



Banner Health

Cardon Children's
Medical Center

My Brave Book

Helping kids in crisis



By Kathy Thomas, Ph.D.

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Dear parents and caregivers,

My Brave Book is intended for children who have experienced shock or loss due to a traumatic event. It is also intended to help reduce the long-term emotional and psychological effects (traumatic stress) that can affect the rate of physical healing of a medical condition. Research has shown that unresolved trauma can have an impact on a child's overall health, rate of healing and even their susceptibility to chronic medical illnesses over the span of their lifetime.

A traumatic event can be any event that the child did not expect to happen that threatened their sense of safety and security. Traumatic stress may come from firsthand experience of an event that might seem relatively minor to an adult, such as having a broken bone from an injury or fall, to more serious concerns such as a hospitalization, or physical or sexual abuse. Children can also be traumatized by simply being a witness to a major event such as a car accident, domestic violence, a near-drowning, divorce, sudden illness or death of a friend, family member or pet.

While not all children experience traumatic stress in response to an event, adults may not realize that seemingly minor events may in fact be traumatic for a child. For this reason, it is important to look for cues in the child's behavior. A child who has been traumatized may be withdrawn, quiet, moody, restless, irritable and difficult to soothe. Conversely, they may return to immature behaviors such as rocking, thumb-sucking, or separation anxiety. There may be an increase in impulsive or out-of-control behavior.

When a disaster occurs, things happen very quickly and all at once. To expedite healing, research tells us that children need to slow things down, share their feelings about the loss, feel heard and understood, feel reassured about the future and to receive honest answers to their questions about the future.



My Brave Book helps with this in many ways. First, the physical act of coloring is soothing and calming because the drawings are safely contained in pictures and frames. It promotes self-expression, and the child's ability to exercise control over the artwork has a healing effect. Second, *My Brave Book* allows children to process and make sense of the event that just happened. This is a critical step toward complete trauma recovery. Third, *My Brave Book* provides a practical tool for the child to use that is therapeutically grounded. Finally, *My Brave Book* provides caregivers an opportunity to gain insight into the child's feelings and provides an opportunity to listen, communicate, provide reassurance, and respond to the child's concerns.

My Brave Book can be given to children at any time — in the emergency room, in a hospital bed, in the waiting room, or at home after discharge from the hospital. Children can color the pages independently or alongside an adult. It can help to reduce the child's distress immediately following an event.

If your child has symptoms of trauma-related stress, be honest, be reassuring, spend extra time and give them your full attention. Allow them to express their feelings and share your feelings about the event with them. Set limits but avoid scolding your child for regressive behaviors started after the trauma. If your child cannot articulate their feelings, encourage them to draw, color, paint and play. Return to a normal routine as much as possible.

Cardon Children's Medical Center is dedicated to supporting all families and children who have been through a trauma. If you have any questions about the purpose of this book or where you can seek help, please contact me at (480) 412-7486.

Kathy Thomas, PhD
Cardon Children's Medical Center

"My Brave Book provides caregivers an opportunity to gain insight into the child's feelings and provides an opportunity to listen, communicate, provide reassurance, and respond to the child's concerns."

**Something really bad just happened
and I was there.**



This is a picture of what happened.

I was so scared! But I am safe now.



This is a picture of my safe place now.

