

REFLECTIVE TOOL

For actioning the Kinship Care
Practice Guide

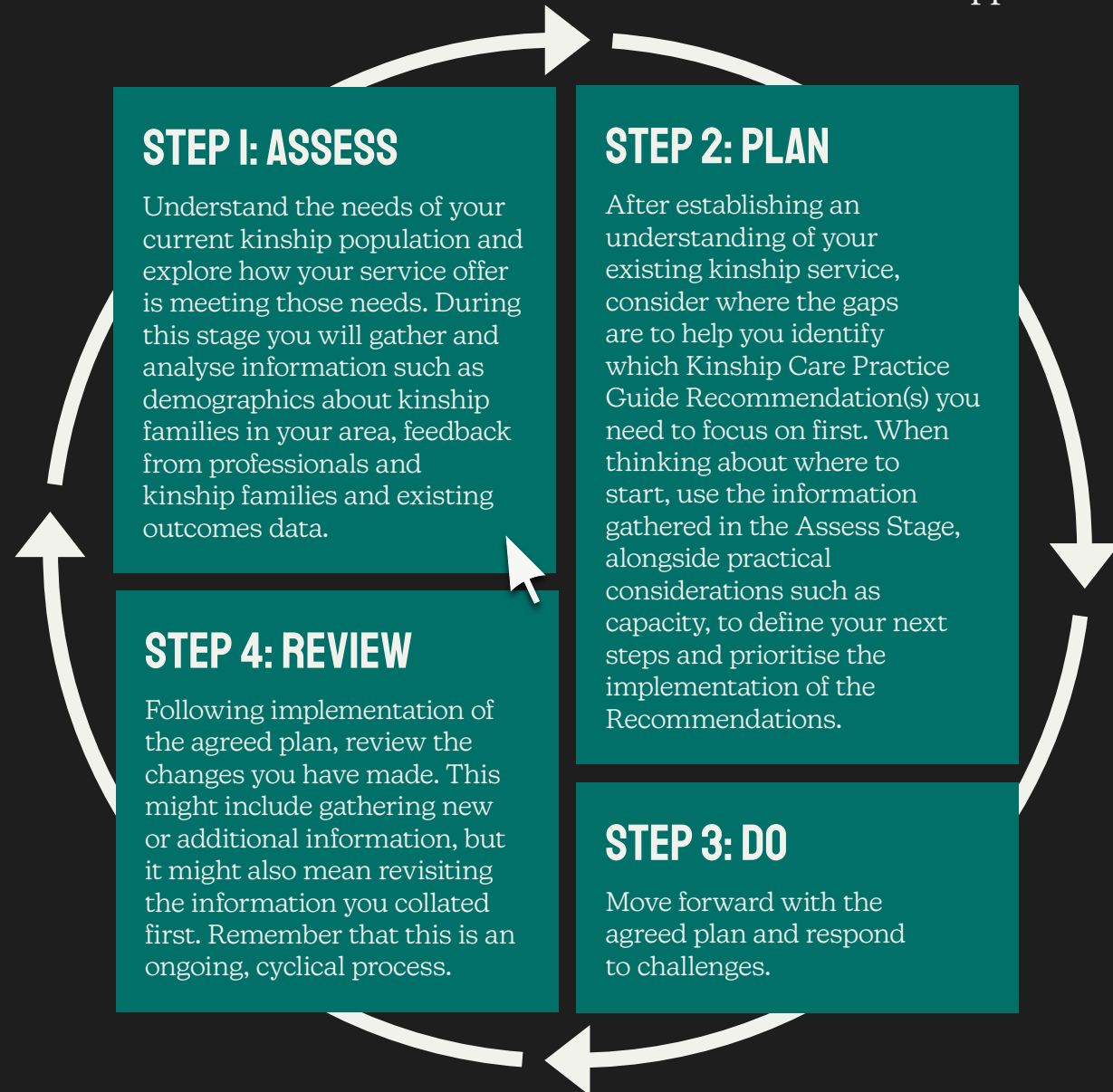
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About this resource

This step-by-step Reflective Tool is designed to support local authorities in actioning the Key Principles and Recommendations in the Kinship Care Practice Guide. It does this through providing prompts to help set the Practice Guide's Key Principles and Recommendations in the local context by considering local data and evidence such as professional knowledge, lived experience, and population and organisational data.

