
THE SHOW UP FOUNDATION

E-Book

Just Show Up: A Caregiver's Guide to Being Present

Faith-based encouragement | Practical caregiver guidance

For parents, guardians, foster parents, and caregivers navigating NICU days, medical uncertainty, and the exhausting realities of loving a child through hard seasons.

WHY THIS RESOURCE EXISTS

This resource is intended for encouragement and practical support. It is not a substitute for professional medical, legal, mental health, or case-management advice.

Created to equip tired caregivers with warm, faith-rooted, practical encouragement for the next faithful step.

SHOW UP WITH HOPE

FROM THE SHOW UP FOUNDATION

Take what helps, return to what you need, and let this resource serve your real life with grace.

Just Show Up: A Caregiver's Guide to Being Present

Welcome

If you are reading this, there is a good chance life did not go according to plan. Maybe your baby arrived too early. Maybe a diagnosis changed the tone of your home overnight. Maybe a foster placement came with little warning, a bag of clothes, and a child who does not yet know whether it is safe to trust you. Maybe you love a child whose medications, appointments, therapies, feeding schedules, or emotional needs keep stretching every part of you.

This guide was written for that place.

It was written for the caregiver who loves deeply but feels tired to the bone. It was written for the parent who is grateful and grieving at the same time. It was written for the guardian who needs something steady, honest, and practical in the middle of a season that feels anything but steady.

At The Show Up Foundation, we believe one of the most powerful things a caregiver can do is not to have all the answers, fix every problem, or say everything perfectly. The most powerful thing is often much simpler and much harder: **to keep showing up.**

Showing up does not mean pretending you are never afraid. It does not mean you never need help. It does not mean you carry every burden alone. It means you choose faithful presence, one moment at a time. It means you return to the bedside, the table, the waiting room, the therapy office, the courtroom, the classroom, or the bedroom floor and say with your life, *"I am here, and I am not leaving love behind."*

Part One: What Presence Really Means

Presence is not perfection

Many caregivers quietly live under crushing pressure. You want to get the medicine right, ask the right questions, regulate your own emotions, keep the family functioning, advocate clearly, remain patient, hold on to faith, and somehow still make dinner. When you cannot do all of it well, shame starts whispering that you are failing.

But presence is not perfection. Presence is faithful attention. It is the willingness to stay engaged with the child in front of you, even when you are learning as you go. It is choosing love over performance. Children do not need a flawless caregiver nearly as much as they need a dependable one.

The child in your care may not remember every detail of what you said in this season. But they will feel the atmosphere you create. They will feel whether you are safe. They will feel whether you come back. They will feel whether love stays in the room when things get hard.

Presence is often quiet

Some seasons of caregiving look dramatic from the outside. Others are hidden. Presence may look like sleeping in a hospital chair. It may look like filling a med organizer on Sunday night. It may look like driving to therapy with coffee in one hand and prayers in the other. It may look like answering the same worried question from a child for the tenth time in one afternoon. It may look like saying, "I know this is hard, and I am still with you."

Quiet faithfulness rarely feels glamorous. But it builds trust, safety, and resilience over time.

Presence is a ministry of return

Caregiving seasons are full of interruption. You get overwhelmed. You lose patience. You forget something. You cry in the shower. You shut down for an hour. Then guilt tells you that because you stumbled, you have ruined everything.

That is not true.

One of the holiest habits a caregiver can build is the habit of return. Return to prayer. Return to peace. Return to the child. Return to the conversation. Return to what matters. Healthy caregiving is not built by never wobbling. It is built by coming back with humility, wisdom, and love.

Part Two: Caring for Your Own Heart While You Care for Theirs

You are a person, not a machine

Caregivers often function on emergency mode for so long that they forget they are human. You may be surviving on fragmented sleep, cold coffee, adrenaline, and responsibility. Your body keeps moving, but your soul feels thin.

