

SUMMARY FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Part of the Kinship Care Practice Guide

| Produced by Foundations, and commissioned by the Department for Education

This document summarises the Kinship Care Practice Guide to support elected members – who play a key role in shaping local services – to reflect on their local offer for kinship carers, and consider how it could be strengthened.

The Practice Guide on Kinship Care 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. The Kinship Care Practice Guide relates predominantly to Outcome 2 of the Children’s Social Care National Framework: Children and Young People are supported by their family network.

ABOUT KINSHIP CARE

The number of children and young people in kinship foster care is increasing.¹ Providing effective support to kinship families enables children to remain in the care of people who know and love them, and can increase the likelihood of reunification with birth parents. Additionally, kinship care can prevent children from entering the care system. The number of children in care in the UK is rising, and supporting kinship carers can ease pressures on local systems.

In 2023, the Department for Education published the first national Kinship Care Strategy, setting out the importance of kinship care in the children’s social care system, and encouraging local areas to strengthen support for kinship families.

In this summary of the Practice Guide, kinship care refers to different types of legal arrangements, including Kinship Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders, as well as informal kinship care arrangements, where friends or family members care for a child without a legal order.

1 Ofsted. (2023). National Statistics: Fostering in England 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2022-to-31-march-2023/fostering-in-england-1-april-2022-to-31-march-2023>

The best evidence on how to support kinship families

The Kinship Practice Guide is based on a new systematic review of existing evidence, that explored what works, for whom, and in what context, which has been translated into actionable Key Principles and Recommendations for local leaders.

- **Key Principles:** which summarise the needs, experiences, and preferences of kinship carers in the UK, and evidence on implementation and design of services and interventions. These ensure accessible, acceptable, and effective interventions can be delivered.
- **Recommendations:** which summarise the best-evidenced interventions for improving outcomes among kinship carers, and children and young people in kinship care. These are drawn from robust impact evaluations of interventions in high-income countries.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Key Principle 1: Support for kinship carers should take into account the specific needs and strengths of kinship carers.

Key Principle 2: One-to-one relationships and high quality casework should be at the heart of support for kinship families.

Key Principle 3: Kinship families need to be made aware of the support they are entitled to, and local authorities should actively work to address barriers to accessing support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	STRONG EVIDENCE	GOOD EVIDENCE	PROMISING EVIDENCE
1. Offer kinship carers specialist support to learn about, navigate and access the support that they are entitled to		✓	
2. Offer parenting support when a child or young person is demonstrating behaviours that challenge their kinship carer(s) on a frequent basis			✓
3. Make services available to facilitate peer support groups to improve kinship carers' wellbeing			✓
4. 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			✓
5. Offer kinship carers training in self-care to support their emotional health, wellbeing and quality of life			✓
6. Offer financial allowances to kinship carers to improve financial well-being, increase placement permanency, and improve the likelihood of exiting the care system through guardianship			✓

STRONG EVIDENCE
 A rating of 'strong' is given if the evidence is from a meta-analysis of at least two methodologically high-quality experimental studies and demonstrates effectiveness of the intervention(s).

GOOD EVIDENCE
 A rating of 'good' is given if the evidence is from a meta-analysis or a narrative synthesis of at least two moderate quality experimental studies and demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

PROMISING EVIDENCE
 A rating of 'promising' is given where the evidence is from one methodologically high- or moderate-quality experimental study of the intervention(s).

KEY QUESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING LOCAL SUPPORT FOR KINSHIP FAMILIES

How evidence-informed is the local support offer for kinship families?

Focusing on support that is well-evidenced will improve outcomes for children and families and can ensure that support meets local needs, while also ensuring that funding is directed to support that is most effective. Because the Kinship Practice Guide summarises the best-evidenced support for kinship families, it is a reference point for assessing existing local support and identifying where it can be strengthened to improve outcomes for kinship families.

When considering what kinds of support to prioritise, the specific needs of local kinship families should be considered. This will require understanding the specific demographics of local kinship families, as well as their support needs.

How do we make all local kinship families aware of the support they are entitled to?

Kinship families often face barriers to accessing support. Help to navigate and access services is the form of support with the strongest evidence. Evidence shows that having a dedicated kinship family support worker who supports kinship carers to learn about and access support can improve placement stability, improve kinship carer wellbeing, and increase the likelihood of reunification with birth parents.

Alongside this, information about the support that is available should be easily accessible in multiple formats. Local areas should publish and publicise information on the kinship local offer, in line with the requirements of the Kinship Care Statutory Guidance.

How do we work with health services and the voluntary sector to ensure kinship families can access the support that they need?

Many of the support services set out in the Practice Guide are often delivered by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), and research shows that many kinship carers have a preference for receiving support from non-statutory services due to negative experiences of statutory services. Similarly, therapeutic support that has been shown to be effective for kinship families is often commissioned and delivered by health partners. There should be close connections between statutory and non-statutory support, and between local authority partners, to allow referrals and coordination of services, and to address safeguarding concerns quickly.

How have you ensured that your Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cabinet, and other relevant committees are aware of the Guide?

Consider whether there are existing forums or means of communications that can be used to share the Kinship Care Practice Guide and its recommendations more widely with your networks. Raising awareness of what the evidence tells us is most effective in supporting kinship families is important for influencing service design and delivery, and ensuring kinship families have access to the right support.

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

- The Practice Guide on Kinship Care – foundations.org.uk/practice-guides/kinship-care
- Reflective Tool for actioning the Kinship Care Practice Guide: <https://www.foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/reflective-tool-kinship-care-practice-guide.pdf>
- Quick Guide – <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/quick-guide-kinship-care.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