



For family or friends who  
step up to raise a child.

# Mental health support in educational settings

Backbench Business debate, 13 March 2025, 2.30 – 4pm

Tabled by Chris Bloore MP

## Summary

- **Our evidence shows that only around half of kinship children (54%) are getting the support they need in education.** Support is based largely on the type of kinship arrangement and the child's journey into kinship care rather than their needs, and many kinship carers are battling to access therapeutic support.
- **Nearly a third (31%) of kinship children have diagnosed or suspected social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH).** Children in kinship care have a prevalence of SEND similar to children in local authority care, but are less likely to be receiving formalised support through an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- We want to see the Government **equalise educational and mental health support between children in kinship care and children in care**, recognising their similar experiences of trauma, separation and loss.

## About kinship care

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them.

The best estimate we have suggests there are **more than 141,000 children in kinship care** in England and Wales – three times the number in unrelated foster care. Grandparents are most commonly kinship carers, but they can also be older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. Kinship care can take many forms, and the rights, responsibilities and support available to kinship families depends largely on the type of arrangement they have.

[Learn more about kinship care](#)

A kinship carer provides a stable and loving home life where a child 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. As a result, evidence suggests that children in kinship care go on to achieve **better outcomes across education, health and employment** than their peers in local authority care, but still much lower than those in parental households.

**It makes sense to invest in kinship care:** it delivers good experiences and outcomes for children and families, as well as cost savings for the public purse. [Our evidence](#) shows that, for every 100 children looked after in well-supported kinship care rather than local authority care, the state saves £4 million per year and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £2 million.

## Support for kinship children

The key findings and recommendations below come from our report – [\*Forgotten: Support for kinship children's education and mental health\*](#) – published in August 2024 and based on responses from more than 1,600 kinship carers across England and Wales to our 2023 annual survey.

[Read our \*Forgotten\* report](#)

### Mental health

**More than half of kinship carers say their kinship children have mental health difficulties.** Our 2024 annual survey of kinship carers found that 13% of kinship carers worried about their ability to continue caring for their children, with nearly three quarters (72%) of those selecting managing kinship children's social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties as a reason for this concern – the most common reason given.

A lack of entitlements and system pressures is pushing families to do whatever they can to secure appropriate therapeutic and emotional support: around 1 in 8 kinship carers have paid for therapeutic support for their children out of their own pockets, rising to 1 in 5 for informal kinship carers or those with a legal order secured in private proceedings.

### Education

**Only around half of kinship children (54%) are reported to be getting the support they need in education.** Children looked after in local authority care, as well as those who were previously looked after, rightly receive additional support through the Virtual School and designated teacher to help them progress well in school, and are eligible for additional funding managed by the school or local authority through Pupil Premium Plus.

However, the same support isn't extended to all kinship children: 2 in 5 kinship carers told us they weren't aware of their kinship children receiving any form of educational support, rising to 3 in 5 for those with informal arrangements. A complex and unfair hierarchy of eligibility dictates whether kinship children receive help with their learning, despite their similar needs and experiences to their peers in care.

*"It's a constant fight to get the right support in a school setting. I feel as if I am not listened to as a kinship carer. I also believe there is stigma attached to the children or teachers do not have the relevant training in supporting children like ours."*

*Aunt and special guardian*

### Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

**Nearly half of kinship children in England are reported to have a special educational need or disability (SEND).** This includes 31% with diagnosed or suspected social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and more than 1 in 10 with diagnosed Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As a result, kinship children are around five times more likely than all children to be learning in a special school.

Kinship children in England are over three times more likely to have an education, health and care (EHC) plan than all pupils. However, despite prevalence of special educational needs similar to children looked after in local authority care, far fewer children than would be expected given this prevalence receive through the SEND system. This gap between need and formalised support means the ongoing crisis in the SEND system is likely to be disproportionately disadvantaging children in kinship care.

The legacy of childhood trauma is at the core of children's experiences. Almost half of kinship carers told us their children's adverse experiences in childhood had negatively impacted on their ability to cope in education. Kinship carers tell us they want to see better recognition and understanding, and additional training and support for teachers and others which recognises how kinship children's experiences impact on behaviour and their ability to cope in the classroom.

*"I learnt about adverse childhood experiences and thought 'that's what this is' and realised he needed to learn healthy ways to manage his feelings. The local authority finally organised for him to see an occupational therapist. But we were stunned when she thought he would become violent and advised us to think about placing him in a secure specialist unit. I cried my eyes out. This wasn't support!"*

**Sarah, aunt and kinship carer to her nephew**

## Recommendations

### Mental health support in educational settings

As part of the government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity and plan to support all children to achieve and thrive, it must consider the elevated prevalence of mental health difficulties amongst kinship children comparable to other social care groups, and consider their unique needs and experiences in the delivery of mental health support in schools, including its manifesto commitment to put a mental health professional in every school.

### Emotional and therapeutic support

The government should urgently confirm the future of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) which supports some eligible kinship families to access vital therapeutic support. The government is yet to announce if the Fund will be available beyond March 2025. In the long term, all kinship families should have access to appropriate emotional and therapeutic support within and beyond educational settings; this should include extending the eligibility and scope of the ASGSF or developing a bespoke version of the Fund designed for kinship families.

### Educational and SEND support

The government should harmonise the existing patchwork of support for kinship children in England and introduce new legislation which guarantees equalised levels of support between children in all forms of kinship care and children looked after in local authority care. This should involve coordinating duties and remits across the Virtual School and designated teacher, and extending eligibility for Pupil Premium Plus and priority school admissions.

As part of future SEND reform in England, the government should consider an automatic entitlement to an EHC needs assessment for children in kinship care, or at minimum ensure guidance for local authorities and schools recognises the elevated prevalence of SEND amongst kinship children and ensure there are no delays to EHC needs or other assessments.

## During the debate

Thanks to those able to share our research, recommendations and suggested questions below.

- Will the government urgently confirm if they plan to renew the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund beyond March 2025?
- What steps is the government taking to ensure children being raised by relatives and family friends in kinship care get the mental health and educational support they need?
- What assessment has the government made of extending Pupil Premium Plus support to all children in kinship care, including those who weren't previously looked after?
- How will the government ensure its plans for a mental health professional in every school include a consideration of children in kinship care?

## Further information

Please visit our [kinship care policy tracker](#) to stay updated on the current status of each kinship care policy area, our verdict and what we think should happen next. You can also read our collection of [recent policy reports and briefings](#) for further information and recommendations.

Please download our [information pack for MPs](#) for everything you need to know about how to support kinship families in your constituency and in Parliament. You can also visit our [kinship care constituency map](#) to learn more about the kinship families in your constituency.

[Learn about our policy and influencing work](#)

## About Kinship

We are Kinship. The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for kinship carers – friends or family who step up to raise a child when their parents aren't able to. Together, let's commit to change for kinship families.

[Discover our support for kinship families in your constituency](#)

## Contact

Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs: [sam.turner@kinship.org.uk](mailto:sam.turner@kinship.org.uk)