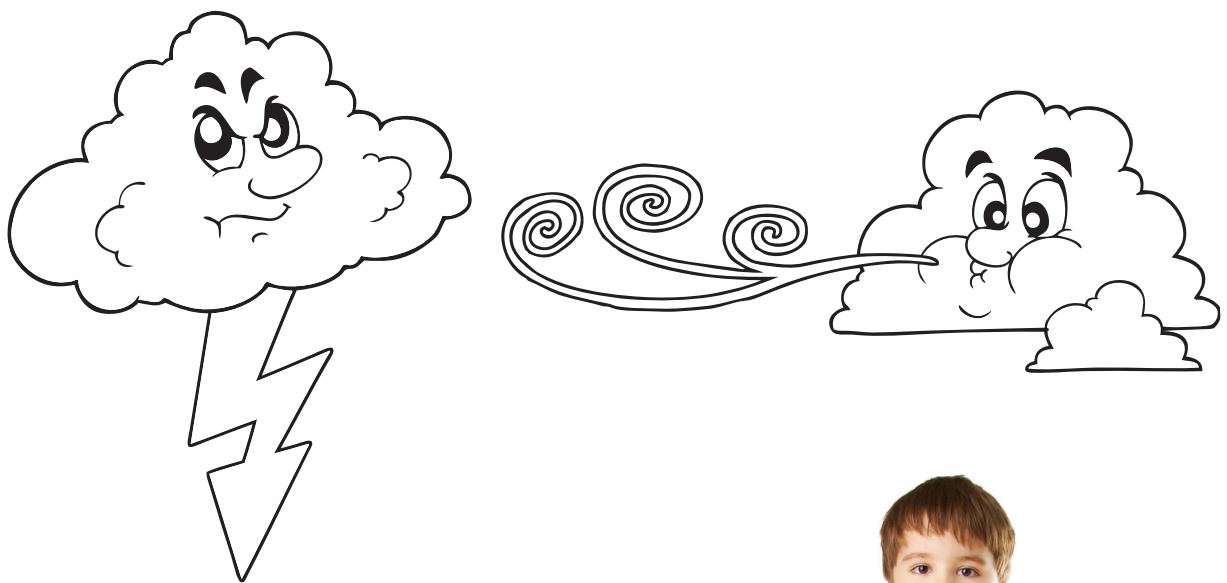
It helps to talk about what happened.



I can talk to (circle one):

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| • Mom | • Pastor | • Counselor |
| • Dad | • Policeman | • Nurse |
| • Grandparent | • Teacher | • Doctor |

**People that love me are very sad
that this bad thing happened.**



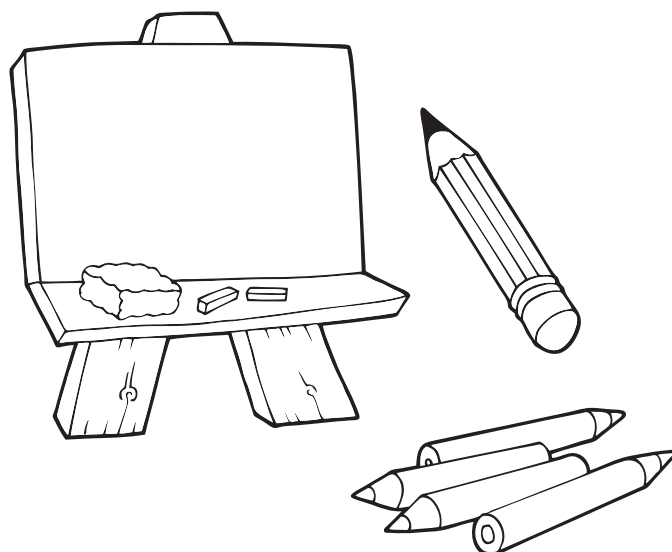
**Sometimes I think about what happened
and I feel scared all over again.**

When this happens, I can:

