



How to Help Families Affected by Childhood Cancer or Blood Disorders

If you know a family facing childhood cancer or a blood disorder like sickle cell disease, you may want to help but don't know where to start. This guide, created by experts at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Aflac, is intended to serve as a toolkit with different ways to provide support.



For nearly three decades, Aflac has been committed to supporting those who care for children with cancer and blood disorders and has donated more than \$184 million to the cause. In 2018, the company created My Special Aflac Duck®, a robotic companion that provides comfort and support to children, helps them express their emotions and normalizes medical procedures. As of September, 2024, Aflac has distributed more than 31,000 of these ducks free of charge to children above the age of three with cancer and sickle cell disease.

Following a three-year study of 160 childhood cancer patients and their families, My Special Aflac Duck has been clinically demonstrated to help improve the mental and emotional health of children and parents going through the cancer journey. Initial findings from the study, conducted at hospitals across the U.S., reported reductions in anxiety and distress in children who use My Special Aflac Duck as part of their treatment, as well as improvement in parents' mental health.

- It provides **comfort** with a calming heartbeat, soothing vibrations and soft "fur."
- It offers **support** through medical play accessories and feeling cards that help express emotions.

My Special Aflac Duck is unique. But each of us can learn from My Special Aflac Duck's superpower – offering comfort and support to children and families who need it most – and do the same for those we care about.

Here are some ideas to show up for families navigating childhood cancer, sickle cell or another serious illness, inspired by My Special Aflac Duck:

Comfort

- Drop off a home-cooked meal
- Order delivery from a favorite restaurant
- Send a voucher from a meal delivery service
- Share baked goods (store-bought or homemade)
- Drop off a favorite magazine, book or board game
- Take a walk or see a movie together
- Offer to be a listening ear or just sit in silence together
- Send a gentle message of empathy in the form of a card, handwritten note, text, voicemail, email or private social media message



Support — Offer to...

- Clean their home
- Set up playdates, babysit or stay with their other children – try to keep things as normal as possible
- Help with caregiving responsibilities
- Walk or care for their pet
- Do laundry
- Shop for groceries
- Water their plants or garden
- Take their car for a wash
- Pick up their mail or newspapers

Instead of asking, **“Can I help?”**, it's best to offer specific acts of service (for example, **“Can I send you some dinner?”** or, **“Can I babysit the other kids for you?”**)

Visit <http://www.aflac.com/bridgetobrighter> for more ways to make a positive difference to families affected by childhood cancer and blood disorders.

