

## CONTACT A FAMILY SURVEY: 1 IN 10 FAMILIES WITH DISABLED CHILDREN HAVE HAD FUEL CUT OFF IN WINTER

Two thirds of families with disabled children struggle to pay their fuel bills in wintertime. And 10% have had their gas or electricity supply cut off – either by their supplier or because they couldn't afford to top up a prepayment meter.

That's according to a survey released today by UK charity Contact a Family.

The charity, which provides support and advice to 275,000 families of children with any disability or rare condition each year, is now calling on government to give these families a winter fuel allowance.

Jill Harrison, Contact a Family's External Affairs Director, said: "Research shows that UK families of disabled children are among the poorest.

"The cold weather inevitably leads to bigger heating bills for any family. But for those whose child's condition is affected by the cold, the costs are even higher.

"A fuel allowance similar to the one pensioners receive would stop these families falling into poverty."

Energy suppliers should not disconnect households where someone has a disability. But according to industry regulator Ofgem, companies install meters where customers are struggling to pay bills, leaving many vulnerable people at risk of disconnection.

Asher Nardone whose son Callum is profoundly disabled, says that paying energy bills is a constant struggle.

"Callum has the needs of a new born baby, he is doubly incontinent and often sick so the washing machine and dryer are always on. It's imperative that his room is warm and his bedding changed daily to prevent infections and further

illnesses. He doesn't have the ability to even pull the bed covers over him and Callum's lack of mobility means he doesn't generate his own heat, so the house has to be very warm to make him comfortable.

"Because we already incur so many additional expenses in caring for him that you don't incur with a healthy child, we are often skimping on basics to afford the heating bills. This compounds an already difficult situation."

Many families with disabled children have their heating on constantly to prevent their child from picking up infections or becoming less mobile.

Almost two thirds of families said that their disabled child was prone to infection due to their condition.

Carol Johnston's four-year-old son Kai has Kabuki Syndrome and she dreads the onset of cold weather and the devastating effect it can have on her son's health.

"Kai's immunity is low because of his condition which makes him susceptible to infection. One winter he had bronchiolitis and last year he was hospitalised with pneumonia," said Carol.

She added: "It affects the whole family when Kai is unwell. The unsettled nights and lack of sleep mean stress levels go way up, so we do everything that we can to prevent infection, including keeping the heating on for prolonged periods."

Contact a Family has produced a Winter Guide to help families of children with a disability or rare condition deal with the additional challenges they face at this time of year.

Jill Harrison added: "If you care for a child with a disability or additional needs and are worried about paying fuel bills or keeping your child warm at this time of year, contact our freephone helpline on 0808 808 3555."

Ends

Click [here to see the results of the online survey](#).

For further information or to arrange an interview with a family case study telephone the press office on 020 7608 8741.