



MARJORIE E. KORFF PACT PROGRAM

**PACT**

Parenting At a Challenging Time



The Clay Center for  
Young Healthy Minds

Developing Resilience through Engagement,  
Awareness and Media (DREAM)

## The Anniversary of the Boston Marathon Bombing and Lockdown Tips for Talking with your Child

Part of the **Patriots' Day Project**, a collaboration of the Marjorie E. Korff PACT Program and The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital

It is approaching a year since the tragedy at the 2013 Boston Marathon unfolded. As families and communities prepare for the anniversary in April, and stories about those most impacted are in the news, some parents may be wondering *“How do I talk with my child about these troubling events?”*

Anticipating this uncertainty, the **Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program at Massachusetts General Hospital** and **The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds** surveyed 400 Boston-area parents to better understand the impact of last year's challenges on these parents and their children.

Seventy percent of those surveyed shared that it was challenging for them as parents to deal with the events of the 2013 Boston Marathon. The findings indicate that the impact on individual children varied, and we can anticipate that there will be variation in the reactions to the upcoming anniversary, too. A child's temperament, personal experiences and memories from last year will be among the factors affecting the intensity and duration of that child's reactions. Most parents recognize that communication is key to supporting a child's resilience; we found three-quarters of the parents surveyed either initiated conversations with their children, or allowed them to take the lead, answering questions as they arose.

As we face the anniversary, here are some tips to guide these important discussions with your child:

### For young children (age 3-5 years):

- Young children think about the world in more concrete and egocentric ways than do older children and adults, and also tend to focus on parts of a complex situation instead of grasping the bigger picture. It's therefore easier to talk with children at this age about a complex event like the marathon if the conversation is connected to their own current experience. For example, if they catch sight of a newspaper photograph, you might ask them, “What do you remember about the marathon last year?”
- Young children can become confused if adults assure them that something is safe, while they themselves sound anxious. Ensure that your words and tone of voice tell the same story.
- If young children have memories that are still frightening to them, reassure them that the scary event is over. Focus on reaffirming their day-to-day experience of safety through maintaining predictable routines and calm caregivers.

### For school-aged children (age 6-12 years):

- It is difficult to protect school-aged children from hearing about bad things that happen in the world—but often easier to gauge their understanding of those events. Ask them what, if anything, they are seeing or hearing about this year's marathon. Is it being talked about at school? Do they have questions about what happened last year, or what is happening this year?
- Children at this age may be especially concerned about the safety of them and their loved ones. Reassure them by reiterating your personal sense of security, and the unlikelihood of last year's event ever repeating itself.

- Talk, too, about all the ways your family and community are ensuring that this year's marathon is safe. If you plan to attend, make sure they know that the enhanced police presence is there to prevent problems—not because there *are* problems.
- Encourage children at this age to use their natural drive to take actions that do good for others—and make them feel good in return. For example, they might contribute their allowance to The One Fund, or create a sign cheering on returning runners.

### For adolescents (age 13-18 years):

- Adolescents are increasingly engaged with peers, making it difficult for parents to monitor the scope of information they are accessing. However, as best you can, try to gauge the *impact* of that information. You might do this by saying, "I'm seeing and hearing a lot about this year's marathon—sometimes more than

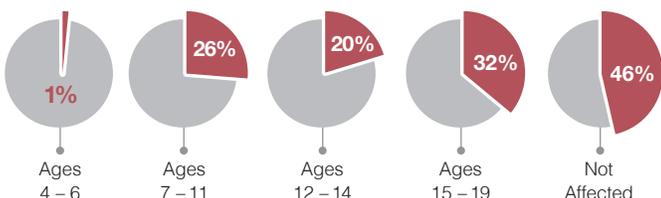
I'd like to. Do you think the coverage is helpful, or is it making people anxious? Are your friends talking about going to watch? Are *you* wanting to go?"

- Adolescents are always pushing for more independence, and the kinds of boundaries that should entail might not be quite as clear to you at present. It is therefore worthwhile to talk with them about the scenarios at this year's event that are worrying you, such as them getting separated from friends, or being pulled into situations they aren't yet equipped to deal with. Don't be afraid to follow your gut instinct—even if it's something they vehemently disagree with.
- Make sure adolescents are aware of the increased security measures in place, and anticipate the reactions or emotions such knowledge may stir in them.

## Impact of the 2013 Boston Marathon events on local children

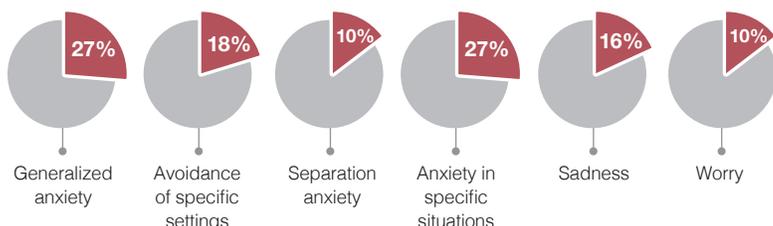
The above guidance is informed by our survey of 400 parents with children between the ages of 4-19 who reside in the lockdown communities. Information gathered about how children were affected by the bombing and lockdown last year may be helpful as you think about the ways in which the anniversary may affect your child.

Percentage of children within specific age groups who were identified by parents as exhibiting a behavioral change as a result of the 2013 Boston Marathon events:



Those children with the greatest amount of media exposure (**8+ hours**) were more likely to also experience ongoing behaviors in the months following the 2013 Boston Marathon events.

Behavioral changes in children during the first few weeks following the 2013 Boston Marathon events:



The duration of children's symptoms following the 2013 Boston Marathon events varied:

**20%** HAD SYMPTOMS IN THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

**11%** HAD SYMPTOMS IN THE FOLLOWING MONTHS

## About the Patriots' Day Project collaborators

### Marjorie E. Korff PACT Program

The Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program offers guidance to parents with serious illnesses who are patients at Massachusetts General Hospital, and concerned about the impact their diagnoses and treatments may have on their children. PACT staff clinicians work closely with parents, drawing on their combined knowledge and experience to develop individualized plans parents can follow to support their children's continued healthy development. To learn more about the Patriots' Day Project and the PACT Program, visit us at [www.mghpact.org](http://www.mghpact.org).

### The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital is a web-based center that disseminates reliable information to parents and other caregivers about the mental health needs of children and young adults who struggle with behavioral, emotional and/or learning challenges. As part of this mission, The Clay Center promotes resilience, the process of using inner strength, relationships and self-awareness to help young people cope with and overcome stressful situations and events. To learn more about The Clay Center and explore our extensive library of content, visit us at [www.pathstodream.org](http://www.pathstodream.org), or find us on [Facebook \(/massgeneralclaycenter\)](#) and [Twitter \(@MGHClayCenter\)](#).

*This publication is being funded with support from the Patriots' Day Fund, a charitable fund established by Fidelity Investments® employees in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings.*