Talk to a grownup



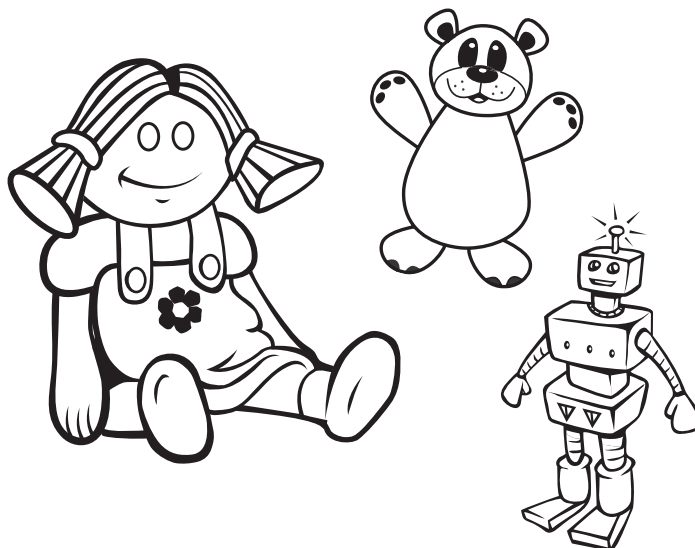
Draw a picture



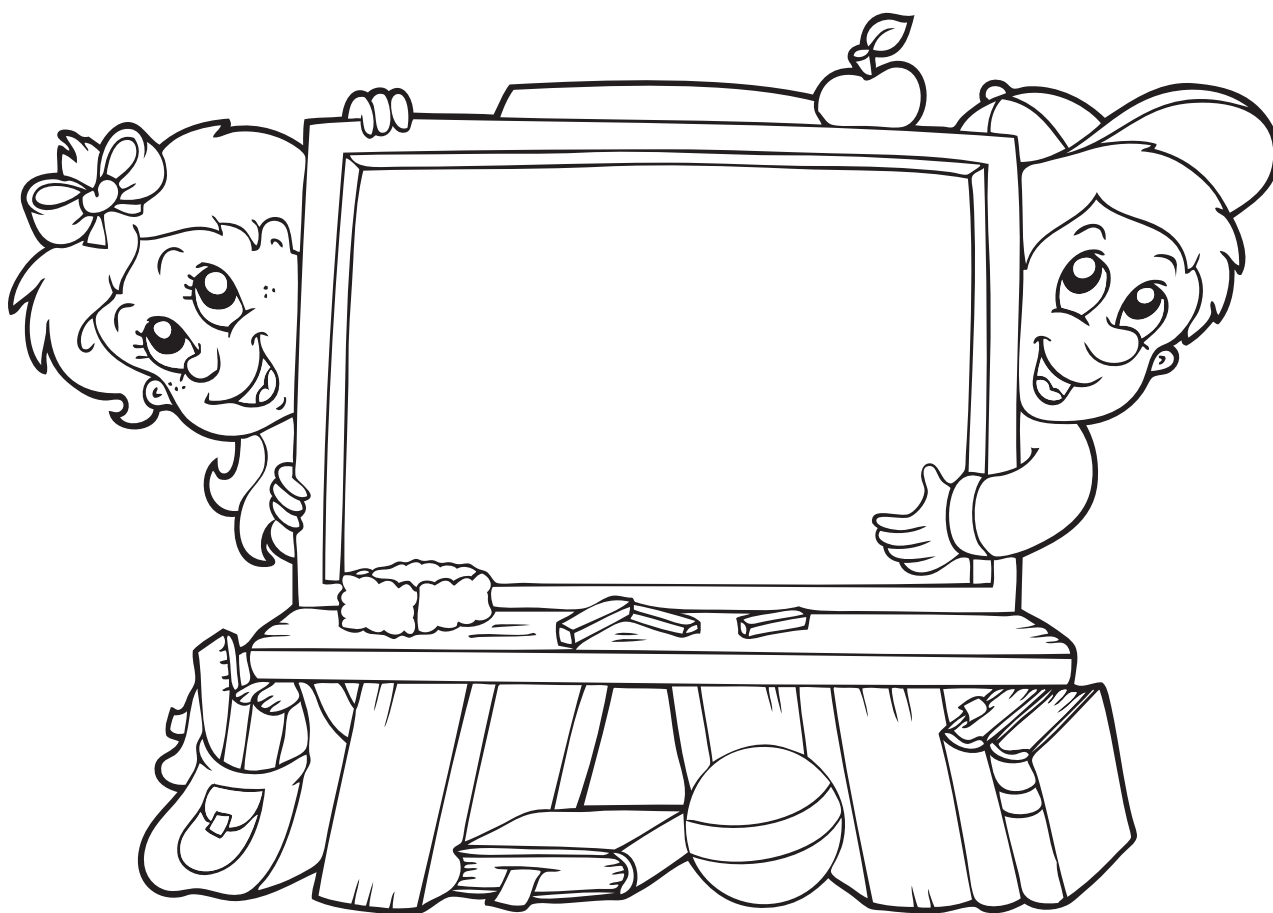
Play with my pet



