

A One Minute Guide to: **Kinship**

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or close family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term. In the UK, there are more than 180,000 children in kinship care.

Grandparents are the most common kinship carers, but older siblings, aunts, uncles, and people who know the child well can also take on the role. This list is not exhaustive.

You might see kinship carers referred to as 'family and friend's carers' or 'connected people' by local authorities and in some documents. See page 2 for kinship care flow chart, providing further context & information.

Why Do Children Need Kinship Care?

Most children are in kinship care because their parents are not able to look after them.

Research shows that around half of children are in kinship care because their parents have had problems with drugs or alcohol. Children may also need kinship care if their parents die, go to prison, or they are abusive, neglectful or unwell.

Many children in kinship care will have experienced trauma. A kinship carer provides a stable home life where they can grow and develop in a safe, positive environment. They also get to stay in their existing family network, which helps maintain their sense of identity and family relationships.

Source: ***Forgotten: Support for Kinship Children's Education and Mental Health, Aug 2024.***

What Challenges Are Children in Kinship Care Facing?

- Too many kinship children aren't getting the educational support they need.
- There is a high prevalence of special educational needs amongst children in kinship care, but many are missing out on a diagnosis and formalised support in school.
- Many children in kinship care are struggling with their mental health, and emotional and therapeutic support for this group is lacking.
- Some kinship children need additional support to manage contact and navigate their family relationships and identity.
- Educational support for these children does not always recognise their specific circumstances & needs.
- Kinship carers can find it difficult to navigate the education system as it can be unclear what support this group are entitled to in order to thrive at school.

Source: ***Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy, Dec 2023 & Forgotten: Support for Kinship Children's Education and Mental Health, Aug 2024.***

How will the Virtual School (VS) Support Children in Kinship Care?

From September 2024, the Virtual School Head strategic role will include:

- a) Raising the visibility of the distinct needs of children in different types of kinship care arrangements and the disadvantage that they can experience.
- b) Promoting practice that supports their attendance and engagement in education.
- c) Promoting practice that improves children in kinship care's outcomes to narrow the attainment gap, so that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The VS will speak to kinship carers and children and their views will inform the VS plans. The VS will also offer advice and information, on request, to all kinship carers with Special Guardianship and Child Arrangements Orders as part of their non-statutory role. This will be an important step in helping more kinship carers to navigate the education system, in turn helping them to advocate for the educational achievement of their children. More children in kinship care will receive the help they need to thrive at school.

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