



Purple Playas Puffy's Pointers

Ages: All



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TO CHILD WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

REVIEWED BY

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From the Outside Looking In Supporting Families of Children with Chronic Illness

Want to help but don't know how? Witnessing families endure so much can lead to a feeling of helplessness, but there are practical caring ways you can support.

When a family is experiencing stress and hardship due to their child's chronic illness, they are often so overwhelmed they don't know how to ask for help. As an extended family member or close friend, we see the struggle but don't know what to say or do beyond sending our love and prayers. Here are some ideas that could make a world of difference to that family in need:

- ♥ **Be specific in your offer to help** rather than being open ended. Avoid saying, "Let me know if you need anything; or what can I do?" People in crisis most often cannot and will not ask for help.
- ♥ **Tag on to your own errands.** If you're going to the store, call ahead and ask if you can pick anything up for them while you're out. Drop off the items at their house.
- ♥ **Send a little note.** Send an upbeat or inspirational email or periodically text so they know they are remembered. Personalize the message with things you know they love like animals, humor, babies, sports, sunsets, etc.
- ♥ **Listen.** Be a sounding board and just listen and support when they need to talk and vent.
- ♥ **Help with kids.** Babysit or take kids for a sleepover if the parents have to be at the hospital or medical appointments. Offering childcare for the child who has chronic illness could also be helpful so that the parent can work or take the other children out. Consider offering childcare for all the kids or make it a fun kids outing too, just to give caregivers a break.
- ♥ **Ask about their other children.** Too often we are so focused on checking in on the child who is ill that we forget to celebrate what is happening with the other kids.
- ♥ **Offer to be the "point person."** If a family is in a medical crisis, you can be quite helpful in offering to inform the rest of the family and close friends of what is happening.

- ♥ **Offer to drive kids.** Take and pick up kids from school/ extracurricular activities when parents are tied up with their other child's medical issues.
- ♥ **Surprise them with chores/yard work.** Do everyday chores such as laundry, cleaning and outdoor lawn care when you see they are backed up from a long-term crisis.
- ♥ **Visit them.** This may seem obvious, but it feels good to get visitors at home and in the hospital. However, always give them a heads up and ask for the most convenient time. Virtual video visits are nice too!
- ♥ **Feed them.** Bring over some of their favorite meals for dinner. Learn dietary restrictions in advance.
- ♥ **Walk the dog.** If the family has pets, they may get forgotten in the shuffle. Offer to take to groomers, vet, or for a walk.
- ♥ **Invite them to fun events.** This can be quite impactful, even if they cannot come. It may be helpful to phrase it in a way that you understand if they cannot make it, but it also sends the message that you want them in your lives, despite all their stress and competing medical demands. You can even divide this up if an adult needs to be in the house with children. Your spouse/partner can take one parent out and then you can stay in with the kids (and then vise-a-versa).
- ♥ **Offer to make a pharmacy run.** Sometimes it is hard to break away just to pick up needed medications, so this can really help.
- ♥ **Send gift cards.** If it's in your budget, send a gift card for gas, groceries or for a meal when you know they are financially stressed due to their hardship.
- ♥ **Show your love.** Be creative and surprise them with a loving gesture.

*The most important thing to do is **continue** to show you care because chronic illness is just that, chronic and ongoing.*



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