Play with my dolls



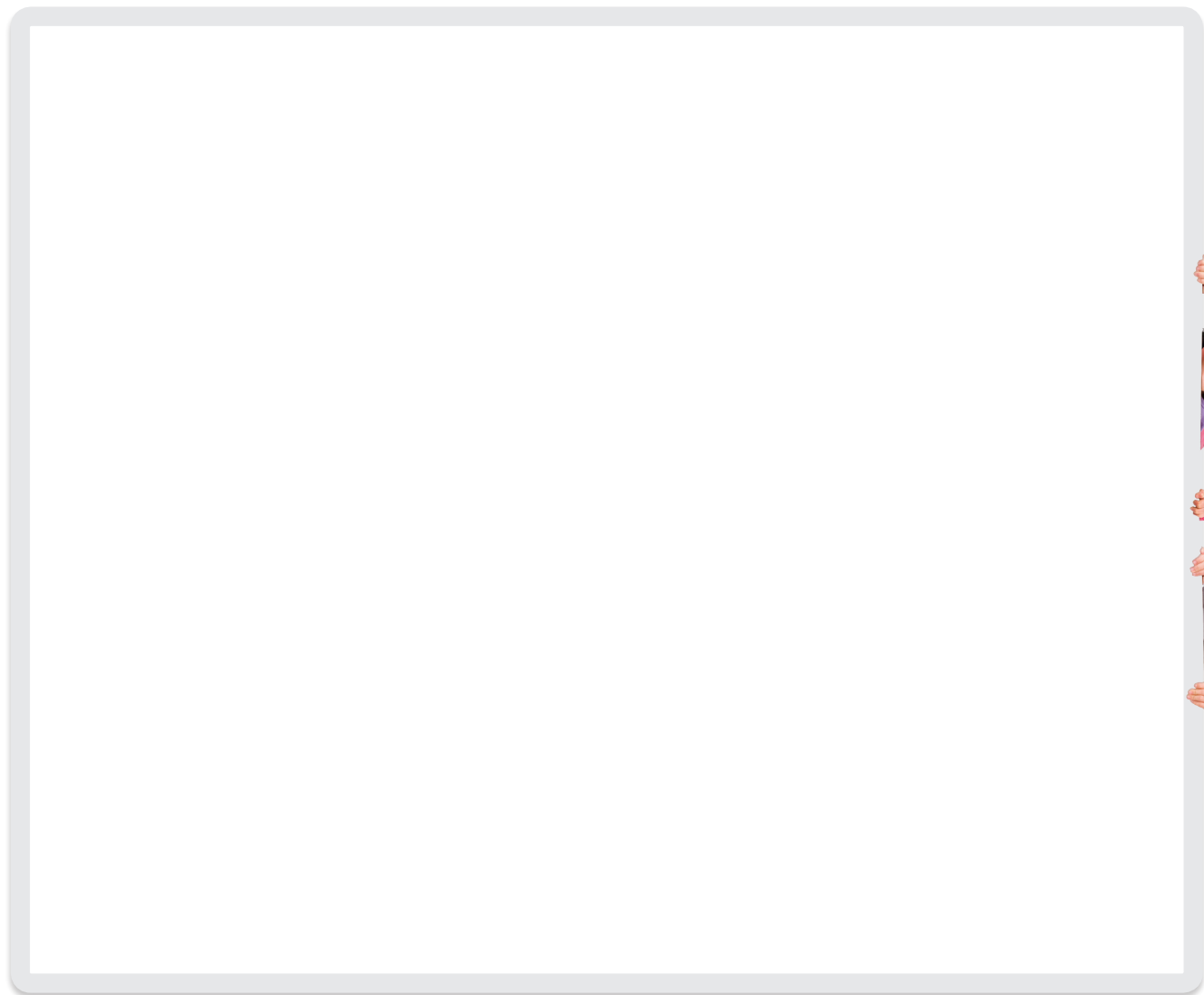
Or I can (choose your own idea):



I know I will feel better soon.