Your needs are not a distraction from your caregiving. They are part of how you sustain it. Rest will not solve every problem, but chronic depletion will intensify nearly all of them. You do not have to earn the right to drink water, eat lunch, sit down, breathe slowly, or ask for thirty uninterrupted minutes.

Learn the signs that you are running dry

The warning signs differ from person to person, but many caregivers notice the same patterns. You may become more irritable, more forgetful, more anxious, more numb, or more discouraged. Small tasks begin to feel impossible. You stop answering texts. You resent simple requests. Prayer feels distant. Hope feels expensive.

Those are not signs that you are weak. They are signals that your inner reserves need care.

Warning sign	What it may be telling you	A small response
Short temper over small things	Your nervous system is overloaded	Step away for three slow breaths before you respond
Forgetfulness or mental fog	You are carrying too much at once	Write the next three tasks down and do only one
Constant tears or numbness	Your emotions need room, not suppression	Tell one trusted person the truth about how you feel
Resentment toward everyone	You need relief, support, or clearer boundaries	Ask for one concrete form of help this week
Spiritual disconnection	You may need gentler rhythms with God	Read one psalm slowly instead of trying to do a long devotion

Build a rule of life for hard seasons

A rule of life is not a rigid performance plan. It is a gentle structure that helps you remain rooted. In a caregiving season, it can be very simple. Choose a few anchors that help you come back to yourself and to God.

A sustainable hard-season rhythm might include waking up five minutes before the rest of the house for prayer, eating something with protein before noon, texting one trusted person each week with an honest update, stepping outside once a day, and ending the evening by naming one evidence of grace. Small anchors can carry a heavy season farther than heroic intentions.

Part Three: Showing Up in NICU and Medical Seasons

The hospital can make you feel powerless

NICU days, hospital admissions, and medically complex seasons can make even the strongest caregiver feel small. Machines beep. clinicians speak fast. numbers matter. Sleep disappears. The environment can make you feel like an observer in your own child's story.

But your presence matters there more than you realize.

You know the child in a way no chart can hold. Your voice is familiar. Your touch can calm. Your questions can reveal patterns. Your observations can protect care. Even when the room is full of professionals, your role remains sacred and real.

Ask good questions without apology

You do not have to prove that you belong in the conversation. Write your questions down. Ask for explanations in plain language. Repeat back what you heard. Request clarification when instructions feel rushed or unclear. If you are overwhelmed, say, "Can you slow that down and say it one more time?" That is not being difficult. That is being faithful.

A simple framework can help:

Situation	Grounding question
New diagnosis or change in condition	What does this mean for today, not just for the future?
Medication change	

Situation	Grounding question
	What is the purpose, dose, timing, and side effect to watch for?
Discharge planning	What do I need to know before we go home, and what should make me call right away?
Therapy or specialist follow-up	What goal are we working toward in the next few weeks?
Confusing care instructions	Can you show me exactly what this looks like step by step?

Let love be felt, not only managed

In medical seasons, caregiving can become mechanical. Feedings, logs, meds, vitals, appointments, insurance calls, and equipment can dominate the day. Practical care matters. But so does relational care. Make space, when possible, for simple connection. Speak the child's name with tenderness. Hold their hand. Sing softly. Make eye contact. Read the same story again. Celebrate small progress.

A child should experience more than treatment in your care. They should experience being cherished.

Part Four: Showing Up for Foster and Trauma-Affected Children

Safety comes before speed

If you are caring for a child from foster care, kinship care, or another hard transition, remember this: attachment is not built by pressure. It is built by safety. Do not rush closeness. Do not demand trust before trust has had a chance to grow.

Children with trauma histories often watch before they lean in. They may test limits, withdraw, overperform, lie, cling, reject comfort, or melt down over what seems small. Those behaviors often carry a message beneath them: *"I do not know if I am safe yet."*

Your calm, predictable, non-shaming presence becomes part of the answer.

