

# Community Crises and Disasters

A Parent's Guide to  
Talking with Children of All Ages





# Community Crises and Disasters

A Parent's Guide to  
Talking with Children of All Ages

Cynthia W. Moore, PhD and Paula K. Rauch, MD

A Project of  
The Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time Program  
Massachusetts General Hospital

MARJORIE E. KORFF PACT PROGRAM  
**PACT**  
Parenting At a Challenging Time



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

CANCER CENTER

## **About The Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time Program**

The Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) provides parent guidance consultation to parents, and their partners, who are facing cancer or other life-threatening medical illnesses. Focusing on honest communication to support children's resilient coping, the PACT parent guidance model is also being used to support military-connected families and families affected by community violence.

The PACT website offers in-depth information for parents and professionals about supporting a child's resilient coping through a parent's medical illness, collaborations with community partners to address a range of additional challenges facing families, and our MGH Cancer Center clinical services. Learn more at [www.mghpact.org](http://www.mghpact.org).

© 2015 Cynthia W. Moore and Paula K. Rauch

Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time Program  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
55 Fruit Street  
Boston, MA 02114

ISBN 978-0-692-38362-9

Project Management: David Gerratt

Design: David Gerratt (*NonprofitDesign.com*)

Editing: Debra Simes (*Wordslinger.net*)

Illustration: John Berry

Printing: Recycled Paper Printing, Boston, MA

# Contents

- iii **Acknowledgments**
- v **Preface**
- 1 **PART ONE**
  - Facing Challenges Together
- 3 **From Crisis Comes Opportunity**
  - 3 Who We Are: The PACT Team
  - 4 Why We Emphasize Communication
  - 5 How This Guide Is Organized
  - 6 What We Learned from Parents: Post-Marathon Challenges
- 9 **Trauma and Resilience**
  - 9 Stress vs. Trauma
  - 10 Same Stressor, Different Reactions
  - 12 Loss and Grief
  - 12 Supporting Resilience
  - 13 Communities with Chronic Stressors
- 14 **Coping at Different Ages**
  - 15 Infants and Toddlers (0–3 years)
  - 15 Preschoolers (3–6 years)
  - 17 Elementary School-Age Children (7–12 years)
  - 18 Teenagers (13–19 years)
- 20 **Caring for Yourself and Your Family**
  - 21 Staying Calm and Connected
  - 21 Self-Care Is Not Selfish
    - 22 Seeking Professional Help
    - 22 When to Seek Help
    - 22 Where to Find Help
  - 23 How Does Therapy Help?
  - 24 Talking about Therapy with Your Child
  - 24 Accessing School Support
  - 25 Communicating with Schools: A Two-Way Street

26	<b>Making Choices about Media Use</b>
27	Be a Savvy Media Consumer
28	Be a Good Role Model
28	How Much Is Too Much?
28	Preschoolers (3-6)
29	Elementary School Age (7-12)
29	Teenagers (13-19)
29	Managing Media
29	Talking about Media Use: Sample Questions to Try
31	<b>Parenting Through Crisis: A Quick Guide</b>
35	<b>PART TWO</b>
	Talking Through a Crisis: Finding Words That Work
37	<b>Talking with Children after a Crisis or Disaster</b>
37	Getting Started
39	Following Up
40	Conversation Tips: Ages 3-6
40	Conversation Tips: Ages 7-12
41	Conversation Tips: Ages 13-19
43	<b>Stories of Families Facing Crisis</b>
44	<b>Living “Boston Strong”: A Story about Violence in the Community</b>
55	Talking with Children about Violence in the Community
63	<b>Weathering the Storm: A Story about a Natural Disaster</b>
71	Talking with Children about a Natural Disaster
80	<b>Navigating a Loss: A Story about an Accident in the Community</b>
88	Talking with Children about an Accident in the Community
97	<b>Resources</b>
101	<b>APPENDIX</b>
101	<b>Patriots’ Day Project Resources</b>
102	Tips for Talking with Children about the Marathon Anniversary
104	Pre-Marathon Anniversary Blog Posts
116	<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>

# Acknowledgments

*Community Crises and Disasters: A Parent's Guide to Talking With Children of All Ages* was made possible through a generous grant from the employees of Fidelity Investments.