I am loved by: _____



**Here is a picture of something fun
we did together.**

**People who had a scary thing happen
(like me) are strong inside.**



**People who have scary things happen
and talk about it are also brave and smart.**



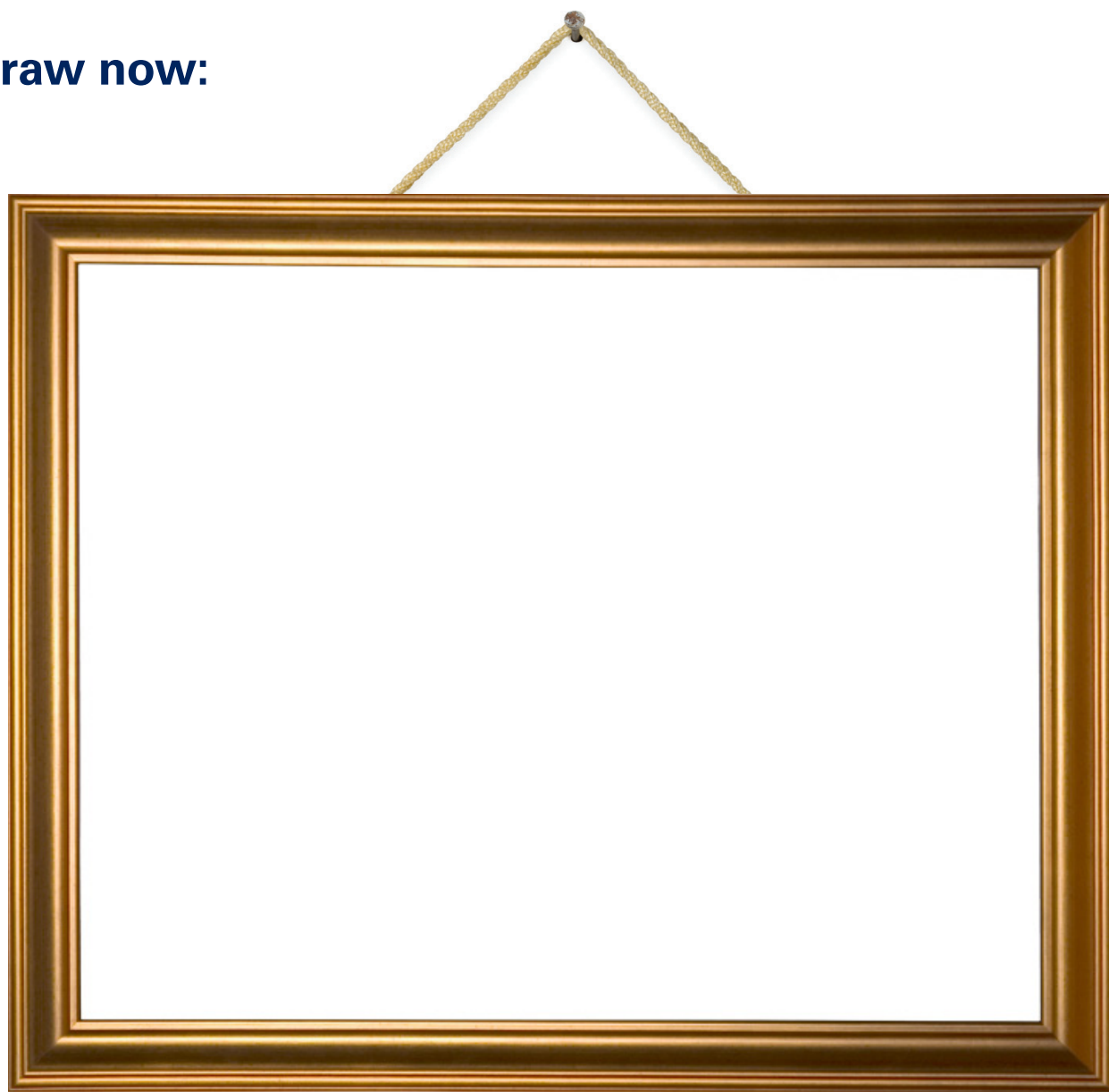
**I wish I could fix everything.
A lot of things are different now.**

**Draw a picture of something
that has changed and is different now.**

Draw before:



Draw now:



