

Impact of Covid

Common Challenges

Impact on Parents

During the pandemic

When considering the impact of COVID on babies and young children, it is also necessary to consider how parents were affected. During the pandemic, the [cost of looking after children increased](#). Household food costs increased while restrictions made it harder for parents to access low-cost food. Parents also had to [spend more money](#) to provide activities for their children at home and used appliances more, while experiencing a drop in income if furloughed, or even job losses.

Parents spoke of feeling isolated and that their support network broke down. This was felt particularly acutely by new parents. For pregnant parents, maternity care changed drastically. The good practice that supports this crucial transition to parenthood and early maternal-child relationships was all but undone: women had to attend pregnancy appointments alone and their partner's presence was restricted during and after labour, with further restrictions on visiting postnatal and neonatal wards. Mothers were even required to wear masks during birth or postnatally (Brown 2021).

With a lot of healthcare provision moving remotely, and the knowledge that the NHS was overwhelmed with COVID patients, mothers were reluctant to seek medical care or worried to catch COVID when attending appointments. This may have led to serious conditions being missed and a more general reluctance amongst parents to seek medical help for themselves or their baby/child.

Financial pressures impacted on the wellbeing of parents. When parents experience stress, this impacts on their babies and there is clear evidence that maternal mental health continues to be affected (Brown 2021). If caregivers are overloaded by stressors, and the pandemic may have raised multiple stressors, this [can increase the risk of child abuse](#) and neglect, as well as children witnessing and experiencing domestic violence, especially if services that may protect children are reduced or not accessible, and normal informal social support is curtailed.



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Isolation and lack of support networks contributed to increases in poor mental health amongst parents, which compounded by the ongoing cost of living crisis has a long-term impact on parental mental health and wellbeing, which in turn makes it more difficult for parents to be the responsive and nurturing carer they want to be for their child.



Many parents reported [mental exhaustion](#) from juggling childcare, work, health worries, and the uncertainty of the situation. Grandparents and non-resident parents were not able to support families in the first lockdown. The pandemic generally increased parental stress and depression, particularly for parents who had younger children. Early years settings were closed to the majority during lockdown but even after they reopened, there was a reluctance to use them, leading to [stress, worry and overwhelm of parents, particularly mothers](#).

Some groups of parents were at particular risk of experiencing poor mental health because of the pandemic: younger parents, single parents, parents of a child with special educational needs or disability (SEND) or additional support needs (ASN), or parents with a pre-existing mental health condition [experienced greater anxiety, stress and depression during the pandemic](#). Parents living on lower incomes experienced overall [greater levels of stress](#) when young children were at home.



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Ongoing impact

Even after the end of pandemic measures, stress levels continued to be increased, partly due to the experience of the pandemic and lockdowns, and the ongoing cost of living crisis. This means that [parental mental health continues to be negatively impacted](#) which can in turn make it harder for them to care for their children responsively.

Parents have had less opportunity to build social networks, which are protective and build resilience, as well as provide informal support for the stress and worries of early parenting. They are also sources of information for parenting questions as well as local knowledge about activities available to families with young children. Young children continue to have [fewer opportunities to socialise](#), while parents may have a lesser level of knowledge about child development and higher levels of worry.

The pandemic also impacted on family incomes. The pandemic induced a surge of unemployment that may have resulted in [200,000 more children falling below the poverty line](#). Many more families experienced a reduction in income or had to reduce working hours to care for children. [This was particularly the case where parents had to care for children with additional support needs](#). Poverty levels continue to rise, partly as a fallout of the pandemic.