This handbook represents the shared expertise of the clinicians in the Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program at the Massachusetts General Hospital:

Paula K. Rauch, MD

Cynthia Moore, PhD

Kristin Russell, MD

Sarah Shea, PhD

Mary Susan Convery, LICSW

Kristin Russell, MD provided content editing for several sections of this handbook, as well as input on the role of schools; Sarah Shea, PhD assisted in the organization of the content; and Mary Susan Convery, LICSW provided input on self-care. Every day we appreciate the privilege of working together on this project and others, and feel fortunate for the warmth, wisdom, and friendship of our PACT team.

Thank you to our colleagues Bonnie Ohye, PhD, Tia Horner, MD, and Steve Durant, EdD at the Home Base Program, whose compassionate care for military families stimulates our thinking about supporting families facing a range of crises.

The parent guidance materials for the first anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing, found in the Appendix, were created in close collaboration with Gene Beresin, MD, Steven Schlozman, MD, Tristan Gorrindo, MD, and Elizabeth Jarrell, MA of the MGH Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds. Market Street Research collaborated on the parent survey. In addition, Aude Henin, PhD contributed a blog posting from which suggestions in this handbook about helping anxious children were taken.

Our special thanks to David Gerratt (*NonprofitDesign.com*) for project management and graphic design, to Debra Simes (*wordslinger.net*) for her wise edits to the manuscript, and to illustrator John Berry for bringing this publication to life. We appreciate their efforts in making this handbook both visually appealing and accessible to a range of audiences, despite a very tight schedule.





# Preface

At 2:47pm on a beautiful, sunny Boston Marathon race day—Monday, April 15, 2013—two bombs exploded near the downtown Boston finish line, seriously injuring more than 250 runners and bystanders, and taking the lives of two young adults and a 10-year-old boy. Because it was Patriots’ Day—a school holiday—many of the spectators were Boston-area families with young children, there alongside fans from around the world to cheer on the runners.

As the perpetrators were sought during the next several days, a young security officer and one of the suspects was killed, and a police officer seriously injured. Then, four days after the Marathon, all public transit was suspended, and Boston-area citizens were asked to stay inside their homes as police, FBI agents, and National Guard members engaged in door-to-door searches, and military vehicles patrolled neighborhoods. On April 19, the search resulted in the apprehension of the second suspected bomber.

A makeshift memorial was created in downtown Boston at the site of the bomb blasts. “Boston Strong,” in signature Marathon blue and yellow, quickly became the logo and the slogan for the Boston community to come together. The events around the Marathon bombing caused both visible and less-visible damage. Communities near and far expressed solidarity and offered whatever support they could to victims and others affected by the events. For all the devastation and loss, there was also heartening evidence of the good in people.



# Resources

## **Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time Program (PACT)**

The PACT website offers in-depth information for parents and professionals about supporting a child's resilient coping through a parent's medical illness, collaborations with community partners to address a range of additional challenges facing families, and our MGH Cancer Center clinical services. It also has links to a digital version of this handbook, as well as to the other Patriots' Day Project resources. [[www.mghpact.org](http://www.mghpact.org)]

## **RESILIENCE**

### **Arthur Family Health on PBS KIDS**

This site provides basic information, games and activities, and videos of Dr. Paula Rauch of Massachusetts General Hospital (and an author of this handbook), which all address the topic of bolstering resilience in children exposed to upsetting events. [<http://pbskids.org/arthur/health/resilience>]

### **Center on the Developing Child**

The mission of the Center is to drive science-based innovation that achieves breakthrough outcomes for children facing adversity. Particular areas of focus include the needs of children who face poverty, maltreatment, violence, racial and ethnic discrimination, and family mental illness. [[www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)]