The Kinship Care Practice Guide commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) is the first in a new series of guides setting out the best available evidence for leaders in the children's social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed and delivered. Designed for service leaders and commissioners, the Practice Guide outlines the broad Key Principles and specific interventions that have been shown to be most effective to support kinship families.

This resource is structured around the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach:



As local contexts are continually changing, and it is important for services to be responsive, the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach in this resource is intended to be ongoing and cyclical. Following a structure like this allows you keep clear track of the progress you are making, and your rationale for making the changes you do.

How to use this tool

Each stage of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach has questions to guide you in reflecting on your local context in relation to the Key Principles and Recommendations in the Kinship Care Practice Guide. This tool acts as a starting point for local areas to prioritise the implementation of the Recommendations in the Kinship Care Practice Guide. We would encourage you to record your reflections in response to each question, for future reference and to track your progress. You may also wish to use the questions to help structure conversations with colleagues to prompt discussion and deliver actions.

How each of the questions relates to one, more, or all of the Key Principles and Recommendations is indicated through symbols as in the example below:

- What specialist training are your kinship service staff offered? **KP1**

The Key Principles and Recommendations are summarised below, alongside the symbols associated with each of them:

KEY PRINCIPLES

Key Principle 1 **KP1**

Support for kinship carers should take into account the specific needs and strengths of kinship carers.

Key Principle 2 **KP2**

One-to-one relationships and high-quality casework should be at the heart of support for kinship families.

Key Principle 3 **KP3**

Kinship families need to be made aware of the support that they are entitled to, and local authorities should actively work to address barriers to carers accessing support.

Where a question corresponds across the Key Principles and Recommendations of the Practice Guide, this is indicated by this symbol **ALL**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 **R1**

Offer kinship carers specialist support to learn about, navigate and access the support that they are entitled to.

GOOD EVIDENCE

Recommendation 2 **R2**

Offer parenting support when a child or young person is demonstrating behaviours that challenge their kinship carer(s) on a frequent basis.

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Recommendation 3 **R3**

Make services available to facilitate peer support groups to improve kinship carers' wellbeing.

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Recommendation 4 **R4**

Make Cognitive Behavioural Therapy available to kinship carers who have been assessed as in need of therapeutic support because, for example, the child or young person in their care is demonstrating behaviours that challenge the kinship carer.

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Recommendation 5 **R5**

Offer kinship carers training in self-care to support their emotional health, wellbeing and quality of life.

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Recommendation 6 **R6**

Offer financial allowance to kinship carers to increase placement permanency, reduce the likelihood of placement disruption and improve the likelihood of permanent guardianship.

PROMISING EVIDENCE

STEP I: ASSESS

Start to develop your approach by understanding the current position of your kinship support provision in relation to the needs of kinship families in your local area. Draw on relevant information such as feedback from professionals and kinship families and what you know about your local population needs.

The questions in this section are designed to encourage reflection on the needs of kinship families in your local area.

