

Breaking Point



Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis is the first report from Kinship's 2023 annual survey series. It explores the views and experiences of nearly 1,700 kinship carers across England and Wales.

Key findings

1. Some kinship families are at urgent risk of breaking down.

12% of kinship carers told us they were concerned they may have to stop caring for their kinship children in the next year if their situation did not improve, most commonly due to financial issues and challenges managing children's emotional and behavioural needs. This risks more than 19,000 children across England and Wales currently living in kinship care instead entering local authority care.



"I have thought about whether I can go on like this, or whether I should hand her back to social services. It makes me feel awful to even consider it, because she's my granddaughter, but what if I can't give her what she needs?"

Gemma, a grandmother and kinship carer featured in the report

2. A lack of support is splitting up siblings unnecessarily.

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents told us they had at some point been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a child already in their care, typically due to a lack of space, challenges with children's emotional or mental health difficulties, carers' own health and wellbeing, and financial worries. As a result, as many as 20,000 children may have entered the care system unnecessarily over the last decade.

3. The cost of living crisis continues to plunge kinship families into poverty.

1 in 10 kinship carers said their household had run out of food and couldn't afford to buy more within the last two weeks. Kinship carers demonstrated higher levels of financial insecurity than other cohorts, including households caring for children.

4. Kinship carers are struggling with poor health and loneliness.

More than one third were caring for a child on their own, and nearly 1 in 5 said they felt lonely 'often or always'. Kinship carers were also significantly more likely to report poor health than other adults in the general population. Poor health and lone caring correlated strongly with increased concerns about kinship carers' ability to continue caring for their children.



"I suffer from depression and anxiety and look after the children on my own and never have a break, I've been close to giving up several times and I'm not sure how long I can cope with no help."

Grandparent and informal kinship carer

5. The quality of local authority support and information is unacceptably low.

Of those kinship carers who had received local authority support, 25% rated the quality of the support received as 'very poor'. More than one third rated the information about kinship care provided by their local authority as 'very poor' and a further 20% as 'poor'.

Recommendations

Kinship's **#ValueOurLove** campaign is continuing to push governments, local authorities and other decision makers to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families across England and Wales.



In particular, the forthcoming national kinship care strategy in England offers a significant opportunity to transform support for kinship carers and their children. The UK Government must use this opportunity to deliver lasting change for kinship families who have waited too long already for support.

Financial support

1. The UK and Welsh Governments should **equalise financial allowances** between foster carers and kinship carers, ensuring kinship families receive a non-means tested allowance equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance.
2. All local authorities should have an **up-to-date, accessible and visible policy** on the provision of financial support for kinship carers, and move towards emulating the leading practice of local authorities who already deliver a non-means tested allowance to kinship carers as soon as possible.
3. The UK Government should also introduce a **statutory right to kinship care leave and pay**, on a par with that given to adoptive parents.

Support for kinship families

4. All kinship carers should receive **free and independent advice and information**, including legal advice. Local authorities should provide clear and accessible information to all types of kinship carers, and signpost to resources such as Kinship Compass.
5. Local authorities should ensure the provision of suitable **local training and support** services, including peer support, for kinship carers.
6. All kinship families should have access to appropriate **emotional and therapeutic support**, including a bespoke version of the Adoption Support Fund.

Improving the system

7. Local authorities should establish **specialist kinship teams** to improve practice in kinship care, supported by research and other activity from Ofsted and Care Inspectorate Wales.
8. UK and Welsh Governments should prioritise comprehensive and holistic **approaches which recognise the unique nature of kinship care**, backed by updated statutory guidance, including within the forthcoming national kinship care strategy for England.
9. Significant **additional investment** must be made in children's social care at the next fiscal opportunities to ensure kinship care reforms are effective.

For more information, please visit kinship.org.uk/breaking-point or scan the QR code.

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for all kinship carers – the grandparents and siblings, the aunts, uncles, and family friends who step up to raise children when their parents can't.

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