

How COVID Shutdowns Are Killing Our Children

Dylan Buckner was an all-American teenage boy.

At 18, this Illinois high school senior with a 4.7 GPA and a room full of trophies should have been on top of the world with his many scholarship offers, one of which was a coveted offer from MIT.

But his father, Chris Buckner, said COVID shutdowns began to take their toll on Dylan. "There is no doubt in my mind," the grieving dad says, that the school closures and Gov. J.B. Pritzker's shutdown orders with their resulting isolation pushed Dylan's mental health to the point of no return.

In January, Dylan quietly checked into a nondescript hotel room and ended his own life. The isolation and fear had become too much.

"I just miss everything," Dylan's father said. "Getting to hug him and talk to him was the best part of my life."

Breaking into tears, the father spoke of a future he will never see. "Getting to watch him grow up and graduate from high school, get married and have [our] grandkids—it's all gone, and it's not coming back."

Dylan's mother, Karen, sometimes sleeps in his bed surrounded by his pictures and trophies, desperate to feel close to her son in her grief.

Sadly, Dylan's family is not alone. These groundless shutdowns have taken a staggering toll on *all* Americans, but especially our youth. Young people have been robbed of in-person interactions, with mandatory masks adding a further element of dehumanization and isolation.

Social interaction and scheduled routines, both important aspects of development, have been revoked, leaving our children feeling bereft and alone. For athletes like Dylan, their future opportunities and scholarships are uncertain, adding another dimension of misery.

And we are seeing an explosion of depression and despair among school-aged young people. Shockingly, children *as young as 8* are attempting to end their lives.

Dr. David Greenhorn says the emergency room at his hospital in northern England used to treat one or two children a week for mental health emergencies and suicides. That average is now one to two *per day*, and with patients as young as 8 years old.

"In an 8-year-old's life, a year is a really, really long time," says Dr. Greenhorn. "They are fed up. They can't see an end to it." The mental health crisis caused by the COVID shutdowns is an "international epidemic" that must be addressed immediately, he emphasizes.

Dr. Richard Delorme, head of the psychiatric unit at Robert Debré pediatric hospital in Paris, agrees. "We are very surprised by the intensity of the desire to die among children who may be 12 or 13 years old," he said.

"We sometimes have children of 9 [years old] who already want to die. And it's not simply a provocation or a blackmail via suicide. It is a genuine wish to end their lives."

"The levels of stress among children are truly massive," Dr. Delorme says.

A U.S. Census Bureau study revealed that by June 2020, one-third of all Americans were showing signs of anxiety and clinical depression. That problem only grew worse as the shutdowns wore on.

But there is *one* segment of the human population that has not

experienced a decline in mental health: *regular churchgoers*.

Studies show that people who attend church regularly comprise the *only* group whose mental health did not decline in 2020—and it actually improved!

That is why our defense of churches and pastors is so important. Too many governors and local bureaucrats have taken it upon themselves to rob Americans of religious freedom. In forcing God's churches closed, lawless governors and power-mad bureaucrats have fueled the depression and suicide epidemic stealing our children's futures.

Liberty Counsel continues to fight to reopen every church a governor has closed and undo every restriction that has strangled religious freedom.

Our fight for religious freedom is really a fight to save America—and kids like Dylan Buckner.

Liberty Counsel continues to defend the Romanian immigrant churches (Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Logos Baptist Ministries) against Illinois Gov. Pritzker's illegal restrictions. We will be filing more legal pleadings in federal court to permanently quarantine Pritzker from returning to his former ways.

At the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, we are submitting yet another brief involving our California churches. We are pressing to strike down ALL remaining restrictions in the state.

And our fight to free Maine, Virginia and all other states from church restrictions continues.

We will not stop until every church in America is free. {eo}

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