

18 Best Books for Families With a Sick Child

No parent ever wants to imagine raising a child with a serious illness. You and your family may be experiencing anxiety, dread, hope, and even guilt. We've assembled a list of 18 of the best books for families with children who are sick and even a few extra reads just for parents. We hope these books offer both some solace and new resources during a scary and confusing time.

Wonder

By R. J. Palacio

Age: 8-13 years

Wonder is a chapter book about a boy named Auggie Pullman. Auggie starts 5th grade at Beecher Prep, after being homeschooled his entire life. Auggie has a rare condition called Treacher Collins syndrome, and he's had to have a number of surgeries that have scarred his face. He worries about what his classmates will think but is excited to go to school for the first time.

This is on a lot of juvenile fiction lists and is certainly not just for children who are dealing with serious illness. But it explores fitting in, being brave, and self-empowerment. It may help normalize chronic illness, long hospital stays away from school, and having scars. It's also a fun story about the importance of friends and family. And you can't help but fall in love with Auggie!

Where the Sidewalk Ends

By Shel Silverstein

Age: All Ages

This is a classic Shel Silverstein illustrated poem book. It's chock-full of silly stories about diamond gardens, flying shoes, mountains of garbage, turning into a TV set, and crocodiles that go to the dentist. It could be just the thing to make you and your family giggle.

This book isn't made for children with an illness, but it is a time-honored favorite for a lot of families. Sometimes, the best medicine is a good laugh, and this book can do it. It's a great imaginative escape, and sometimes, you just need something silly to take the edge off.

The Invisible String

By Patrice Karst

Age: 4-8 years

This picture book follows two twins who are scared of a thunderstorm. Their mother comforts them by saying that even if she's out in the other room, she's still with them and loving them up during the storm. When they ask how, she says that no matter where you are, or what you do, the people you love are always with you. You are connected by an invisible string.



This may be a good book for children that might have to spend a lot of time in the hospital or travel to get medical tests. It offers a great framework for how they are still connected to their entire support network and community, even if their life is looking a little different now. It may be worth reading with all the kids in the family since separation can be a scary part of being sick, for everyone in the family.

S is For Surgery: A Kids Surgery Book From A to Z

By Dylan Fox

Age: All ages

S is For Surgery is a book written by a mother whose young daughter was diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis (NF1), who's had over 20 surgeries. Fox used her personal experience to write a book to help talk to her daughter about surgery. It covers going under anesthesia, beeping machines, what to pack, and the types of doctors you'll meet.

This book may be a good tool to help prepare children for surgery or a long hospital visit. It's written with empathy and compassion, by someone who's been there. The book is filled with common questions, what to expect, and activities. It's 64 pages, but written for both young children and their parents, so this is a good one to read together.

In My Heart: A Book of Feelings

By Ali Benjamin

Age: 2-6

This picture book goes through a number of different feelings, like brave, proud, shy, sad, and mad. The book uses the language, "My heart feels..." as a framework for talking about your feelings. On the last page, it asks the reader, "What does your heart feel?"

In My Heart might be a good place to start, when asking your child how they are feeling. It's not specific to illness, but being sick, or having a sick sibling, can bring up lots of confusing new feelings. This book provides kids with the language to start expressing those feelings and talking about them.

Caleb and Kit

By Beth Varbel

Age: 8-13 years

In Varbel's *Caleb and Kit*, twelve-year-old Caleb feels smothered by his overprotective family. But they're overprotective because he has cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening chronic illness that fills his lungs with mucus. Then Caleb meets the brash and brave Kit, and he has to decide for himself what are safe boundaries. Is keeping up with Kit what's best for both of them?

A few things might be nice about Caleb and Kit. Beyond centering around the main hero with a chronic illness, it also could be a good way to open up conversations around boundaries. It could be empowering for them to read about Caleb, as he struggles with letting his family and Kit decide what those boundaries and limitations are, rather than himself.

A Children's Bible

Age: All Ages

If you are a religious or even spiritual family, a faith text is a really beautiful thing to get a sick child. There are a lot of sacred texts, but a common one to get is a children's bible. The Bible, and its prayers, stories, and psalms, are a great place to start finding words of comfort for some families.

A children's bible can be fully illustrated, and often rephrased the text to be easily understandable by a child. If they grew up hearing these stories, the bible could be really soothing just on its own. There are also certain stories and passages that might be more applicable, and offer great comfort, like Isaiah 41.

The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya

By Jane Kelley

Age: 8-13 years

This book is about an arrogant orphaned African grey parrot named Zeno, and Alya, an 11-year-old Brooklyn girl with leukemia. After a chance encounter, these two realize they are kindred spirits. And although neither of them ever doubts they are loved, they both need incredible amounts of hope to power through and find each other again.

The book definitely touches on illness, with Alya having leukemia and death, but it balances out the seriousness with humor. This is a good reminder for little ones to have hope and believe in themselves. For siblings, it's a good reminder of how important it is to just be a good friend through all of this.

Bubble

By Stewart Foster

Age: 8-12 years

Bubble is a story about 11-year-old Joe, who's never had a life outside of the hospital. Joe has a rare genetic autoimmune disorder that keeps him from even going outside and limits the number of visitors he has.

Bubble talks about how Joe spends his days taking lessons online, reading on his iPad, and video calling Henry, a kid with a similar condition in Pennsylvania.

