

# Impact of Covid

## Common Challenges

### *Impact on Behaviour*

#### **During the pandemic**

Parents living on lower incomes were more likely to report negative changes to their baby's behaviour. While this may be a subjective observation, it could also be caused by the pandemic increasing worry, anxiety and stress amongst parents, which a baby picks up on. It could also be caused by new parents having less access to peers and activities outside of the home, which can increase worry about whether a baby's behaviour is normal or problematic. Either way, it indicates that there was a direct disproportionate impact of the pandemic even on the youngest children (Brown 2021).

The imposed isolation of families during the pandemic contributed to the [increased abuse and neglect of young children](#). Social isolation is the greatest risk factor for abuse and neglect, as are stress, poverty and loss of access to support services. As family stress goes up latent aggressions surface more, and rates of domestic conflict and violence increased. Behaviours which may have been kept out of the home in normal times, now occurred inside the home, while children had less access to safe spaces such as schools and nurseries.

#### **Ongoing impact**

Young children who are not used to interacting with peers can struggle to engage in group settings and find them stressful. They may be more anxious or display more aggressive behaviours. Less opportunity to practice negotiation and compromise can lead to children struggling to handle everyday conflict situations. This translates to a lot of teacher or early years practitioner time being occupied with helping children manage peer conflict and promoting appropriate behaviours, rather than child-led play or early learning activities.

The pandemic's adverse impact on language development contributes to behaviour difficulties: a child who struggles to verbalise their feelings and needs very well is more likely to express their frustrations and needs through challenging behaviour.

There is evidence that children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) or additional support needs (ASN), those from low-income families, and those in single-adult households continue to show [elevated behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties](#) even two years after the start of the pandemic. It is likely that this will continue unless appropriate support is provided.



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In 2023, schools and nursery settings report a stark increase in absenteeism since the pandemic. This clearly reduces learning opportunities and disrupts routines and learning for a range of children across the UK, including the most marginalised. There are many potential reasons for this. For some children, home schooling may have been a more positive experience, others may not have experienced a positive transition and developed an ambivalence towards school. Schools are necessarily large group settings, which, considering that the pandemic curtailed peer interactions so pervasively, may be more of a change than children are able to deal with after the pandemic. Higher rates of absenteeism may be the result of greater concerns around sending a slightly unwell child into school, or of catching an illness for clinically vulnerable children.

