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PRESS RELEASE

Massachusetts Launches New Family-Friendly Website to Help Parents Support Children's Mental Health

HandholdMA.org provides free tools and resources for parents concerned about their children's mental health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

10/23/2020

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

Office of the Child Advocate

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BOSTON — Recognizing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on children's mental health, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) joined forces with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to launch HandholdMA.org (https://handholdma.org/), a new family-friendly website for parents and guardians of school-aged children who are concerned about their child's mental health.

HandholdMA.org (https://www.handholdma.org) provides families with tips, tools, and resources designed to help them navigate their child's mental health journey with confidence. The content, which is targeted to families with kids age 6-12 years, was developed by a team of mental health and child development experts as well as family and community partners. A creative team from IDEO Cambridge designed the user experience and branding.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that there has been an impact on the emotional well being of many residents across the Commonwealth, including our youngest residents," **said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders.** "As families continue to navigate these unprecedented times, tapping into expertise through HandholdMA.org can help them better understand their child's mental health and find available resources."

"Every family in the Commonwealth has experienced stress, disruption, and isolation due to the pandemic, but we know from the data that the impact on immigrant communities and communities of color has been particularly severe," **said Maria Mossaides, the Commonwealth's Child Advocate**. "It's more important than ever that we are reaching out to offer support to families in these communities, and we greatly appreciate the work of the family and community partners who helped us ensure this website would feel welcoming and relevant to individuals from all backgrounds."

"Parents who have 'been there' told us what they wished they had known sooner. Mental health experts – including child psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists – selected the most relevant and useful resources for this website," **said DMH Acting Commissioner Brooke Doyle.** "We used all of this feedback to develop a site that we hope families will find immediately useful, no matter where they are in their mental health journey."

The content on HandholdMA.org (https://handholdma.org/) is organized in three main sections:

- **Should I worry?** This section helps parents/guardians explore if their child is just being a kid or if their behavior is something to worry about. Families can learn about signs to look for and get suggestions on what to do next.
- **What can I do?** These are tips, tools, and strategies that have worked for other families in the past and are things they can learn about or do from home.
- **Who can help?** The final section includes carefully selected community organizations and government resources to help families find the right mental health services.

HandholdMA.org (https://handholdma.org/) was developed with input from individuals representing the diversity of Massachusetts' communities, and is available in six languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese.

Office of the Child Advocate

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is an independent state agency that provides oversight of state services for children in order to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely and quality services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth's most vulnerable and at-risk children have the opportunity to thrive. Through collaboration with public and private stakeholders, the OCA identifies gaps in state services and recommends improvements in policy and practice. The OCA also serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or are eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.

Executive Office of Health & Human Services
The Executive Office of Health and Human Services is the largest secretariat in Massachusetts' Executive Branch and is comprised of 12 agencies, in addition to 2 soldiers' homes and the MassHealth program. Our efforts are focused on the health, resilience, and independence of the one in four residents of the Commonwealth we serve. Our public health programs touch every community in the Commonwealth.

Department of Mental Health
The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) is an agency within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and is the state mental health authority. DMH assures and provides access to services and supports to meet the mental health needs of individuals of all ages, enabling them to live, work, and participate in their communities. DMH provides services to approximately 29,000 individuals with severe and persistent mental health conditions across the Commonwealth, including children and adolescents and their families.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

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Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

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The Department of Mental Health, as the State Mental Health Authority, assures and provides access to services and supports to meet the mental health needs of individuals of all ages; enabling them to live, work and participate in their communities.

More (/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-mental-health)

Office of the Child Advocate (/orgs/office-of-the-child-advocate)

The OCA works to ensure Massachusetts state agencies provide children with quality services and that children receiving services are protected from harm. We work with families, legislators, social workers, and other professionals to improve state services for children and families.

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HandholdMA.org (https://handholdma.org/)

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