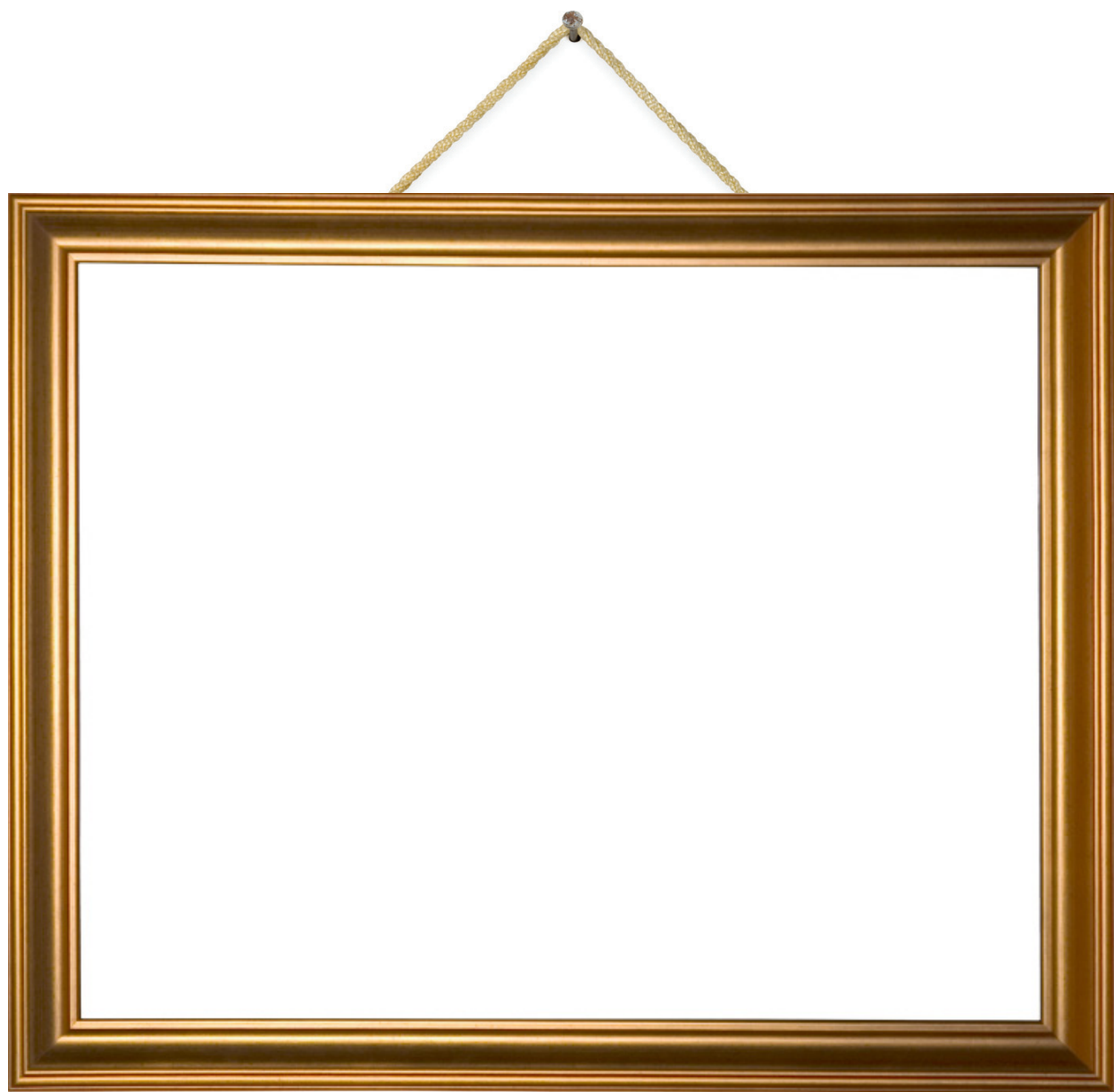
Sometimes I feel a little scared about how things have changed, but everyone tells me that the scary feelings will go away after a while.



**What happened was not my fault.
I did not make it happen.**



Here is a picture of something that I will soon get to do. I am looking forward to it!



**I am strong, smart,
and feeling better every day!**





Kathy Thomas

earned her Ph.D. in Health Psychology/Behavioral Medicine from the University of North Texas and completed her post-doctoral residency at the Child Study Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Her pre-doctoral internship was completed at Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she worked extensively with the PCMC Center for Safe and Healthy Families, the outpatient family clinic and the University of Utah Neurobehavioral Clinic.

Her scope of practice is broad. In addition to her neurocognitive training and research, Dr. Thomas has experience teaching undergraduate classes at the University of North Texas, and graduate assessment courses at Pepperdine University Graduate School in Malibu, California. She has also published parenting articles, been a requested speaker covering a variety of topics related to pediatric intervention, child development, and parenting concerns. She is the co-author of Kidstep, a non-profit therapeutic program for children of divorce endorsed by the family courts in Tarrant County, Texas. She is a frequent speaker for community organizations and schools on subjects such as parenting, families in crisis and increasing resilience in children.

Dr. Thomas has particular expertise in the areas of neuropsychological assessment of children and adolescents with medical and/or developmental issues, applied behavioral interventions for chronic pain and chronically ill patients, and evaluation and treatment of traumatized and/or abused children. She is currently Director of the Pediatric Neuropsychology Division at Cardon Children's Medical Center, part of nonprofit Banner Health, in Mesa, Arizona.



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***Our nonprofit mission:** We exist to make a difference in people's lives through excellent patient care.*