Kinship carers in your area

- What are the basic demographics of the children and their carers? This includes but isn't limited to: age, ethnicity, sex, employment status, disability, any other additional needs, legal status. **ALL**
- How are your kinship carers connected to the children they care for? **ALL**
 - » Are they grandparents? Siblings? Aunts or uncles? Family friends?
- Are your kinship carers mostly caring in couples or as individuals? **ALL**
- How many children are living in kinship households? This includes the size of sibling groups, but also the number of other children who may be living in the household. **ALL**
- How many kinship carers does your service support? **ALL**
- What information is collected about unplanned endings to kinship family arrangements? **ALL**
 - » Is this data analysed? **ALL**
 - » Are there common themes in endings that kinship families could have been supported with? It may be helpful to consider different demographic groupings here, including the legal status of those families. **ALL**
- How do you understand the support needs of kinship carers in your area? **KP1**
- How is this information gathered and assessed on a collective level? (i.e., beyond within individual support plans) **KP1**
- As you gather this information, are there common themes specific to your kinship community? **KP1**
- Does your current service provision align with the identified needs? **KP1**
- What are the gaps? **KP1**

TIP

This might be information that is already available or known, or you may need to gather and collate information to identify which Recommendation(s) to prioritise and plan for as part of Step 2.

Lived experience

- What are your kinship carers telling you about the support they receive? **ALL**
 - » How do you collect their views? **ALL**
 - » How can you create a process that supports kinship carers to be as honest as possible? **ALL**
 - » What are the gaps between what you offer and what kinship carers say? **ALL**
 - » Do they find the support accessible? How do you know? **KP3**
 - » Is support offered flexibly? How do you know? **KP3**
- How do you make sure that support is not stigmatising, and is offered in a respectful way? **KP1**

Kinship service in your area

- What specialist training are your kinship service staff offered, to support them to understand the specific needs and strengths of kinship carers? **KP1**
 - » What do they know/understand about the therapeutic needs of kinship carers? **R4 R5**
 - » What do they know/understand about the parenting support needs of kinship carers? **R2**
 - » What do they know/understand about the wellbeing needs of kinship carers? **R3**
- How are your kinship service teams supported? **KP2**
 - » What do they say would help them? **KP2**
- Do your kinship carers experience consistency from the Local Authority? **KP2**
 - » How is your kinship service designed? Do you have one team, or different teams based of geography or separate assessment and support teams? How might this impact the service your kinship carers experience? **KP2**
 - » How many points of contact with the Local Authority do your kinship carers have during their time working with services? You may want to look at both the minimum number the process requires, and the real number that carers can experience when unexpected or unanticipated circumstances (such as staff turnover) occur. **KP2**
- Do you have stable kinship service team(s) in place? **KP2**
 - » Think about recruitment and retention, how is this impacting the service kinship families receive? **KP2**
 - » If the team isn't stable, what action can you take to change that? **KP2**
 - » If the team is stable, what do you need to do to maintain that? **KP2**
- How is kinship care understood by teams across the whole of children's services? **KP2**
 - » How does this impact kinship carers experience of support? **KP2**

The support offer in your area

- Do your kinship families have access to support services that are specifically tailored to them or are they directed to less specifically targeted services (i.e., services for all-looked-after children, or services for all foster carers)? **KP1 R2**
- Do you, and your kinship team, have a comprehensive understanding of the different support services available to your kinship carers (including any support offered by voluntary and community services in your area)? **KP3 R1**
- Do you publish your kinship local offer? If so, how do you direct kinship carers to it and support them to access the services available to them? **KP3 R1**
- Who is currently helping your kinship carers understand and access the services available to them? **KP3 R1**
- What areas of good practice are already in place? How have you identified these? **ALL**
- Have kinship families been involved in the co-design of any of the services currently offered? **KP1**
- What financial support is offered to kinship carers in your area? **R6**
- Does this vary by legal status? **R6**
- Remember to also consider any support offered through Section 17 funding here too. **R6**
- How do you understand outcomes for kinship families who access support? **R6**
 - » How do you understand outcomes for kinship families who access support? **ALL**
 - » Do you have a theory of change for the development your kinship offer? This might support you to clarify how your support offer directly relates to the outcomes you are trying to achieve. **ALL**
 - » Is the theory of change well understood amongst those delivering support? If not, how could you develop this? **ALL**

Your local strategy

- Does your kinship care strategy/policy align with the Key Principles and Recommendations in the Kinship Care Practice Guide? **ALL**
 - » What is missing? **ALL**
 - » Where could you go further to bring your current provision more closely in line with the evidence? **ALL**

STEP 2: PLAN

Once you have looked more closely at your existing kinship service, you can consider where there are gaps in support to help you identify which Recommendation(s) you need to prioritise and plan for.