Predictability is a form of love

When life has been chaotic, simple routines become powerful. Mealtimes, bedtime rituals, clear expectations, advance notice of transitions, and follow-through all communicate safety. The goal is not a rigid house. The goal is a trustworthy one.

Try using the same words for key transitions: "After dinner, we will clean up, take showers, and read before bed." The repetition may feel ordinary to you, but to a child from instability it can become deeply regulating.

Correct with dignity

Children who carry trauma often expect correction to come with rejection. When discipline is needed, stay anchored. Avoid humiliation, sarcasm, and threats you do not intend to carry out. Speak clearly, calmly, and briefly. Separate the child's identity from the behavior.

You can say, "That choice was not okay, and we are going to fix it together," instead of, "What is wrong with you?" One approach builds shame. The other builds accountability without breaking connection.

Part Five: Showing Up in Your Home When Everybody Is Tired

Simplify more than you think you should

Caregivers often carry hidden expectations about what a "good" home should look like. In difficult seasons, those expectations can become cruel. This may be the time for paper plates, repeated meals, laundry in baskets instead of drawers, shorter to-do lists, and a much smaller definition of success.

A peaceful home does not have to be an impressive home. A functioning home does not have to look efficient from the outside. If simplifying helps you preserve tenderness, energy, and faithfulness, then simplifying is wisdom.

Decide what matters most this week

Not everything deserves equal urgency. Ask yourself each week: what must be protected right now? It may be medication accuracy, school communication, one date night at home, one therapy appointment, one Sabbath hour, or getting everyone to bed earlier. Name the few priorities that matter most, and allow lesser things to be less perfect.

Priority area	What to protect	What can be released for now
Child care	Safety, meds, appointments, emotional connection	Overcommitted schedule
Home life	Food, rest, basic cleanliness, calm routines	Ideal housekeeping
Marriage or support relationships	Honest communication, brief check-ins, shared decisions	Unrealistic expectations for romance or availability
Spiritual life	Small daily contact with God	Pressure to maintain long or polished routines
Personal health	Hydration, food, rest, a medical check if needed	Guilt for not doing more

Repair quickly when stress spills over

If you snap, withdraw, or speak harshly, do not stay stuck in shame. Repair quickly. A simple apology can restore more than you think. "I was overwhelmed, and I spoke sharply. That was wrong. I love you, and I want to try that again." Children do not need adults who never need repair. They need adults who know how to make it.

Part Six: How to Ask for Help Without Feeling Like a Failure

Vague offers rarely become real support

People often say, "Let me know how I can help." That is kind, but in a hard season it can also create one more task for you. Specific help is easier to receive. Instead of saying, "We are okay," consider naming one concrete need.

You might ask someone to bring dinner on Tuesday, sit with siblings during an appointment, mow the lawn, make two pharmacy runs this month, pray with you by phone, or organize a short list of errands. People who care about you often want to help. They just need a doorway.

Build a small support circle

You do not need a massive village. You need a reliable one. Try to identify three kinds of support: someone who can pray with you, someone who can help practically, and someone who can listen honestly without trying to fix everything.

Support role	Who fits this role?	What to ask for
Spiritual support	Pastor, trusted friend, mature believer	Prayer, encouragement, truth when you are discouraged
Practical support	Family member, neighbor, church member	Meals, rides, errands, childcare, household help
Emotional support	Counselor, wise friend, support group	A safe place to process grief, fear, and fatigue

Receiving help honors limits

It is not more spiritual to collapse quietly. Humility is not pretending to be limitless. Even Jesus received care, companionship, and support. Letting others carry part of the load can be an act of trust, not weakness.

Part Seven: Holding on to Faith When Answers Do Not Come Quickly

God is near in the unresolved

Caregivers often live in unanswered prayers. The test results are delayed. The next placement decision is uncertain. The healing is partial. The therapy progress is slower than hoped. The future remains unclear.

