

# #LeftInLockdown briefing – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disabled children



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Partnership

The Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) has been regularly interviewing and surveying a panel of 1,200 families with disabled children throughout 2021. Our research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on disabled children, young people, and their families.

## Delays to vital support services

More than

# 50%

**of families are unable to access therapies vital for their disability**

such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, or occupational therapy (April 2021).

# 60%

**of families are experiencing delays and challenges with health service appointments they need.**

These could be check-ins with clinicians to manage a child's condition or to review treatments for those with progressive conditions (April 2021).

*My child has regressed irretrievably; I despair he will ever be able to catch up.*

More than

# 80%

**of families have seen both informal and formal support services**

such as from charities and local authorities, cut during the pandemic. This includes short breaks, day care, and residential care (January 2021).

*There has been no occupational therapy (OT) support at all since January 2021, even when my child has OT provision on his Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).*

*I am physically and mentally exhausted having looked after my son almost single handedly for such a long time.*



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## The impact of these delays

As a result of delays to education, health appointments and therapies,

over

# 50%

**of parents reported that their child's condition had worsened due to the impacts of the pandemic.**

(January 2021)

Parents highlighted a negative impact in hard earned life skills in their disabled child, such as being out and about (53%) communicating with others (49%) and interacting with strangers (47%) (March 2021).

**Despite lockdown restrictions easing,**

# 1 in 2

parents and

# 3 in 4

**disabled children are socially isolated.**

– rates which are higher than the general population (April 2021).

**A staggering**

# 65%

**of parents had possible or probable depression.**

(April 2021)

*He has developed an agonizing complication condition to his main disability. No specialists have been available to see him.*

*I am really concerned that my son has only done around 12 weeks in school in the last year (March to March) and seems to be regressing in some of his learning abilities and behaviours.*



## The need for a recovery plan

The DCP is calling for a **COVID-19 recovery plan** for disabled children and families, with ring-fenced funding, to make up for the disproportionate impact they have felt from support services being reduced. This plan should include:

- ☼ Catch-up for missed therapies.
- ☼ Short breaks for families to address high levels of family exhaustion.
- ☼ Flexibility to extend or allow repeat funding for disabled young people in further education.
- ☼ Additional support for the mental health of disabled children and families.
- ☼ Access to activities to overcome social isolation.

Despite reassurances from the government that support for disabled children should be returning, our research shows that this is not happening fast enough. **We need targeted policies to ensure no disabled child is left behind from the pandemic recovery.**



## For more information on the DCP's research and campaigns, please visit:

[disabledchildrenpartnership.org.uk](https://disabledchildrenpartnership.org.uk)

or email us on:

[disabledchildrens.partnership@mencap.org.uk](mailto:disabledchildrens.partnership@mencap.org.uk)

Statistics in this briefing are from three DCP reports of surveys of parent carers – The Longest Lockdown (January 2021); The Loneliest Lockdown (March 2021) and No End In Sight (May 2021) - all of which are available to download on our website.