The information in this section is in two parts: the first relates specifically to each of the six Recommendations in the Practice Guide to help guide your planning around your priority Recommendation(s). **All questions in this section relate specifically to one of the six Recommendations, and additional labels indicate where a question also relates to a Key Principle.** The second includes questions you will want to consider across all the Recommendations.

Key things to consider when implementing specialist support for kinship carers to understand and access available support **R1**

The evidence tells us that these programmes are best delivered by dedicated workers. Plan how you will ensure they are able to:

- Have clear and robust knowledge of all support available to kinship carers. This includes:
 - » Practical support **R1**
 - » Financial support **R1**
 - » Emotional/ therapeutic support. **R1**
- Knowledge of referral pathways and professional relationships to follow these through **R1**
- Ability to review if the support put in place is meeting identified needs and make changes where support is not meeting need **R1**
- Ability to build and maintain positive relationships with kinship families **R1**
- Ability to coordinate support across services. **R1**

TIP

When thinking about where to start, consider how much work will be required to implement each Recommendation and be realistic about how you order them from there.

Key things to consider when providing parenting support to kinship families R2

- Make sure any parenting support programme you offer covers the following:
 - » Child development R2
 - » Attachment styles R2
 - » Impact of trauma on child development R2
 - » Conflict management. R2
- You will need to plan how to upskill staff delivering the programme or commission the programme developers to run the programme. R2

Key things to consider when focussing on providing peer support for your kinship carers R3

- The evidence points to some crucial elements of peer support, and you should plan for how you can:
 - » Provide training and ongoing support to peer volunteers R3
 - » Pay or reimburse peer volunteers for their time R3
 - » Ensure that peer volunteers reflect the needs and diversity of kinship carers in your area R3
 - » Ensure that peer support compliments and strengthens the support provided by professionals, rather than replacing qualified expertise. R3

Key things to consider when focussing on providing Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to kinship carers R4

CBT is one kind of therapeutic approach that can support kinship carers to strength their own resources, helping them feel more competent and assured in their parenting. The evidence tells us that it has been shown to support positive change in how grandmothers who are kinship carers think and behave, which had a positive impact on the children in their care.

- How could you make the case to local health services to work jointly to offer this service? R4
- Is commissioning an external agency an option? R4
- What support will your kinship team need to ensure that referrals for CBT are appropriate? R4

Key things to consider when focussing on providing training in self-care to kinship carers **R5**

- What existing skills does your staff team have to support kinship carers to develop techniques to support their own wellbeing? **R5**
- Think about what different elements of self-care training you want to include. The evaluated interventions included elements such as:
 - » Goal setting **R5**
 - » Using positive self-statements **R5**
 - » Positive reframing **R5**
 - » Exploring new ideas **R5**
 - » Challenging the usual response to stress **R5**
 - » Written or verbal journals to record reflections **R5**
 - » Promoting solution focussed thinking. **R5**
- Consider whether group based, or one-to-one support would suit your carers more, or whether it is possible for both to be offered. **R5**

Key things to consider when focussing on offering financial allowance to kinship carers **R6**

When thinking about the financial support kinship carers in your area are offered, remember that this isn't just limited to children who are or have been previously looked after, Section 17 funding may be appropriate for some kinship families, regardless of previous involvement with services.

