

# Children with chronic health conditions and special education needs should receive more help with online learning

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Online learning poses additional challenges to children with chronic medical conditions or special education needs, and these patients could benefit from more support from pediatric clinicians to be academically successful, according to a new opinion piece in *JAMA Pediatrics* released today and co-written by researchers at Kennedy Krieger Institute and Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Clinicians should address school-related challenges or issues like any other medical need in [pediatric care](#), said Lisa Jacobson, Ph.D., NCSP, ABPP, co-director of Kennedy Krieger's Center for Innovation and Leadership in Special Education (CILSE) and director of research for the Institute's department of neuropsychology.

This includes gathering a child's full health history and details of school performance, as well as noting any signs of school challenges the patient faces. Clinicians can reach out to neuropsychology teams, educators or social workers to help their

patients with chronic illnesses keep up academically with their peers.

These recommendations are based on research with pediatric oncology patients, who suffered unique obstacles with online learning in the COVID-19 pandemic; in fact, more than half, or 57 percent, of parents of children with cancer reported difficulties with learning online during this time.

Prior to the pandemic, parents of children with cancer also reported challenges to securing [special education](#) services because of several factors, including a lack of familiarity with available resources as well as ways to secure them. But these challenges are not unique to pediatric cancer patients; children with other chronic conditions, including long COVID, or special education needs face the same obstacles, Dr. Jacobson said.

However, these same families often have regular interactions with pediatric specialists throughout their child's treatment or care. By increasing the awareness of the positive role that pediatric specialists can play in their patients' education, these clinicians could provide assistance on school-related issues, she said, adding that not doing so could contribute to lifelong negative health impacts.

**More information:** Clifton P. Thornton et al, Education for Children With Chronic Illness, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.5643](#)

Provided by Kennedy Krieger Institute

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