- AIR Dogs have visited with students after a crisis, such as the death of a classmate. The dogs visiting give the students the ability to smile and for a short time, forget their grief. We recommend that counselors be present during these visits. Often, students open up about their feelings while petting a dog and it is critical that they are connected with a counselor.



7. WarmAIR4Winter™ – 70% of people in mental health hospitals never receive a visitor. AIR Heroes want to change that. AIR collects socks, gloves and beanie style hats and delivers them to patients in behavioral health hospitals. AIR Dogs bring smiles, and they also visit with patients.

- Students from schools take up collections and have allowed us to collect close to 1,000 gift items for local patients. Some youth have knit or crochet caps, as part of their own therapy treatments.
- This program runs from mid-November through mid-December and gives us the opportunity to talk to our students about those who wake up each day and struggle with a mental health disorder. It is critical that we teach that mental health disorders are no different from any other medical illness and that no one chooses to have a mental health disorder. We must teach our students to be kind, understanding and empathetic towards those who struggle, to create a community of acceptance.



8. AIR Hero Award – AIR Heroes receive an AIR Dog Tag, a wristband and an AIR Hero T-shirt.

- Teachers can encourage their students to sponsor an AIR Hero. For each \$50 donation, AIR sends a young person, who wakes up every day to battle a mental health disorder, a gift to let them know that there are people who care about them. Gifts include dog tag, t-shirt, wristband and other informational materials. We include a hand written inspirational note, that could be written by the class students.
- AIR Heroes can also be nominated by peers. AIR Heroes are young people who have inspired others to learn about mental health disorders and to be kind to others.



9. C-AIR Messages – Students share letters with other students who may be struggling. The letters are written in February and delivered in March and April, the months with the highest youth suicide rate.



For more information and to schedule a presentation, please visit www.AttitudesInReverse.org, write to info@AttitudesInReverse.org, or call **609-945-3200**.