

# Community Behavioral Health Promotion and Prevention Commission

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PROPOSAL FOR PROMOTION AND PREVENTION-RELATED  
RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC  
ON THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, WITH A  
FOCUS ON THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF COVID ON  
COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND LOW-RESOURCE COMMUNITIES.

# Pandemic conditions and quarantines are having an impact on the behavioral health of people all over the world.

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In the United States, according to a CDC survey of a representative sample of adults over 18 conducted June 24-30, 2020, 40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health condition. This was two to four times the prevalence of specific conditions cited in a similar survey conducted a year earlier.

Also from the CDC, data on mental health-related emergency department visits for children and youth under the age of 18 during the pandemic have increased substantially compared to data from 2019: 24% for children ages 5-11 and 31% for youth aged 12-17.

# The events of 2020 include many stressors and challenges:

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- Presence of a novel, life-threatening pathogen
- Illness and loss of loved ones
- Quarantine, which has been shown to produce post-traumatic stress disorder in children (Jiao et al., 2020)
- Social isolation which may impact the mental health of youth up to nine years later (Loades, et al., 2020)
- Disruption to education and access to health care, including mental health care
- Structural racism, violence against Black people in encounters with police, threats of violence against Asian people related to blaming China for the pandemic
- Housing and food insecurity
- Increased risk of child abuse and domestic violence
- Exposure to unhealthy coping behaviors

(Cites from the Judge Baker Children's Center's brief "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children, Youth and Families"  
<https://jbcc.harvard.edu/news/impact-covid-19-pandemic-children-youth-and-families-spotlight-policy-brief>)

# What can help?

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From the Massachusetts Childhood Trauma Task Force's June report "Protecting our Children's Well-Being During COVID-19":

- Finding #5: Technology-Based Resources Hold the Potential to Overcome Many (But Not All) Barriers to Mental Health Services – If Allocated Equitably
- Finding #6: Caring Adults in Regular Contact with Children are Key to Recovery

# Building on what exists:

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*There Are Many Existing Initiatives and Intervention Models Focused on Childhood Trauma and Mental Health Upon Which We Can Build*

HandholdMA.org

Massachusetts COVID 19 Trauma Response

LINK-KID

Family Resource Centers

DPH Suicide Prevention Task Force

Substance Use Helpline

Network of Care

Referral Sources

# HandholdMA.org

You know your child better than anyone. But even you have a few questions.

COVID-19 is putting incredible pressure on families. You might be noticing your child is struggling in new ways, or that old problems are getting worse. Should you worry about your child's behavioral health? We're here to help you figure that out.



▶ HEAR FROM PARENTS LIKE YOU (3 MINUTES)



### Should I worry?

Is your kid just being a kid, or is their behavior something to worry about? Learn about signs to look for and get suggestions on what to do next.

[Learn More](#)



### What can I do?

Tips, tools, and strategies that have worked for other families, sorted by topic, and picked by Handhold. These are things you can learn about or do from home.

[Learn More](#)



### Who can help?

Our top picks for community organizations and government resources that can help you locate the right mental health service for your child and family.

[Learn More](#)



Produced by the Office of the Child Advocate, Department of Mental Health and EOHS

# HandholdMA.org

## Where To Find Help

Below are select resources that can help you take the next step. People in your life already like your child's pediatrician or a school counselor might also be good starting points.



### Search lots of choices so you can find the right fit for your family

This website includes a searchable database of over 5,000 mental health and related social services. If you want to explore options ranging from therapy, Network of Care Massachusetts is a good place to start.

[Read More](#)



### Talk to a person who will guide your search for support

Call 1-888-244-6843 (M-F between 9-5) to speak with a resource counselor at the Interface Referral Service at William James College. Counselors can help you find a behavioral health treatment program in your area. This is a free resource available to Massachusetts residents in more than 60 participating communities.

[Read More](#)



### Talk to a person that will help find trauma support near you

If you are worried about your child because they experienced a traumatic event such as witnessing violence, bullying, a severe injury, or death of a loved one, LINK-KID can help. When you call 1-855-LINK-KID you'll speak with a trained specialist who can assist you in finding trauma treatment in your area. This is a free resource available to all Massachusetts residents.

[Read More](#)



### Reach out to people from your community who are trained to help

A Family Resource Center (FRC) is located in each of the 14 Massachusetts counties. The FRC can help you locate resources related to child care, education, English as a Second Language, housing, legal, family support, and much more! These services are free and open to all families.

[Read More](#)



### Call or chat online for help finding substance use treatment

Chat in real-time with a knowledgeable Helpline Specialist who can assist you in finding substance use treatment for you and/or your child. You can also call to speak with a Helpline Specialist at 1-800-327-5050. This is a free, confidential resource available to all Massachusetts residents.

[Read More](#)

# Massachusetts COVID19 Trauma Response



Statewide number:  
888-215-4920

**Riverside Trauma Center**  
a service of  
**Riverside Community Care**  
THE HELP YOU NEED CLOSE TO HOME

Email:  
[MassSupport@riversidecc.org](mailto:MassSupport@riversidecc.org)

Riverside Trauma Center

# Subcommittee Recommendations for Action: Themes

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- Public education about the mental health impact of the pandemic and how to support mental health and well-being for people of all ages
  - Equip caring adults in regular contact with children with the skills to support their mental health and well-being
  - Help schools access mental health services and supports for students and staff
  - Parents need information, access to peer support and help with basic needs

Communities hardest hit by the pandemic should receive priority access to these interventions

# Recommendations:

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1. Designate or hire staff to be added to Commonwealth's Pandemic Command Center to coordinate the State's COVID-19 Public Mental Health Response, including working with a broad coalition of stakeholders
2. Develop and implement a public health campaign to educate Massachusetts residents about the mental health impact of the pandemic and how to support mental health and well-being for themselves and others, including materials targeted to youth and young adults.
3. *Equip* adults who work with children and youth with skills to support their well-being:
  - MassSupport consultations for teachers, child-care workers, etc.
  - Free online trainings in Mental Health First Aid for Youth
4. *Support* adults who work with children and youth: telephonic support, online groups and in-person group consultations by MassSupport

# Recommendations, cont.:

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## 5. Helping schools access mental health services for students

- Explore expanding Project Interface to cities hardest hit by COVID
- State agencies facilitate communication between community-based mental health providers and schools

## 6. Support for Parents

- Widely promote HandHoldMA.org
- Create and publicize parent support groups
- Widely publicize sources of support for basic needs, including Family Support Centers
- Offer free online MH First Aid for Youth trainings for parents
- Fund Family Partners and Community Health Workers to reach out to parents of children not attending online or in-person school in communities hardest hit by COVID