### **Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds**

This site provides information about the mental health and well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults who struggle with behavioral, emotional, or learning challenges. [[www.mghclaycenter.org](http://www.mghclaycenter.org)]

## **TRAUMA**

### **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)**

The NCTSN mission is to raise the standards of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, and their families and communities throughout the U.S. The website has information about the impact of trauma on children and families, as well as resources. [[www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org)]

### **National Center for PTSD**

The Center is dedicated to research and education on trauma and PTSD, and ensuring that the latest research findings help those exposed to trauma. [[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)]

### **Identifying Seriously Traumatized Children: Tips for Parents and Educators**

This publication by the National Association of School Psychologists describes the symptoms of severe trauma in children, and makes suggestions about an approach to getting help for these children. [[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/psycht\\_general.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/psycht_general.aspx)]

## **BEREAVEMENT**

### **The Dougy Center**

The Dougy Center's mission is to provide a safe place for children, teens, and young adults who are grieving a death to share their experiences. They do this through peer support groups, education, and training. The website contains information about the center, including news and events, as well as abundant resources. [[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)]

### **The Children's Room**

This is a Massachusetts nonprofit organization that describes itself as dedicated to creating safe, supportive communities so that no child, teen, or family has to grieve alone. The website has written guides to many topics, as well as information about services they provide to families and professionals. [<http://childrensroom.org>]

### **Death and Grief: Supporting Children and Youth**

This publication by the National Association of School Psychologists includes tips for adults to support grieving children, and guidance for children and teens with grieving friends and classmates. [[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/deathgrief.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/deathgrief.pdf)]

## **MENTAL ILLNESS**

### **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)**

The mission of AACAP is to promote the healthy development of children, adolescents, and families through advocacy, education, and research. The website provides information about child psychiatric challenges, as well as guides to many topics, including finding care. The site also contains links to additional resources for families and clinicians. [[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)]

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

SAMHSA is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities. The website includes information on a wide range of efforts to improve mental health, as well as therapist locators. [[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)]

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

The mission of NIMH is to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure. The website provides information on a number of mental health disorders, as well as research updates and other resources. [[www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml)]

## **MILITARY FAMILIES**

### **The Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital Home Base Program**

The Home Base Program offers clinical care and support services for post-9/11 service members, veterans, and their families throughout the deployment cycle, and community education about the “invisible wounds of war.” The Home Base Program is also engaged in research to develop better understanding and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). [[www.HomeBaseProgram.org](http://www.HomeBaseProgram.org)]

### **Staying Strong**

This parent guidance website for military connected families is associated with the Home Base Program. The website contains a number of videos that provide guidance about parenting in general, child development, and parenting in difficult circumstances. [[www.StayingStrong.org](http://www.StayingStrong.org)]

## **FINDING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

These resources are geared to those seeking a helping professional (therapist, psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, mental health counselor, et al.):

### **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)**

This lists several websites that can help you locate a therapist; it also provides information about evidence-based therapies for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in children. [[www.nctsn.org/about-us/about-this-web-site](http://www.nctsn.org/about-us/about-this-web-site)]

### **National Association of Social Workers**

This source lists several searchable websites for finding therapists with different backgrounds, including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health counselors. [[www.HelpStartsHere.org](http://www.HelpStartsHere.org)]

### **American Psychological Association (APA)**

This is the APA listing of licensed psychologists. [<http://locator.apa.org>]

### **Psychology Today**

The print magazine maintains an online listing of clinicians. [[www.therapists.PsychologyToday.com](http://www.therapists.PsychologyToday.com)]

## FOR EDUCATORS

### **Crisis Resource Guide: A Tool for Families, Schools, and Professionals**

#### **Working with Youth During a Crisis**

This is a guide from Children's Hospital Boston (the Children's Hospital Neighborhood Partnerships Program/CHNP), which summarizes web-based resources for schools and families, including topics such as crisis preparedness in schools, supporting youth impacted by a death, talking with youth about disasters and violence, and the impact of media during crises.