Faith in these seasons is rarely loud. It often looks like returning to God without polished words. It sounds like, "Lord, help us today." It admits both love and fear. It chooses to believe that God is present even when life is not yet easier.

Simple prayers for exhausted people

When long prayers feel out of reach, small honest prayers are enough.

Lord, give me what I need for this hour.

God, steady my mind and soften my voice.

Jesus, help me love this child well today.

Father, make me faithful in small things.

Holy Spirit, remind me that I am not alone.

Remember what growth actually looks like

Growth is not always dramatic. Sometimes growth is staying calm one minute longer. Sometimes it is asking a better question. Sometimes it is getting the refill on time. Sometimes it is choosing gentleness after a hard morning. Sometimes it is crying and praying instead of numbing out.

Do not overlook the grace of small faithfulness.

Part Eight: Practical Reset Plans for Overwhelmed Days

The fifteen-minute reset

When the day feels like too much, do not try to fix the whole week. Reset the next fifteen minutes.

Minute range	Reset action
1–3	Stop moving for a moment and take five slow breaths
4–6	Drink water and eat something small if you have not eaten
7–10	Write down the next two essential tasks only
11–13	Send one text or make one call for needed support
14–15	Whisper a short prayer and begin the next right thing

The bedtime reset

End the day by naming three things: what was hard, what was helped, and what can wait until tomorrow. This keeps the mind from carrying everything into the night without distinction.

The weekly reset

Once a week, if possible, sit down for twenty minutes with a notebook. Review appointments, refill needs, childcare plans, transportation, meals, and one emotional or spiritual need in the home. Planning does not erase hardship, but it can reduce preventable chaos.

Part Nine: A Gentle Word for Marriages, Co-Parents, and Support Teams

Hard seasons can divide good people

When stress rises, even loving adults can misread each other. One person becomes hyper-organized. Another shuts down. One wants to talk everything through. Another only wants quiet. Resentment grows when fear is not named.

Try to remember that you are not enemies. You are tired people standing under the same storm.

Use short check-ins

Long deep conversations may not be realistic every day. Brief check-ins can still keep you connected. Ask: What feels heaviest right now? What is one thing you need from me today? What decision still needs to be made? What went well this week? These simple questions can prevent unnecessary distance.

Keep honor in the room

Stress can make speech sharp. Protect the tone of your home as best you can. Speak with respect, especially when you disagree. A child living through instability or illness is helped by an environment where the adults remain anchored and kind.

Part Ten: Keep Going, One Faithful Step at a Time

You may not feel strong today. You may not feel inspiring. You may not even feel particularly brave. But if you are still loving, still returning, still learning, still praying, still asking for wisdom, still bringing your ordinary self back into this extraordinary assignment, then you are already doing something holy.

You are showing up.

Not perfectly. Not effortlessly. Not without tears. But faithfully.

And faithful love, over time, changes the atmosphere of a home, the healing of a child, and the story a family tells about hard seasons.

When the road feels uncertain, do not waste energy trying to become superhuman. Ask God for daily bread. Receive help. Simplify what you can. Stay tender. Repair when needed. Protect your peace as best you are able. Then take the next right step.

That step may not look dramatic.

But it is enough for today.

Closing Prayer

Lord,

Thank You for the child or children You have entrusted to my care. Thank You for seeing what no one else sees, for understanding the burdens I do not always know how to explain, and for staying near when my heart is weary.

Give me wisdom for the decisions in front of me. Give me patience when my body is tired and my mind is crowded. Give me gentleness in my words, steadiness in my spirit, and courage in places where I feel small.

Help me show up with love, truth, and peace. Protect this home. Protect this child. Strengthen what is weak. Heal what is hurting. Provide what is needed. And remind me, again and again, that Your presence goes with us.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

A Final Word from The Show Up Foundation

You do not have to carry this season alone. Keep taking the next faithful step. Keep receiving grace for today. Keep believing that presence matters.

Because it does.