- It is important to consider:
 - » What eligibility criteria is appropriate for your area? **R6**
 - » What process might you need to follow to make any changes to that eligibility criteria? **R6**

Key things to consider when planning for any changes across all the Recommendations **ALL**

- How will you involve kinship families in planning the changes you want to make? **KP1**
 - » How can you make this involvement as meaningful as possible? **ALL**
 - » How could kinship families co-design any of the new services you want to introduce? **ALL**
- Are there opportunities to collaborate with other teams or services across the Local Authority, or with partner agencies such as Health, Education or other voluntary organisations? **ALL**
- Are you looking to upskill staff internally or externally commission another organisation? **ALL**
 - » Remember that there is evidence that kinship carers really appreciate receiving support from non-statutory agencies. **KP1**
- If you do plan to work with external agencies or other services, think about how you will ensure that referrals, coordination and safeguarding are addressed quickly and smoothly. **ALL**
- How will you gather information to measure the effect of the planned changes on kinship families? **ALL**

You may want to think about collecting things such as:

 - » Referral information **ALL**
 - » How carer support needs are changing **ALL**
 - » What your staff are reporting from kinship families **ALL**
 - » What kinship families (carers and children/young people) are telling you **ALL**
 - » What partner agencies are sharing. **ALL**

STEP 3: DO

Now that you have assessed, prioritised and planned, it is time to take action on strengthening support for kinship families in your local area. It is normal to encounter challenges and barriers during this stage but there are steps you can take to mitigate and successfully navigate them.

The questions below can help prompt your thinking if you start to feel stuck:

- Think about any barriers you're facing, how can you overcome them? Do you need to seek support from others? **ALL**
- Consider the progress you have made so far, is it happening as you expected? **ALL**
- Are you managing to capture the information you need to know whether the changes made are having a positive impact on kinship families? **ALL**
- What is the feedback from both kinship teams and kinship families? **ALL**
- Do you need to revisit the Practice Guide to make sure you are remaining aligned to the Principles and Recommendations? **ALL**
- If you are offering support that you weren't before, how have you integrated it with existing services? Is any troubleshooting required? **ALL**

STEP 4: REVIEW

Once your plan is in action, begin the process of reviewing the changes you have made. Remember that this is an ongoing, cyclical, process.

The questions below can support you in reflecting on your support offer in the Review stage.

- What have you learned from the data or information you have been gathering about the changes you have made? **ALL**
- Are the changes you have made still aligned with what you know about the specific needs and strengths of your kinship carers? **ALL**
- Have the demographics or characteristics of your kinship families changed? What does this mean? **ALL**
- What is missing? Are there needs of kinship families in your area that you are aware of that are not currently met by the support available? **ALL**
- What gaps are you finding? How can you overcome this? **ALL**
- What could you do to improve the quality and accuracy of the information you collect and collate about your kinship carers? **ALL**
- Is there any other data collection you might want to consider moving forwards? **ALL**
- How are you analysing your data and working it into decision-making? **ALL**
- What are kinship families and your kinship team telling you about their experiences of the changes in support? What about other partner agencies? **ALL**
- Which Recommendation are you going to focus on next? **ALL**
- How does this inform your future thinking? As this is a cyclical process the review activity should inform your ongoing assessment of the kinship services to contribute to ongoing improvements. **ALL**
- When thinking about your kinship support, what have you learnt about how this is achieving its intended outcomes? **ALL**
- Do you need to review or update your theory of change based on what has been learnt? **ALL**

TIP

You may need to consider the information you have been collecting and/or revisit the information you collated in Step 1 when initially assessing your existing support offer.

This resource is part of a set of publications linked to the Kinship Care Practice Guide:

- Kinship Care Practice Guide – www.foundations.org.uk/practice-guides/kinship-care/
- Quick Guide – www.foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/quick-guide-kinship-care.pdf
- Summary for Elected Members – www.foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/elected-members-summary-kinship-care-practice-guide.pdf

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides: foundations.org.uk/practice-guides

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.

Get in touch at practice_guides@foundations.org.uk.