[[www.childrenshospital.org/chnp](http://www.childrenshospital.org/chnp)]

#### **Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators**

This toolkit was written by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The toolkit contains trauma facts and suggestions for educators, as well as specific guidance for school staff caring for students of all ages.

[[www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/Child\\_Trauma\\_Toolkit\\_Final.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/Child_Trauma_Toolkit_Final.pdf)]

#### **Helping Children After a Natural Disaster: Information for Parents and Teachers**

This online publication by the National Association of School Psychologists describes actions parent and teachers can take after specific natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.), and provides guidance for the immediate aftermath of these disasters.

[[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/naturaldisaster\\_ho.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/naturaldisaster_ho.aspx)]

#### **Coping with Crisis—Helping Children With Special Needs:**

##### **Tips for School Personnel and Parents**

This online resource of the National Association of School Psychologists addresses the impact of trauma in students with special needs, and ways in which parents and school personnel can best assist this population. [[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/specpop\\_general.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/specpop_general.aspx)]

#### **American Psychological Association Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers**

This is a concise guide for parents and teachers of children of all ages. The authors give specific information applicable to children in each age range (preschoolers, elementary school-age, etc.), including 10 useful tips for building resilience in children and teens.

[[www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx)]

## About the Authors

**Cindy Moore, PhD** is the Associate Director of the Marjorie E. Korff Parenting at a Challenging Time (PACT) Program at the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center, which provides parent guidance to support the emotional health and well-being of children when a parent is seriously ill. She speaks nationally about the PACT parent guidance model to physicians, nurses, mental health clinicians and educators. Dr. Moore graduated from Cornell University and the University of Virginia, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, and an Associate Psychologist in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at MGH, where she has a particular interest in providing care to bereaved adults and children.

**Paula K. Rauch, MD** is the founding director of the Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program at the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center and the Family Team Program Director for the Home Base Program (a partnership between the Red Sox Foundation and the Massachusetts General Hospital) serving post 9/11 veterans and their families.

Dr. Rauch graduated from Amherst College and the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and completed her psychiatry residency at Massachusetts General Hospital. She is board certified in adult, child and adolescent psychiatry and is an associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. She is an advisor to the Public Broadcasting Station “Arthur” cartoon and Family Health Website and co author of “Raising an Emotionally Healthy Child When a Parent is Sick.” Dr. Rauch serves on the Science Advisory Board for the Military Child Education Coalition and on the Amherst College Board of Trustees.

# Community Crises and Disasters

A Parent's Guide to Talking with Children of All Ages

Cynthia W. Moore, PhD and Paula K. Rauch, MD

As much as we might wish that children could grow up in a world free from disasters and crises, at some point, all families are faced with unexpected and upsetting situations. At these times, children and teenagers rely on parents and other trusted adults to help them make sense of what has happened, and parents respond in ways they hope will support children's emotional health and resilience. This isn't easy—it can be difficult both to help children feel safe when parents themselves are uncertain, and to know how much to tell children about upsetting events and what to say, especially when children of different ages are living at home.

*Community Crises and Disasters: A Parent's Guide to Talking with Children of All Ages* is designed as a resource that parents can turn to in a time of crisis, or ideally, in advance of a crisis. It provides practical information about children's reactions, and ideas about how to support their healthy coping. Stories of three families facing different types of crises illustrate these ideas, and provide a starting point for discussions about supporting children. In addition, detailed suggestions about how to talk with children after a crisis or disaster, with tips for different age groups, accompany each story.

MARJORIE E. KORFF PACT PROGRAM

# PACT

Parenting At a Challenging Time

This handbook was produced with continuing support from  
our colleagues at the Massachusetts General Hospital



The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds  
Developing Resilience through Engagement, Awareness and Media

