

Supporting a Family or Friend with a Child in Hospital

Practical tips and real experiences from parents

When a child is admitted to hospital, it can be one of the most stressful and exhausting times for a family. Parents often don't have the headspace to think about what they need, or to ask for help. The support of friends, relatives, and community members can make all the difference.

This guide shares real feedback from families supported by Sophie's Legacy, to help you know how best to support someone when their child is in hospital.

1. Food and Everyday Essentials

- Homemade meals: Bring portioned, microwavable food (especially with vegetables).
- Frozen meals: Stock their freezer with meals they can reheat quickly.

Hospital vouchers: Costa, M&S, or canteen vouchers are invaluable.

Snacks & treats: Fresh fruit salad, thermos of hot chocolate, sandwiches, or even a slice of birthday cake if they miss celebrations.

Gift cards: JustEat, Cook, or supermarket vouchers help families eat without the stress of cooking.

2. Washing, Cleaning & House Support

- Collect washing from hospital, return it clean, dry, and folded.
 - Offer to do housework: change bedding, clean floors, tidy bathrooms, or wash dishes.
 - Keep the garden tidy — mow the lawn, weed flower beds, or plant something cheerful.
 - Help care for pets, or take them to appointments if needed.
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3. Emotional Support

- Send regular messages – even if there's no reply, it shows you care.

Call at a set time (e.g. in the evenings) to provide a friendly voice.

Visit just to have coffee or sit quietly – no expectation, just presence.

- Write or send cards, funny notes, or small gifts (stickers, colouring, mini shampoo, chocolate). It's the thought that counts.
 - Record little videos or send photos so they can feel connected even from isolation.
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4. Giving Parents a Break

- Sit with the child so parents can shower, nap, or take a short walk.
 - Take siblings out for fun activities (especially in school holidays).
 - Stay overnight in hospital or at home so parents can spend time with their other children.
 - Offer to accompany them so they don't feel alone on the ward.
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5. Supporting Siblings

- Arrange playdates, days out, or fun activities – siblings often feel left out.
 - Celebrate milestones and birthdays with them, even if the parent is away.
 - Keep them included in normal life with small gestures, like bringing cake or sending messages.
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6. What Doesn't Help

- Doing nothing. Silence can feel isolating, and parents will remember who showed up for them.
 - Stopping support after the “early days.” Hospital stays can last weeks or months, consistency matters.
 - Assuming parents will ask. They often don't have the energy to explain what they need.
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7. Small Gestures That Mean the World

- Fresh bag of salad or favourite crisps from the shop.
- Quick snacks, drinks, or even a takeaway delivered to hospital.
- Face mask, flannel, or toiletries to freshen up.



- A wrapped little gift or pack of stickers for the child.
- Simply showing up and sitting by the bedside.

Final Thoughts Hospital stays are long, exhausting, and often very lonely. Parents may not know what to ask for, but the smallest gestures of kindness — a cooked meal, a clean set of clothes, a message saying “I’m thinking of you” — can carry them through some of the hardest days.

If you’re wondering whether to help: do it.

Your support will never be forgotten.

