



Disabled  
Children's  
Partnership

**Pears**  
Foundation



# Then There Was Silence: *Report summary*

A briefing on the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) and Pears Learning Hub final report into the impact of the pandemic on disabled children, young people and their families.

September  
2021

# Summary

This briefing highlights the key findings from *Then There Was Silence*, the final report from the Pears Learning Hub, a partnership between the DCP and the Pears Foundation, on the impact of the pandemic on disabled children and families. The report draws on evidence from a number of surveys of and interviews with parent carers; Freedom of Information requests of local councils and health trusts; and other research and sources of evidence. This summarises the proposed steps for central and local government, and the NHS.

To view all of the DCP's research into the pandemic, visit:  
[disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk](https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk)

“My non-SEN children have had to deal with the physical tantrums, aggression from their sister; sadness seeing their parents attacked, anxiety seeing their parents row about how best to cope, and they've overheard discussions about lack of money.

- Parent Carer



# Key findings - the impact of the pandemic on families



**Children and families have been isolated, abandoned and ignored.**

## 9 in 10

were socially isolated in June, with three quarters seeing no improvement over the course of 2021 - despite lockdown measures easing.

Isolation affected the whole family, with

## 65%

of parents and

## 72%

of siblings also isolated in June. These figures are much higher than the general population.



**Covid restrictions meant services were stopped or reduced; and many are still slow to return**

Paediatric Pain Management clinics were reduced by

## 84%

**The mental health and wellbeing of all the family has deteriorated**

There was also a shocking

## 60%

increase in referrals to paediatric emergency mental health services

Parental anxiety was consistently high with more than

## 80%

of parent carers of disabled children having some form of anxiety despite the easing of restrictions

# Key findings - the impact of the pandemic on families



**Children's conditions have worsened and needs become more complex; delays in assessments mean needs haven't been identified**

**40%**

reduction in  
paediatric surgery

Almost

**50%**

reduction in hospital  
activity for 0-5 year olds  
than before pandemic

**67%**

67% of trusts completed  
fewer physiotherapy  
assessments within the  
13 weeks target



**CLOSED**



My daughter's mental health can be so bad, that she spends most of it in her room. A good day is if she comes out to use the toilet. So when she's like that I get into trouble for not taking her younger sibling to school. I can't leave her and they don't help me so either way I can't get it right.

**- Parent Carer**

# 5 steps for central and local government and the NHS

In light of the significant detrimental impacts disabled children and their families have experienced throughout the pandemic, the government must step up and take action if they are to have the same opportunities for recovery as their peers.

1

Prioritise the meeting the needs of disabled children and their families within covid recovery plans and programmes

2

Tackle the backlog in assessments and ensure that children's needs are re-assessed in light of missed support during the pandemic

3

Ensure the right support is in place for all children and families, including education, health (including mental health), therapies and equipment

4

Take a whole family approach to assessments and support, including siblings. This should include the provision of respite/short breaks and opportunities for families to take part in activities to overcome the isolation felt by so many families

5

Invest in health and care services through the Comprehensive Spending Review





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

 @DCPCampaign

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The Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) is a growing coalition of more than 90 charities who have joined forces, working closely in partnership with parents, to campaign for improved health and social care for disabled children, young people and their families. We are administered by Royal Mencap Society (registered company in England and Wales no. 00550457; registered charity numbers are 222377 in England and Wales, and SC041079 in Scotland).