This book does a good job normalizing life in the hospital and touches on themes of hope and resilience. It highlights the importance of little goals. Joe works hard with a new nurse so that he can take steps outside. This is a good read for a child living in the hospital, or a sibling, who wants to understand more.

Kasey & Ivy

By Alison Hughes

Age: 8-13 years

Hughes's book is told in 26 letters from Kasey, to her friend Nina, about her time in the hospital. Kasey is diagnosed with a rare, but treatable bone disease, where she has to spend a month in the hospital.

This book does a good job talking about the realities of hospital life and coping mechanisms. Kasey does things your child might do, like bringing her own nightgowns, her own stuffed animals, and coming up with an unusual exercise routine. It's normalizing, and sweet, without sugar-coating the reality of Kasey's situation.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

By J.K. Rowling

Age: All Ages

Sometimes the last thing you might want is to read another story about a sick child. Harry Potter doesn't need much of an introduction. The series follows Harry, a boy wizard, and his magical friends as they battle and defeat the evil Lord Voldemort.

This is a good read for the whole family. It's a children's favorite around the world. It's not about sickness in any way. It gives the space for you all to spend a few pages immersed in a completely different world. Try reading it out loud together, or reading it as a family book club.

Franklin Goes to the Hospital

By Paulette Bourgeois

Age: 3-8 years

Franklin stories are classic, and this one follows Franklin as he breaks his shell. He has to go to the hospital to get it fixed, and everyone is telling him how brave he is. But the catch? Franklin doesn't feel brave at all, and he's terrified his X-Ray will show how scared he is on the inside. Dr. Bear helps show him that you can be scared, and brave, at the same time.

Franklin Goes to the Hospital does a few things. First, it helps address fear. Being at a hospital can be so scary, and Franklin feels the same way your little one may be feeling. He is brave but doesn't feel brave, because he's so scared. It also normalizes being in the hospital. Franklin is just a regular turtle, who has to stay at the hospital, and that's okay.

How Do You Care for a Very Sick Bear?

By Vanessa Bayer

Age: 2-6 years

How Do You Care for a Very Sick Bear was written by *Saturday Night Live* actress, Vanessa Bayer, as an adult, after experiencing childhood leukemia. It's sweet and rhyming and has first-hand advice for friends or loved ones of "a very sick bear," on how to take care of them and show them lots of love.

This may be a good choice for a child with a sick sibling. The advice rings true since the author can truly empathize with being so sick as a child. It also can be easily generalized beyond leukemia, since it's just "very sick," not a specific disease.

Sometimes

By Rebecca Elliott

Age: 3-8 years

In this picture book, Toby loves his big sister Clemmie! They take good care of each other, even when Clemmie has to have long stays at the hospital. These two are an unstoppable team. They love and support each other through ups and downs.

This is a good one because it is a story about two siblings going through something your family can maybe relate to. It's told from a child's perspective and is full of optimism and hope. We also like that Clemmie isn't weaker, or less of a caretaker for Toby, even though she's sick. Toby in turns takes care of Clemmie when she needs some brotherly love.

The Surgery Book: For Kids

By Shivani Bhatia, MD

Age: 4-9 years

Dr. Bhatia expertly describes the surgery process and what to expect. Iggy learns that his swollen tonsils are causing his loud snoring and sore throat, and he has to go to the hospital to get them removed. He is super scared about the surgery, but handles it bravely, and describes it all for your kiddo. Since Dr. Bhatia has her medical degree, her information in the book is spot on.

This is a good one for a child that is having surgery for the first time. It turns the sometimes scary feeling of going in for surgery, into a hopeful adventure. It's maybe not as relevant for a little one that has to have an extended hospital stay but is still worth the read if they are scared about an operation, and you want something written by a medical professional.

Goodnight Hospital Room

By Marilyn Luce Robertson, and Cub Robertson

Age: 18 mo - 8 years

Goodnight Hospital Room takes after the *Goodnight Moon* tradition and is a rhyming goodnight poem with illustrations. It's written especially for children who will spend the night in the hospital.

Proceeds from this book go to support St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. It may be a good book for someone who'll be spending a lot of nights in the hospital because it adds a little whimsy to the hospital setting.

The Famous Hat

By Kate Gaynor

Age: 2-8 years

The Famous Hat is about a little boy named Harry who has leukemia. He has long hospital stays, and worries about IVs, chemo, and losing his hair. Throughout the book, he comes to appreciate how his treatment helps, and that even though it's hard, it's temporary. And that his hair will grow back!

This may be a good choice for a child that is nervous about the side effects of cancer treatment, and how that treatment might impact their lives. It addresses common fears about appearance, injections, and long hospital stays away from home and school.

The Great Katie Kate Tackles Questions About Cancer

By M. Maitland DeLand

Age: 2-8 years

In this Katie Kate book, Katie Kate swoops in to help Suzy, a little girl with cancer. When Dr. Demarco explains to Suzy that she might have cancer, Suzy worries. So Katie Kate takes her on a tour of the hospital and helps her stare down the Worry Wombat.

DeLand's book may help your child prepare for their hospital visit, and what their treatment may look like. It also advocates for tackling hard emotions like fear, and anxiety, head-on, by personifying them into the Worry Wombat. Katie Kate and Suzy are fun heroines that could inspire your little one and give them a little confidence boost.

CaringBridge is a global, nonprofit social network dedicated to helping family and friends communicate with and support loved ones during a health journey. We offer free, personal, protected websites for people to easily share updates and receive strength and encouragement from their community. This article was pulled from our families' insights in collaboration with experts.

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